

Iraq —14 months later



Pfc. Shadividka Rogins sings the "Star Spangled Banner" at Provider Forward Operating Base during the Purple Heart and Combat Medical Badge Ceremony June 23 in Baghdad. Photo left: Brig. Gen. Mark P. Hertling (center), 1st Armored Division's assistant division commander for support, poses with the seven CMB awardees after the ceremony.

'Providers' awarded combat medals

Eleven 501st FSB Soldiers receive Purple Hearts, Combat Medical Badges

Story and photos by Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

No one knows for sure how he or she will react when the bullets start flying, the rocket propelled grenades come blasting in and the improvised explosive devices tear apart one's vehicles and comrades.

Eleven members of the Friedberg-based 501st Forward Support Battalion know exactly what they did — and they were recognized for their actions June 23 at their Provider Forward Operating Base just outside Baghdad with Purple Hearts and Combat Medical Badges.

Sgt. 1st Class William G. Scheuneman, Sgt. William L. Buford, Spc. Christopher T. Lamb and Pvt. Emmanuel H. Seals III were awarded Purple Hearts by Brig. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, 1st Armored Division's assistant division commander for support. During the ceremony Hertling also awarded Combat Medical Badges to Capt. John E. Hammer, Staff Sgt. Marvin L. Johnson II, Pfc. Renee V. Aponte, Pfc. Kimi A. Bitzer, Pfc. Richard B.

Budro, Pfc. Daphne R. Piper and Pvt. 2 Roger E. Barrios.

"The members of the 501st Providers have led the way in many ways," said Hertling, describing how its men and women regularly find themselves in harm's way supporting a wide variety of units.

'Organized ambush'

For Lamb, coming under intense fire May 24, 2004, meant keeping his bearings and leading his convoy out of danger. "There was explosion after explosion," said Lamb, describing an attack that occurred on his convoy while traveling to Karbala. "They were probably about 50 meters away in the wood line on our left side. They just started shooting. It was a well organized ambush.

"I didn't have fear," he said. "I wasn't scared. I just wanted to get

out of the kill zone. I led the rest of the convoy out of the danger area.

"I feel honored to receive the Purple Heart," said Lamb. "I'm just blessed that I'm still alive."

Lamb added that his commander in Germany called his parents in the United States to let them know about the attack. "They were pretty stressed out and weren't relieved until they heard my voice."

"I was on a convoy coming back from Karbala on April 25, 2004," said fellow Purple Heart recipient, Seals. "An IED went off on our left side, knocked off the roof and half of our driver, Sgt. 1st Class Frank Sanders' head. Shrapnel was blown back and hit me. My hearing was gone in one ear — they give you pills for that.

"We were worried about our driver," said Seals. "I give all the

praise to Command Sgt. Maj. Houston who held Sanders' head together and drove me to the aid station. I had goggles on and they were shattered. That's what protected my eyes."

After initial treatment Sanders was shipped back to Walter Reed Army Hospital where he is "doing fine and walking around," according to Sgt. Maj. Edward Massey, support, plans and operations sergeant major for Division Support Command. "They're just worried about his eye still."

'Glad to be in country'

"I'm glad to still be in country with my fellow Americans," said Buford, who along with fellow Purple Heart awardee, Scheuneman, were injured during an attack on Palestine Road near the 1-36th Infantry base. "Me and Sgt. Scheuneman were in the rear truck pulling security. As I was going to clear a catwalk there was a big explosion and dust. I dropped back down into the vehicle from the turret to check on Sgt. Scheuneman — he was OK and he made sure I was all right. I got back in the turret and we headed back to 1-36th.

"My hearing was messed up, vision was blurry and my face was banged up," said Buford. "Once we got back we checked on our truck and went to get attention from the medics."

"It's an honor" to be awarded the CMB, said Barrios, dedicating the awards to "those medics who

died."

Barrios described how his adrenaline was surging as he was attacked by grenades while supporting Company A of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, in Baghdad. "There was no time to think — it's not a pretty sight. We were lucky — the grenade hit our windshield, bounced off and blew up in the air."

The medic described how he came to the aid of an injured Soldier, comparing the experience to the depiction in the movie, "Saving Private Ryan."

"I felt relieved that I was alive," Barrios added.

Fellow CMB recipient, Piper, of 501st's Company C, said she helped treat Soldiers and Iraqi insurgents while attached to a field artillery unit. "We do IED sweeps in the morning. Most of the time we get called out in support of the Iraqi Police stations. We were under an RPG attack and it came through the roof of an up-armored vehicle. The Soldier was injured in the abdomen.

"You just do what you know how to do," she said explaining her life-saving actions while under fire. "There's no time to stop and think about things. You don't want to be losing Soldiers."

Piper added that she was looking forward to leaving Iraq. "I'll be happy when I'm on leave. . . . There's no point in counting the days until we leave — not after the last time."



Purple Hearts and Combat Medical Badges await presentation during the awards ceremony at Provider Forward Operation Base in Baghdad.

Iraq —14 months later

Engineer looks back at road he 'built' in Army career

By Spc. Andrew Meissner
1st Armored Division Public Affairs Office

When James Flum enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1988 he was 21. He had been out of high school a few years, tried college, but it didn't work out.

Holding down odd jobs, he wanted something more in his life. Flum admitted he wasn't leading an outstanding life before he raised his right hand.

"I knew that I needed some kind of direction, my parents had nine kids to deal with, and I was probably the hardest one," he said.

His father had been a combat engineer and Flum decided on the same military occupation.

He began his Army career like a board game, at square one. "I came in as a buck Private — E-1," he said.

After completing Initial Entry Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., Flum was assigned to the 54th Engineer Battalion in Germany where he stayed for six years.

"I got extended. I was due (for a permanent change of station) to Fort Campbell and then stop-loss came about at the end of 1990 for Desert Storm," Flum explained.

First deployment

By January 1991, Flum was a specialist deploying to Operation Desert Storm.

"My squad leader was on leave when the flag went up — he never came back. So they pinned corporal on me and told me to take charge," he recalled.

The newly appointed Cpl. Flum was now leading a six-man squad.

"It was different, it wasn't like what we're going through now, the fighting was all in the desert," said Flum. "We engaged bunkers, people on the ground, there was no urban fighting back then."

For his time in Desert Storm Flum received a division coin and a Certificate of Achievement. Upon his return, Flum was promoted to sergeant.

After his time with 54th Eng. Bn., Flum went to Fort Riley, Kan. He served with the 1st Infantry Division there until he received orders for Drill Sergeant's school.

"Somebody made that decision for me. They figured, probably, that I had such a good job at Riley that I was due for some pain," he related.

While on "the trail," Flum molded future combat engineers at Fort Leonard Wood for two years.

Arabic language ability pays off

Soldier born in Egypt serves Task Force 1-37 commander

By Staff Sgt. Tony Sailer
1st Armored Division Public Affairs Office

A supply specialist born in Cairo, Egypt, is always nearby whenever Task Force 1-37 Armor commander, Lt. Col. Garry Bishop, goes downtown.

Spc. John Helmy uses his native Arabic language skills to help Bishop communicate with local sheiks, community leaders and businessmen during Civil Affairs trips through Karbala.

"At first I was not the official translator, but every time Lt. Col. Bishop, aka Bandit 6, went out I would ask to go out," Helmy said. "I kept riding with him until it became like a daily thing."

Helmy was still doing his supply duties as well, and that made for some very long days. One day his sergeant major told him if he was

going out everyday, he might as well work directly for the commander.

"Local people did not trust the Iraqi translators at first, but when they saw a Soldier speaking Arabic, they felt a lot safer talking with us," Helmy said.

Born in Egypt in 1982, Helmy was raised in the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church. He attended high school and one year of college there before a life-changing event occurred.

In March 2000 he, his father, mother, twin sister and younger brother moved to Columbia, Pa. His father had won the green card lottery and was granted an American work visa. As a newly arrived immigrant, Helmy attended high school and then was accepted at Pennsylvania State University.

He was about to accept the full

scholarship to Penn State when he grew wary of his fledgling English speaking skills and decided to defer college until he could speak better English. A friend suggested he look into the military. The Army's educational benefits appealed to him and he enlisted in Aug. 2001, becoming a supply specialist.

After graduating Advanced Individual Training at Fort Lee, Va., he was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 37th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division.

Helmy learned about a recently enacted program which allows service members with green cards to become citizens after six months of military service.

He decided to apply and was granted citizenship Feb 26, 2003 in Philadelphia. "I cried that day. I couldn't believe it," he said.

Helmy's position as the transla-



Photo by Spc. Andrew Meissner
Sgt. 1st Class James Flum of Company B, 16th Eng. Bn., pulls security on a dismounted patrol in Karbala, Iraq.

After leaving the drill pad in October 2000, Flum was assigned another teaching position at Fort Leonard Wood.

"Back then, they didn't want people coming off the trail and then shoving them in a unit because they tended to be jerks, so they sent us in a chill unit for a year," he explained.

He instructed Modernized Demolition Initiators, teaching demolitions.

"MDI is the baseline demolition instruction that we give to privates, before they go out in their units," he said.

Because of his position, Flum learned everything in the training manuals.

He knew everything about demolitions, backward and forward, "like the palm of my hand," Flum admitted.

He felt that his next tour would take him back overseas. Flum's wife is German, and she wanted to go back and see her family, so he requested to be stationed in Germany.

"They gave me what I wanted, and in December 2001 I came over to the 16th Engineer Battalion in Giessen, and I've been with them ever since," Flum said.

Flum, platoon sergeant for Company B, 16th Engineers, is in charge of 24 Soldiers.

Flum said he thinks highly of his Soldiers and feels they

have invaluable experience from the action they've seen.

"A lot of the privates that we have, they're new, they've only been in four to six months, but I will put their knowledge up against some E-4s, maybe even against some E-5s in other units that have not been deployed ... because of everything they've learned out here," he said with pride.

Yet, being out here is not always rosy for a platoon sergeant and Flum knows he has to be a model for his Soldiers.

"The hard part is to put on my game face everyday and tell (my Soldiers) they might have to go another mile on a mission when I know they're dog-tired, because I'm dog-tired," he said. "I can't show them that I'm getting tired, and I can't show them that I want to give up. I've got 24 guys that I've got to carry through this and they're doing well. They're doing really well."

With the extension of 1st Armored Division, Flum's unit was attached to Task Force 1st Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment, and moved to Karbala where they work closely with infantry and armor companies to remove Moqtada al Sadr's militia from that city.

Flum said he's learned many things in the past year and has much to take back to future combat engineers.

"Since I've been out here I've learned all about improvised explosive devices. How they make them, how they wire them, what they make them out of, and recently, where they make them. I've got a lot of stuff in my head to take back for lessons-learned," he said.

Somewhere on his odyssey, Flum started smoking a burl wood pipe. He does it in a very slow and deliberate way. He looks young, with his clear blue eyes and closely cropped blond hair. In that respect the pipe looks out of place, but it accents his personality, scholarly demeanor and the air of wisdom Flum conveys.

When asked how he feels he performed on this deployment, Flum took some time to gather his thoughts and then came through with an answer that is much like he is, measured and honest.

"Sometimes I ought to be a little bit harder on (the Soldiers), but the conditions out here are hard enough," he said.

Stopping for a moment, Flum pondered and continued, "I'm like the glue; I have to keep them together and keep them straight, and to get them back safe and in one piece."



Photo by Staff Sgt. Tony Sailer
Spc. John Helmy (center) translates for Lt. Col. Garry Bishop in Karbala.

tor for Bandit 6 has taught him the importance of communication and being an active listener.

"I believe translating is not about word-for-word translation; it is about making sense out of what

somebody is saying," Helmy said. "Sometimes they may use an Arabic phrase, maybe a proverb, and it would make no sense in English. My job is to get you the meaning of the statement."

284th BSB – Friedberg, Giessen

Ribbon cuttings mark completion of barracks renovation project



By Monique V. Sorrell
Special to the Herald Union

Ribbon-cutting ceremonies held in June in Giessen and Friedberg officially ended the barracks renovation project of the 284th Base Support Battalion.

For about 10 weeks workers of the Base Operations Services painted, plastered, did carpentry work and replaced worn tiles, electrical wiring and floors.

Previously yellowing walls, floors stained and scuffed, showing the many years Soldiers have occupied these buildings, water damaged ceilings and molded over showers and tiles have all been replaced. Upon entering the room Soldiers will now notice the highly glossed floors and white walls.

The project was part of the barracks renovation project to improve the quality of life of Soldiers.

“We’ve spent about \$1.25 million for the barracks renovation on both installations,” said BOS project manager Felix Barthels.

“We renovated 750 rooms plus hallways, painted about 56,000 square meters of walls and 17,000 square meters of ceilings,” he said.

Photo by Alexandra Williams
Staff Sgt. Michael Saxton of Company C, 2-3rd Field Artillery (from left); 2nd Lt. Timothy Jenkins of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2-3rd FA; and 284th BSB Command Sgt. Maj. Keith Francis cut the ribbon to officially signal the end of barracks renovation work in Giessen.



Photo by Alexandra Williams

It's good to see you

Tamara, Quentin and Tyler Cannon (from left) welcome Staff Sgt. Michael J. Cannon of Company A, 1-37th Armor, upon his return from a 14-month deployment to Iraq. Cannon was part of an advance party whose return marks the beginning of the redeployment of the 1st Brigade.

284th BSB – Friedberg, Giessen

Softball league brings community together

By Alexandra Williams

284th Base Support Battalion Public Affairs Office

When unit level softball tournaments were cancelled this spring due to the extension of the Soldiers of the Ready First Combat Team, Sheree Hunt and Shawna Cozad took it upon themselves to provide the community with a fun softball season.

“Occasionally spouses are allowed to play in unit teams. Now there were no games to watch or even a chance to play softball, but I wanted to play,” said Hunt.

“I used to play softball in a recreational league in Aberdeen, Wash., so Sheree and I came up with the idea to start our own softball league,” said Cozad.

Having fun and social interaction was the goal for both so they prepared fliers advertising their community softball league and distributed them in the housing areas.

“Teams were not organized per unit or battalion but randomly. We didn’t want to create a division, but rather bring people together and play a few games. We opened the league to all adults who wanted to play — not only spouses. Some people were hesitant to join either because they had planned to go back home for the summer or there are other things coming up, but we made the teams big enough to always have enough players,” she Hunt.

“About 75 people signed up. We got four teams — the Rock Bottom Babes, the Giessen Education Department team, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and the Dragons. The fitness center in Giessen and Friedberg helped us with the scheduling of games, and the Youth Services let us use their baseball field in Butzbach,” said Cozad, a member of the Dragons.

Practice takes place once a week and games are usually scheduled for Wednesday and Saturday evenings. Children are always welcome.

“It’s up to each team when they practice and every team decided if they wanted to get T-shirts or not. After all the league is not sponsored by anyone,” said Hunt, who plays for the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

David Hernandez, coach of the Rock Bottom Babes, was one of the first male players.

“Sheree is my neighbor and she asked me if I wanted to play and coach one of the teams. At first only ladies signed up for the league and it wasn’t always easy because some of them have never played before. After a couple of games more men joined the teams. It’s a lot of fun and it lifted up the community’s spirit. The season ends in July, but I would like to see it continued in fall,” he said.

“We still don’t know all the rules, but between us we can figure out what to do. The main point is to have fun,” said



Photo by Alexandra Williams

The Red Hot Chili Peppers, one of four community league teams, discuss winning strategies during a game against the Rock Bottom Babes.

Hunt. “Among the teams we are even helping each other with players if one team does not have enough,” she said.

For most players the league has become an important tool to meet other community members within the 284th Base Support Battalion. “It’s become a social event and we even have a fan club. Sometimes people approach me and say, ‘I saw you playing yesterday,’” said Angela Robinson, team member of the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

“Some of our players have never played softball before. One player, Donna Scott, arrived in Germany three weeks

ago. Her husband had signed up for the team, but then he was deployed to Iraq so she took his space. It’s her first time playing,” Robinson said.

“We are having a lot of fun and that’s what this league is all about. It’s great to meet spouses from other battalions and have a little interaction. I never thought I would meet so many different people,” said Robinson.

“My husband and my friends talked me into it. I used to play when I was younger. Besides having fun it’s also a great chance for my husband and me to do something together because we don’t have many hobbies that we can do together,” said Francis Moon, a player with the Rock Bottom Babes.

“I like to play softball. I welcomed the idea for the softball league because it’s a break from the routine and it’s fun,” said Debbie Sudduth, another member of the Rock Bottom Babes.

“That’s what I really like about our league, that it drew us together and it formed a sense of community,” said Cozad.

“The best part is that we’ve brought so many people together and this has given me new ideas for the future,” said Hunt. “Our last game will be July 10. Nothing is scheduled after that because we are expecting our husbands back and most of us will go on block leave and be busy with other things. But I thought about having a fall season and this time our husbands can join the league, if they like,” she said.

“I never thought I would meet so many different people.” — Angela Robinson.

Community spotlights

Free POV safety inspection

The 284th Base Support Battalion Auto Skills Center offers free Privately Owned Vehicle safety inspections in support of extended

families. Family members may bring their POV to either the Giessen or Friedberg Auto Skills Center. Service is on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information call the Giessen Auto Skills Center at mil 343-7050 or Friedberg at mil 324-

3218.

School bus registration

Registration for the school bus for the new school year 2004/2005 is open all summer. The School Bus Office in Butzbach is open Monday and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1-2 p.m. In Bad Nauheim it’s open Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon at the elementary school, and in Giessen Thursday from 8-11:30 a.m. at the high school and from noon to 2 p.m. at the elementary school.

Weekend child care

Child and Youth Services host a Super Saturday morning child care

service July 10 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Butzbach Child Development Center. The service is available for all CLEOS registered children age six weeks to 11 years old. Reservations are required. For more information call Butzbach CDC at civ (06033)67922.

COPE meetings in Butzbach

The Adolescence Substance Abuse Counseling Center hosts a Communicating, Opinions, Perceptions and Emotions meeting every fourth Monday of the month from 2:30-3:30 p.m. at the Army Community Service located in Building 6543 in Butzbach’s Roman Way Hous-

ing. COPE is a safe, anonymous place for parents to talk about their concerns and worries. No records are being kept. For more information call Billy Wray at mil 343-6635 or send an email to shelwilbed.wray@us.army.mil.

VA benefits briefing July 22

The Army Career and Alumni Program has scheduled a Veterans Affairs benefits briefing July 22 from 9-11 a.m. at Building 7 on the Giessen Depot. The briefing covers education benefits, VA home loans, disability compensation and other benefits. For details call Claire Sowinski at mil 343-9332.



Community notes . . . Community notes

Gone fishing

Get your German fishing license with this four-day course, July 10, 11, 17, 18 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the DCA conference room, Room 20, Building 454 on Old Argonner Kaserne. Sign up at the Outdoor Recreation office at the Community Activities Center on Fliegerhorst Kaserne. Call Harold Toft at mil 322-8391 for information.

AFCU job

AFCU is hiring a full-time teller at the Hanau branch. One year of teller experience or one year cash-handling experience and one year general office experience is required for the position. Contact Matt Haas, the branch manager, for information at mil 322-8062 or civ (06181) 953-80.

Warrant Officer ceremony

The Hanau Silver Chapter Warrant Officers Association will host a welcoming ceremony to retire the Rising Eagle branch insignia and welcome the new W-5 grade insignia. This historic event coincides with the 86th birthday of the Warrant Officer Corps. The ceremony will be held July 9 at 10 a.m. at the Pioneer Fitness Center. All warrant officers, their commanders and invited guests are welcome. Contact CW3 Griffin at mil 322-8048 or harold.griffiniii@us.army.mil for information.

Beauty and the Beast

The Hanau Community Spouses Club and the German American Club invite you to join them at the Schloss Philippsruhe for the Grimm Brothers' play "The Beauty and the Beast." The show will take place on July 15 at 4 p.m. and the cost is • 8.50 for adults and • 6.50 for children ages 3 to 14. Call Marie Krause at civ (06181) 307-9699.

Job orientation

Have you just arrived and don't know where to begin your job search? ACS offers Employment Orientation on Tuesdays, July 6, 13, 20 and 27 from 10-11:30 a.m. in Building 9, Room 104 on Pioneer Kaserne. For information call mil 322-9191.

Dress for success

The ACS Employment Readiness



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Saddam has left the airport

Iraqi workers ride to work at Baghdad International Airport past the old airport sign. The word Saddam and images of him have been sprayed over, rubbed out and torn down all over Iraq.

Team will host a Dress for Success seminar, July 21 from 10-11:30 a.m. in Building 9, Room 104 on Pioneer Kaserne. For information call mil 322-9191.

Interview techniques

On July 22, the ACS Employment Readiness Team will host an Interview Techniques seminar from 10-11:30 a.m. in Building 9, Room 104 on Pioneer Kaserne. For information call mil 322-9191.

55th PSB COC

The 55th Personnel Support Battalion will have a change of command July 14 at 10 a.m. on the Pioneer soccer field. The outgoing commander, Lt. Col. Brenda A. Andrews, will relinquish command to Lt. Col. Robert D. Knock. Call mil 322-8759 for information.

Computer sign-up

All visitors to the Central Processing Facility on Pioneer Kaserne should report to Building 21, Room 10 for a computerized sign-in. All agencies monitor the sign-in list and page the next customer. Personnel IOP, finance IOP, installation access, ID cards, transportation, SATO travel, Housing (in/out

processing), CLEOS and clearing papers/final-out at CPF will all use this new electronic sign-in.

Exceptional Family Member Program

The Exceptional Family Member Program Support Network meets on the fourth Monday of the month from 4-5 p.m. at Army Community Service, Building 9 on Pioneer Kaserne. For information call mil 322-9275 or civ (06181) 88-9275.

Respite care

Respite care provides a brief time away for care givers responsible for special-needs children in the 414th BSB. Contact the Army Community Service EFMP specialist at mil 322-9275 or civ (06181) 88-9275.

Parent Advisory Council

The next Youth Services Parent Advisory Council is scheduled for July 14 at 5:30 p.m. in Building 200, the Galaxy MS/Teen Center, on New Argonner Kaserne.

Hearts-Apart Group

Meet others who have deployed spouses to share common experiences every Tuesday and Friday at 10 a.m. at Büdingen Army Commu-

nity Service, Building 2207. For information call mil 321-4786 or civ (06042) 80786.

Büdingen fitness

Enroll your child, 6 years old and up, for a CYS sponsored taekwon do class, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-7 p.m. at the Büdingen Fitness Center. The class costs \$35 per month. For information call mil 323-3919 or 322-9144. Children must be registered at CLEOS.

Basic Car Care class

Learn about basic car maintenance at Hanau Auto Skills every Wednesday at 1 p.m. Topics include changing your oil, fixing flat tires, checking fluid levels and brake pads for wear. The class fee is \$10. Call Hanau Auto Skills at mil 322-8247/8625 to sign up.

New ODR office

For Outdoor Recreation trip reservations, equipment rental and

payments visit the new Leisure Travel and Equipment Rental Office at the Community Activities Center, Building 1355 on Fliegerhorst Kaserne. The office is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursday from noon to 8 p.m. and is closed Saturday, Sunday and federal holidays. Call mil 322-6015 or civ (06183) 902-087.

Finance closing

The 39th Finance Battalion will be closed July 23 for training. Call mil 322-9238 or civ (06181) 88-9238 for information.

10-K run

Join the 10-K run July 31 at Büdingen. Register from 9-10:30 a.m. and the run starts at 11 a.m. \$10 entry fee. Call mil 322-9617 for information.

Cardwell art class

Enroll your child, from 9-17 years old, for a CYS sponsored art class, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5-6 p.m. at the Cardwell Youth Center. The class costs \$35 per month. For information call mil 323-3919 or call mil 322-9144 to register.

Hanau Community Spouses Club

The Hanau Community Spouses Club needs volunteers to help at their annual fall bazaar. All the profits from the bazaar are donated to the 414th BSB community in scholarships and donations to organizations that support Soldiers and their families. If you're interested in volunteering, email biancamcort@usc.army.mil or call civ (0160) 910-52378.



Vacation Bible

School

Register for the Hanau Vacation Bible School to be held Aug. 2-6 at the Pioneer Chapel. All children entering kindergarten through sixth grade in fall 2004 are welcome. Look for registration forms at the mail room or the ACS office. For information or to volunteer call Abigail Dolinger at civ (06181) 906-2891 or Lisa Hixon at civ (06181) 507-9250.

Get the latest news online at www.hanau.army.mil

Iraq —14 months later

Chem Soldiers serve in many roles in Iraq

With little NBC threat, members of Hanau unit take on cordon and search mission

By Dennis Johnson
414th Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

Members of the 69th Chemical Company, based on Hutier Kaserne in Hanau and deployed to Iraq since April 2003, haven't been doing their normal jobs. Not because they don't want to, but because Saddam Hussein's boast of chemical and biological weapons turned out to be nothing but that, a boast.

In Iraq the 69th Chemical is assigned to 4th Brigade's 2-501st Aviation Regiment. The 135 Soldiers of the company are divided into eight platoons — a headquarters, maintenance, smoke, reconnaissance and four decontamination platoons.

"Our mission is to look for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons — recon and decon," said Spc. Holly Mullin.

The headquarters and maintenance platoons run the show and fix the equipment. The smoke platoon literally "puts up a smoke screen" when needed to conceal tactical vehicles and troops from the enemy. The recon platoon is sent out whenever there's a sign of a Nuclear, Biological or Chemical threat.

"We have a Fox Reconnaissance Vehicle that carries equipment to detect NBC threats. It's a very high-tech vehicle loaded with computers and an air-filtration system that'll keep you sterile on the inside," said Mullin.

"It also served as our primary armored personnel carrier in support of Task Force 1st Armored Division," added company commander, Capt. Kevin Williams.

"When we first arrived we were always on standby, ready to go out



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Spc. Carla Willingham washes a five-ton truck at Baghdad International Airport as Spc. Holly Mullin and Cpl. Amanda Frisbee assist.

and decon anything," said Mullin. "The recon went out to areas to confirm or deny any possible NBC threat. You always have to be ready to roll out if an NBC attack happens."

For their decontamination mission, the company carries specialized washing equipment which they put to good use, although not its intended use, early in their deployment. "When we first got here we washed down helicopters with our M-12 decontamination apparatus," said Mullin. "We did that to give

the mechanics a clean area [on the aircraft] to work on and to help keep the dust out of the machinery."

"When the president was here, we had to stand by for six hours, ready to decontaminate him if something happened.

"I was in the chow hall (the Bob Hope Dining Facility at Baghdad International Airport) when Bush arrived," said Spc. Carla Willingham. "Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional Authority asked Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, as the highest member of the armed forces, to make a Thanksgiving speech. Sanchez replied, 'I'm not the highest rank here,' and President Bush walked out from behind the camo net and everybody cheered. I didn't know what was going on because I'm so short. Then he [Bush] went behind the chow line and served Soldiers and then shook hands with everybody who wanted to. But we all had to stay where we were until he left."

"In July 2003 we went on a decon mission with the Department of Energy, four of us from the 2nd Decon Platoon. We went down to the yellow-cake factory [the Baghdad Nuclear Research Facility] which was the reactor that Israel bombed in 1981," said Mullin. The Department of Energy team was on a search for uranium and nuclear materials. They went in to confine the substances in one area and lock it up so no one could get at it. We were there to stand

by to decontaminate them in case someone was exposed to radioactive materials."

"Because there was no NBC threat we were trained at BIAP in search and seizures, cordon and search and how to search houses, vehicles and people," said Mullin. "When we were at Forward Operating Base Falcon [in the Al-Rashid district of Baghdad] we went on raids, cordon searches and traffic control points with the 82nd Airborne Division, 1-94th Field Artillery, the 1-1st Cavalry and Special Forces."

"We're the only unit with females trained to do this type of mission. We're all qualified urban fighters," said Spc. Maria Shadrova.

The women became an important cultural asset to the units they assisted. "They had to integrate more females into the front line missions; they needed females to deal with the Iraqi women," said Mullin.

"They try to accommodate the civil liberties of the Iraqi women. Men [U.S. Soldiers] are allowed to touch them if they have to, but they'd prefer to have female Soldiers there to search the Iraqi women," said Willingham.

"At the FOB we did missions everyday. They took a female with them on each mission to search women and girls. You had people who were cooperative and some who were hostile. We've found women with weapons on them; and you have to treat them just like a

man. When we search a house we'd put all the women in one room and I'd guard them. When they see that I'm a female they're much calmer," said Mullin.

"Sometimes 20 people would come out of a house and you think everyone's out while the Soldiers search the house and they find some baby sitting in a room alone. The guys go, 'hey, we've got a baby in here' and I go, 'I got it.' I pick the baby up and take it to its mom; the Iraqi women are usually more comfortable with us [women] handling their children. Sometimes they speak good English and tell you that they understand that you're just doing your job and offer you chai (tea)," said Willingham.

"It was basically a light infantry mission we conducted in the Al-Rashid district from January to April 2004," said Williams.

"Another mission, from June to October 2003, was that we ran the NGO cell at BIAP. We processed incoming Non-Governmental Organization personnel — from the International Red Cross, CARE, UNICEF, and USAID. We made sure the people had the proper credentials and IDs and got them transportation to their final destinations. We also facilitated the reception of incoming humanitarian cargo — medical and school supplies and food."

"I'm very happy to have the experience here," said Mullin. "I'm proud of what we've done."

Iraq —14 months later



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Warrant Officer 1 Ali Keahiolalo says, "Where else can you do this?" about flying Blackhawk helicopters in Iraq.

Getting a kick out of flying

Hanau aviator makes transition 'from high school to flight school'

By Dennis Johnson
414th Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

The Army made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

Warrant Officer 1 Ali Keahiolalo, a Hawaiian native, was working for an airline in Seattle and studying to be an aviation mechanic when 9-11 struck the nation and the aviation industry.

"I've been throwing bags at airports since I was in high school and I was studying aviation maintenance when the airline laid me off," said Keahiolalo.

"An Army recruiter told me about the Warrant Officer Flight Training program, which is often unofficially called 'high school to flight school' or 'street to seat.' They send you to basic, to warrant officer school and right to flight school," he said.

"I graduated flight school in November 2003 and then I went straight to Germany. They kept me real busy in processing. I didn't have a chance to unpack or find a house. My stuff's still in storage and my truck is somewhere, who knows? I wanted to explore Europe but I didn't get the chance," Keahiolalo said.

"I was in Germany just three and a half weeks before they shipped me to BIAP (Baghdad International Airport)," he said.

"It was really awesome when I finally arrived.

"You know how long it takes

to get somewhere when you're traveling with the Army? I had three days of inprocessing here where I got different classes covering the rules of engagement, information on improvised explosive devices and 'how to interact with the Iraqis.' They wanted you to know what to expect here," Keahiolalo said.

Before a pilot starts flying missions he takes a flight with a battalion instructor pilot.

"It's just for him to see where I am in my flying," said Keahiolalo. "I had to do certain tasks to a certain standard before I could fly missions. And you also have to do those tasks at night using night-vision goggles and complete a certain number of flight hours at night," he said.

"We have to do tasks like sling loading, rolling takeoffs and roll-on landings, which are used when the aircraft is heavily laden.

"I'm still getting a kick out of flying, and the funny thing is that I never wanted to fly until the Army told me 'we'll pay you to go to school to be a helicopter pilot,'" he said.

"I'll always be a rotor-head. Flying low and hauling ass, that's the fun stuff.

"Where else can you do this?" he said. "It's yank and bank up there.

"When I'm on the ground I'm thinking 'when am I going to fly next?'"



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Spc. Michael Steelesmith, a Blackhawk crew chief with 2-501st Aviation, serves as a gunner during a flight from Baghdad to Babylon.



Photo by Karl Weisel

A view of the ancient city of Babylon with one of Saddam Hussein's palaces overlooking the site.

Iraq —14 months later



Photo by Dennis Johnson



Photo by Karl Weisel

A Blackhawk traveling between Baghdad and Babylon stays close to the ground to avoid gunfire and missiles. Photo left: Soldiers strap in with their gear while traveling by air between bases in Iraq.

Baghdad to Babylon: Hanau helicopter crews perform vital role while enjoying the ride of a lifetime

By Dennis Johnson
414th Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

Biblical city names are as common these days as Army acronyms. “Our mission today is to fly down to Babylon to pick up some personnel to return to Baghdad,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Fink.

It’s just another day and another mission for the Blackhawk pilot who has flown over 500 hours since he arrived in Iraq in March 2003. This flight of two UH-60 Blackhawk utility helicopters will make the 45-minute flight from Baghdad International Airport to Landing Zone Ruins, a small Army post located at the ruins of the ancient city.

Fink flew his Blackhawk fast and low, often below the tops of the palm trees at speeds of 140 knots. The two helicopters wove their way across the countryside, there’s no flying in a straight line here — the formation stayed loose and changing constantly. The pilots pulled up sharply every few minutes to hop over high-voltage power lines and then pushed over in an arc that gave passengers a nearly weightless, astronaut-like experience, until they were down in the trees again.

“You’re flying for your life. Your concern is for yourself, your crew and the safety of the aircraft. Some people equate our flying to skiing, cutting in and out among the trees like running a slalom course. We’re always keeping a low profile, and when you fly low it keeps you sharp,” said Fink.

“When you’re flying, you look ahead and you begin to visualize the route you must take. We’re trying to be unpredictable, that’s why we fly in what I call a fluid formation,” said Warrant Officer 1 Ali Keahiolalo, Fink’s co-pilot for this flight. “Chalk One (the lead helicopter) picks the general direction, he’s responsible for getting us there. Chalk Two follows and changes up the formation, often swinging from the 3 o’clock to 9 o’clock position. Flying fast and low is not just for fun, although it is, it’s for safety. When some guy is in the city, down between the buildings — or in the country down in the trees — he’ll only have a split second to fire at us, so the lower the better,” said Keahiolalo.

Blackhawk missions usually carry personnel and equipment, but they can also include reconnaissance and security missions such as escorting helicopters carrying VIPs or providing eyes in the air above convoys. “Our mission is to support the 1st Armored Division by transporting equip-



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Fink and Warrant Officer 1 Ali Keahiolalo run through their pre-flight checklist before taking off from BIAP.

ment and personnel,” said Keahiolalo.

The landscape around Baghdad varies from huge plantations of palm trees to parched fields that look like they could barely yield a turnip. Many farm plots are irrigated by small canals around their perimeter making a checkerboard of crops. Only the edges directly by the water push up plants.

The helicopter pilots cover a vast scrubby desert marked by infrequent small lakes until they reach the wide Tigris River, which winds through this region on its way to the Persian Gulf. This is the famed Fertile Crescent that every schoolchild learns about, the “cradle of civilization.” The helicopters fly past waving reeds of papyrus and flax along the muddy river banks, blasting the mud-colored homes on the riverside with rotor wash.

Graveyards of burnt Iraqi military vehicles zip below along with destroyed groups of buildings and dusty, hot cemeteries.

Baghdad is a sprawling modern-day Babylon. Miles of drab and dusty suburbs stretch to the horizon with only the local mosques’ mosaic domes providing a touch of color. Modern office buildings and the rubble of strategic sites that didn’t survive the American aerial bombardment dot the city. Looming like a mountain on the horizon is what would be, if it’s ever finished, the world’s largest mosque. In 1997 Saddam

Hussein approved the design for a domed mosque capable of holding 30,000 worshippers with four minarets alongside a huge artificial lake shaped like a map of the Arab world. Today construction cranes stand idle over the unfinished project.

Flying in Iraq was Keahiolalo’s first assignment as a Blackhawk pilot. “My first mission was with Dan Fink and we went out to Butler Field, a firing range near Baghdad, to clear the field. Iraqis were out there picking up brass while the range was hot. Back then we were scheduled twice a day to clear the range. There was always somebody out there. The sheepherders go out there; we’ve had to herd sheep with the helicopters. We fly along and there’re trees, trees and trees and then there’s a line and nothing but sand. I was surprised at how green it is around the irrigated areas,” said Keahiolalo.

“I like to improve my skills, and I’m flying nearly every day. I’m flying real world missions, doing what I’m trained to do. That’s just awesome,” he said.

Recalling the extension announcement in April, “We were watching the TV all the day when we heard about the extension. That night we had a meeting and the commander broke the news. The helicopters were down at the port in Kuwait, all washed and checked by customs when we were called back. Some helicopters still wear ‘passed by customs’ stickers on their noses,” said Keahiolalo. “Some took it better than others. It’s easier for me because I just have a girlfriend, not a wife and kids.”

One of the unexpected consequences of the last minute recall was that the units had sent home all their “quality of life” personal items. “We all sent stuff home, all our DVDs and then we got extended and wished we had that stuff. The days drag on and on and nobody’s going to buy a new X-Box,” said Keahiolalo.

“We’re keeping our loads light since the extension. If they told me I could go home in an hour, I’d be able to throw my stuff in one bag and go. I think a lot of guys are ready,” he said.

“Flying allows the days to go quickly, doing something you love,” said Fink. “We’re just living it out now, going to the Internet cafe, using the phones and reading books because we sent home all our recreational stuff. Now we want to lighten our load, so we can get home with one rucksack. I can’t wait to be back with my family and hold my daughter again.”