

**Special edition: 'On guard in Iraq'**

# Herald Union



Vol. X, No. 20

Serving the military communities of the 104th Area Support Group

July 8, 2003



Photo by Karl Weisel

Soldiers of Baumholder's 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, part of Task Force 1-35, guard a checkpoint at the Assassin's Gate in Baghdad.

## In between war and peace

By Karl Weisel

104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

*Everything you've heard and read about duty in Iraq is true and then some.*

*The overpowering heat. The constantly shifting sand that covers every surface. The hard looks of passersby, generous gestures of strangers and friendly waves from children. The danger of never being sure who is friendly and who wishes to do one harm.*

"It's like 'Groundhog Day' (the movie starring Bill Murray) out here. Every day's the same over and over again," was the way Spc. Steven Dudgeon, of Wiesbaden's Company A, 141st Signal Battalion, described duty in Iraq.

Not that every situation is even remotely alike for the men and women risking their lives on a daily basis to improve the living conditions for Iraq's citizens, but the sameness of eating food from a plastic Meals Ready to Eat pouch, going out on dangerous patrols night after night and the sheer effort of trying to stay cool in an extremely unforgiving climate tends to blur the passage of time.

"The Iraqis have told us over and over again how grateful they are for the American presence," said Baumholder's Chaplain (Maj.) Ken Sorenson, with the 2nd Brigade Ministry Team in Baghdad. The Army chaplain was describing the

acquaintances he's made in Iraq, the shared religious history of the land and the growing awareness of American soldiers about the atrocities committed by Iraq's former rulers in some of the very locations where U.S. troops are now stationed.

"I expected to live in a tent; I never expected to live in a palace," said Pfc. Corey Blanton of Wackernheim's Company B, 501st Military Intelligence Battalion. Blanton, like many fellow 1st Armored Division soldiers, was describing the living conditions of Iraq's former rulers, the palatial residences that contrast so strongly with the extreme poverty of those not favored by the Saddam regime.

"The hardest thing to deal with is the separation," said

Pfc. Charles Mitchell, Company A, 141st Signal Battalion. With sporadic email connections, slow postal service, no American Forces Network radio and little news from the outside world, many soldiers find family separation the most difficult part of the deployment experience.

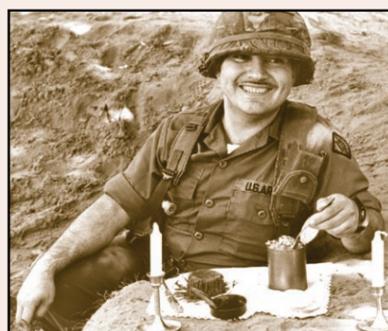
Despite the challenges soldiers serving on the front lines in Iraq somehow manage to stay focused on the mission while maintaining their senses of humor.

"The last time I was here (in the Persian Gulf region) was during the Gulf War. It was nice to finally roll into Baghdad and have a cigar," said Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Mackey of Baumholder's 40th Engineer Battalion. *(Editor's note: See stories throughout this special edition focusing on men and women from the communities of the 104th Area Support Group serving in Iraq.)*

### Inside

#### What's your favorite MRE?

Army field food has come a long way since the days of the humble C-Ration. See page 2 for a look at fine dining in Iraq.



#### Shooting hoops, not bullets in Baghdad

1st Brigade soldiers take on members of the Iraqi national team in a friendly competition. See pages 16 and 17.



# Commentary

## Feedback: What advice do you have for soldiers serving in Iraq?



**Capt. Jason Conde**  
1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment

"I guess the biggest thing we have to do is just get a full understanding of what we're here for. Kind of keep the end state in mind. It gets a little frustrating sometimes dealing with the checkpoints. Soldiers can get a little aggressive; people can get a little aggressive. Just remember we're building a nation down here."



**Pvt. 2 Michelle Bryant**  
Company A, 141st Signal Battalion

"Be prepared. Bring lots of entertainment like books and war games. It gets really boring out here. Bring a lot of bug spray."



**Spc. Ladislao Arellano**  
69th Chemical Company

"It's kind of boring here and hot. Bring refreshments, reading and writing materials. Even though the mail is slow you'll get mail."



**Spc. Steven Dudgeon**  
141st Signal Battalion

"It's hot as hell — bring a fan. We all had to buy them when we got here. Bring an air conditioner if you can — and a cooler. The local businessmen will just gouge you. They know it's supply and demand. Also, bring a lot of extra socks and brown T-shirts."



**Pfc. Tara Long**  
527th Military Police Company

"Bring lots of sunscreen and baby wipes. Just be friendly with the people because it's a lot easier — especially to the kids. They like to come up to you and talk."

## MREs: a fact of life for deployed soldiers

**Commentary by Karl Weisel**  
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Weekends are big breakfast days at my house. After the rush of work and school during the week, it's a pleasure to crawl out of bed Saturday or Sunday to put together a breakfast spread including among other things fresh melon, mozzarella, basil and tomatoes, eggs, German rolls, orange juice and coffee. The best part of the ritual is sharing the repast with the wife and kids (and any overnight guests), lingering over the good eats and conversation for much of the morning.

But this Sunday I had to think about the friends I'd made in Baghdad the week before. I could picture them crawling out of tents and bombed out buildings, shaking the dust out of sleeping bags, shaving over cans of potable water (if there was any available) and reaching for the MRE box to see what had been rejected by their comrades.

If you haven't had the pleasure of living off of Meals Ready to Eat (or Meals Refused by practically Everyone as they are known in politer circles) for any length of time, you probably are not an MRE connoisseur like most of the folks serving in Iraq.

There's nothing quite like starting the day with a cold helping of beef teriyaki straight out of the plastic bag (real men don't heat their MREs) washed down with lukewarm, orange- or grape-flavored bottled water from the United Arab Emirates. (The water isn't really flavored, but thanks to the foresight of those who developed MREs, soldiers have several powdery substances to choose from, which under the cover of absolute darkness and a really bad cold might actually pass for a fruit drink substitute.)

Don't get me wrong — there's absolutely nothing wrong with MREs. They beat risking contagion or worse by indulging in the local cuisine and are guaranteed to keep a person fortified under the most adverse conditions. They're a lot better than C-Rations ever were and offer more variety (plus, you never got a little bottle of Tabasco or a package of M&Ms with C-Rations).

But people who dine on the stuff on a regular basis quickly form strong opinions about the ingredients of an MRE. Ask an MRE connoisseur about his or her favorite and least loved selections and you'll most likely get numbers in return such as, "My favorite is Number 23 — chicken cavatelli," or "Stay away from No. 24 — meat loaf and gravy."

People will advise you of ways to enhance the MRE dining experience — "crunch up the cheese and crackers and mix them with the chicken and noodles," or simply, "mix several together and douse with several bottles of Tabasco." They'll also warn you about the digestion slowdown process of indulging in too much of the peanut butter and brownies.

As a public service the *Herald Union* conducted an extremely informal survey of MRE likes and dislikes during a visit to Iraq. While there is absolutely no validity to the results gathered over a several day period, this newspaper found that the beef dishes ranked highest among those asked for their favorite dish. These included the most votes for beef stew and beef enchilada. People who said they liked the beef dishes usually also claimed to prefer the beef with mushrooms and beef patty entrees.

Other people expressed a distinct liking for the chicken or noodle dishes. Among dishes garnering high marks were the chili macaroni, Thai chicken, and chicken and noodles dishes. And although early results indicated that those who prefer the beef dishes like the chicken entrees the least, and vice versa, one soldier dispelled that conclusion by declaring, "We stay away from the Thai chicken and the beef enchilada."

At one stage it looked like officers predominantly prefer chicken and enlisted soldiers like the beef dishes, but that also fell by the wayside during the course of our research.

Boneless pork chop and jambalaya were the big losers in our informal survey, with one 1st Armored Division soldier declaring, "Being Cajun I can tell you it has nothing to do with Cajun food, not the way my family makes it. It's an insult."

Soldiers also expressed their longing for entrees they hadn't seen in a while such as barbecue pork — and ways to improve the basic MRE. "They ought to have potato sticks instead of crackers," said one.

The most positive description of an MRE — "It's a nice, well-rounded meal" — came from a sergeant first class and Desert Storm veteran who said he had eaten his share of Army food and appreciated the variety.

Our hands-on research also revealed that the Desert Camouflage Uniform is better suited at concealing the stains left behind when indulging in an MRE than the BDU — particularly the chicken dishes.

What did our research conclude? The best part of an MRE is the good company and conversation that come along with it.

## Herald Union

The *Herald Union* is an authorized unofficial Army newspaper published under the provisions of AR 360-1 for members of the 104th Area Support Group. Contents of the *Herald Union* are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. government or the Department of Defense. The editorial content is the responsibility of the 104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office. No payment will be made for contributions. This is a biweekly publication printed by *The Stars and Stripes* in Griesheim, Germany. Our office is in Building 1205 on Hanau's Yorkhof Kaserne. Circulation is 13,000 copies. For advertising rates contact Sean Adams at civ (06155) 601-203, mil 349-8203 or [adamss@mail.estripes.osd.mil](mailto:adamss@mail.estripes.osd.mil).

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# On guard in Iraq

## News flash ... News flash

### Suicide prevention

An Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training workshop will be held July 31 and Aug. 1 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Wiesbaden Army Airfield Community Activity Center, Building 1011. First responders, care givers and others in the helping professions are encouraged to attend. These include counselors, teachers, Military Police, rear detachment commanders, Family Readiness Group leaders, first sergeants and health care providers. The workshop is designed to give participants emergency "first aid skills" for helping people at risk of suicidal behavior. Call mil322-1570 or civ(06181)88-1570 to register for the workshop.

### LQA changed

The U.S. Army Europe Civilian Human Resource Management Agency has revised the regulation for civilian Living Quarters Allowance. The change:
 

- Expands the authorization to grant LQA to locally separated military personnel and contractors who meet Department of State Standardized Regulations and appointed to positions GS-9, WG-11, WL-9, WS-5 and above;
- Exempts employees on mandatory mobility agreements from the one-year residency requirement for U.S. hires;
- Exempts applicants selected for career program positions from grade restrictions;
- Authorizes continued LQA to employees voluntarily leaving hard-to-fill positions to accept other positions. Current civilian employees hired since June 1998 may meet the requirements of the revised regulation (Army in Europe Regulation 690-500.592). Visit the CHRMA website at [www.chrma.hq.usareur.army.mil](http://www.chrma.hq.usareur.army.mil) for more information. (USAREUR Public Affairs)

### Top trooper

Spc. Angelina Ellis of the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity Heidelberg has been named the 2003 Medical Command Soldier of the Year. Ellis will compete against other major command winners in the Army-wide Soldier of the Year competition later this year. (U.S. Army Medical Department Activity Heidelberg Public Affairs)

### Technology Expo

More than 20 exhibitors will be on hand demonstrating the latest computer hardware, software and services at the Wiesbaden Army Airfield Technology Exposition

July 18 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Community Activity Center. All Army, Department of Defense civilians and contractors are invited to attend the free expo, which will feature complimentary refreshments and giveaways. The event is sponsored by the 102nd Signal Battalion.

### Improved ACAP website

The Army Career and Alumni Program has launched an improved version of ACAP Online at [www.acap.army.mil](http://www.acap.army.mil). New services include an online coaching section for transitioners and information for Army leaders at all levels. While the site is not intended to serve as a substitute for personal visits to ACAP centers, it supplements existing services and can help those who are deployed or otherwise unable to visit ACAP.

### Signal Ball

The 2003 European Regimental Signal Ball will be held Sept. 13 at the Rosengarten in Mannheim. All soldiers, civilians, local nationals and spouses of the signal corps are invited to attend. Gen. B.B. Bell, U.S. Army Europe commander will speak. Tickets, costing \$30, are now on sale. Visit the [www.eurosigball.net](http://www.eurosigball.net) website to make reservations.

### Family health care

If you have children who attend school in the United States but return overseas to stay with you for an extended time (more than 60 days) you should consider enrolling them in Tricare Europe Prime, according to Tricare officials. Local enrollment ensures priority access to care and smooth claims processing. If they stay with you for only a few days, enrolling them in their stateside Tricare region is recommended. Children must reside with you, their overseas-assigned active duty sponsor, to be eligible for Tricare Prime. When students return to school in the United States they must outprocess from the overseas center and return to the Prime or Standard coverage they had in the States. If your parents, in-laws or other non-dependent family members visit you this summer, they must ensure their health insurance policy covers them overseas. If not they may wish to purchase temporary travel insurance. Medicare does not pay for care received overseas. For more information browse to [www.europe.tricare.osd.mil](http://www.europe.tricare.osd.mil) or visit your local Tricare Service Center. (IMA-E News Release)



# Senators get inside look at duty in Iraq

Story and photo by Pfc. Derrol Fulghum  
1st Armored Division Public Affairs Office

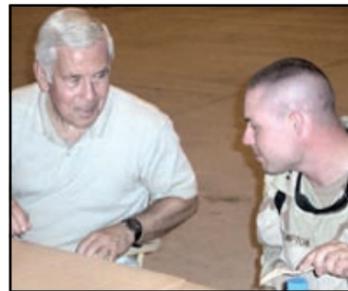
Three U.S. senators braved the dangers of Iraq to have dinner with 1st Armored Division soldiers June 23.

Eighteen soldiers representing Delaware, Nebraska and Indiana met with their representatives at an informal dinner held on the Baghdad International Airport.

"It's a real morale boost for him to come all the way here just to eat with us," said Spc. Brian Bogart, 4th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery. Bogart dined with Sen. Richard G. Lugar from Indiana.

The lawmakers spent the day meeting with Office of Coalition Provisional Authority representatives and other officials in Baghdad.

The senators made no formal entrances or speeches; they simply got their food, sat down and talked



Capt. Christopher Compton enjoys a meal with Senator Richard Lugar during the senator's visit to Iraq.

with soldiers. Following the meal they posed for pictures with each of the soldiers from their state.

Throughout the evening they discussed various issues from the situation in Iraq to the weather along the east coast of the United States.

Cooks from the 4th Brigade Combat Team Dining Facility provided a meal for the group, which the soldiers and senators said they highly enjoyed.

Staff Sgt. Brent Sweeny, an aircraft electrician with 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, dined with Senator Joseph Biden.

"I think it's good that an honored representative of Delaware would eat with soldiers. It shows that the state cares," he said.

Senator Chuck Hagle of Nebraska made a favorable impression on "his" soldiers, said 1st Sgt. Martin Roy with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, V Corps, from Omaha, Neb.

"I have to respect anybody who will leave the comforts of the U.S. willingly to come out here and eat field food with soldiers," he said.

The soldiers said that it lifted their spirits to know that the representatives of their states were thinking about them. The evening also helped the senators get a good idea of how their Army constituents in Iraq were living.

## Keep contact data updated

### Website provides access for deployed civilian workers

By Staff Sgt. Marcia Triggs  
Army News Service

The Army's Civilian Personnel office has designed a website to prevent the woeful scenario of not knowing whom to contact if one of its employees is injured or dies while on duty.

The site was operational March 2002. However, more than two-thirds of the 230,000 Army appropriated and nonappropriated fund civilians have not updated their emergency contact data at the site, [www.cpol.army.mil](http://www.cpol.army.mil).

### Missing info

"I'm sure if more people knew what we saw after 9-11, when we started going through the process of providing data to the Casualty Assistance Office, they would make sure that their information was correct," said Patricia Nabinett, a personnel management specialist at the U.S. Total Army Personnel Com-

mand.

The information provided to the site would be used to notify family or friends in the case of an emergency or death.

Nabinett designed the site to provide an automated method of accessing employees' emergency contact information. After Sept. 11, 2001, Nabinett said they discovered that the data for many employees was missing or outdated. There was not one system that held everyone's personal information, she said. Some managers had hard copies, and there was not a standard way to extract that type of information, she added.

This website has been an innovative process for the Army, said Taiwana Smith, a personnel management specialist with PERSCOM.

"The Air Force is interested in duplicating our system and is looking to us for help on trying to improve its notification system," Smith said.

"We've tried to make the process of updating the required information as simple as possible," Nabinett said. "We're not asking for data that we already have such as Social Security numbers and birthdays."

### Password protected

After accessing the CPOL site individuals can click on the "emergency contact data" tab to register and set up a password. Once a password is established employees can go to the form and fill out the name, relationship, address and phone number of their appointed contact person.

"It's crucial that we have the information," Smith said. "Before we can determine what benefits or entitlements the spouse or designated beneficiary gets, we have to notify that designated person."

It can take up to several weeks  
See Website on page 4

## Letter to the editor: Thanks for the school coverage

I couldn't leave for the summer without taking just a couple of moments to write and let you know how much we appreciate the support you gave us this year. We feel that we've made some milestones

as far as celebrating student success in our schools. It is an understatement to say that you've been instrumental in getting this out to the community. Next year we plan on doing more exciting things, so

please make sure we are on your calendar. Again, thanks for all you do for us.

Working Together,  
Georgia Williams-Fitzpatrick  
Hanau Middle School principal

# On guard in Iraq

## Medic volunteers for guard duty

### Baumholder soldier wants to be 'in the thick of it'

Story and photo by Sgt. Mark Bell  
372nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Pfc. Amber Bryant, a medic with Baumholder's Company C, 47th Forward Support Battalion, said she wants to be on the front lines of Operation Iraqi Freedom every day.

Bryant volunteered to stand guard duty at Baghdad's busiest checkpoint at the former presidential compound, the scene of frequent protests and sometimes violent demonstrations.

In addition to being ready to perform first aid to U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians in case of emergency, she also works with sentries searching women and girls wanting to enter the compound.

"Why sit around in a hangar and wait for something to happen," she said. "I want to be where the action is, and what better place than right here."

Although her medical unit's headquarters on the Baghdad International Airport has electricity, running water and a nearby Burger King, Bryant chooses the life of the infantryman as her role in the ongoing peacekeeping mission inside the city's center.

"I'll be honest — I joined the Army for college money," she said. "I never thought I'd be here in Iraq, let alone in the middle of protests and riots, but I am here every day helping the Iraqi people after the fall of the regime of Saddam."

To some it could seem a secondary task, but Bryant's job of searching females requesting entrance to the compound

is just as important as the male soldiers standing point at the razor-wire's edge.

"Females are just as capable of delivering a bomb or weapons into the palace," she said.

"Because in Iraqi society, men can't search females, and that's why I am at the front gate," she explained. "I also believe it shows the women of Iraq that women are equal and can do anything a man does — even fight a war."

Bryant is no stranger to danger. Reporting to the main gate is an adventure in itself. From rock throwing to sniper attacks, Bryant and fellow soldiers controlling the gate put their lives on the line daily.

The media paints a different picture of Iraq than the one she sees each day, said Bryant. It's important to tell the real stories about the Iraqi people, she said. "Americans who disagree with what we are doing might understand how much we've helped this country and its people. We are doing the right thing here. I just know it. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but someday, people will see the change we made."

Bryant said that people should not only support the military, but also join the military to learn true discipline.

"No matter how mad you get at your boss, you just have to say 'Roger, Sergeant,' and move out to execute the mission."

Bryant said she is proud to be serving side-by-side with infantrymen and sharing the goals of Operation Iraqi Freedom to bring freedom and safe and secure communities to the Iraqi people.

**"I'll be honest — I joined the Army for college money. I never thought I'd be here in Iraq, let alone in the middle of protests and riots, but I am here every day helping the Iraqi people after the fall of the regime of Saddam."**



Pfc. Amber Bryant, Company C, 47th Forward Support Battalion, greets a young Iraqi girl at a military checkpoint.

## Website . . . . .

### Continued from page 3

to find family members or friends after a tragedy, and that increases the chances that the victim's loved ones could find out about the death through other channels, Nabinett said.

The emergency contact person for civilians does not have to be a relative, Nabinett said; however, it's different for soldiers.

Soldiers are also required to keep Department of Defense Form 93, Record of Emergency Data, updated in their personnel files. Before any major deployment, part of the outgoing process is to have soldiers review their DD93 and their Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance form.

Most Personnel Support Bat-

talions proactively get soldiers to review their forms during peacetime. But on one occasion, a PERSCOM official said, a soldier died in Germany, and the address for his next of kin was a post office box.

### Next of kin

For anyone who isn't sure about who's listed on his SGLI or on DD Form 93, just walk into any PSB — it's a simple process that can be done on a walk-in basis, said Sgt. Ricardo Rodriguez, a records noncommissioned officer for the Military Personnel Center in Arlington, Va.

Most people have the wrong perception of who their next of kin is, and another misperception is when changes can be made to the SGLI, Rodriguez said.

"The name on the emergency data form has to be someone of relationship to you, not a fiancée," Rodriguez said. "Also at any time changes can be made to the SGLI. The process for getting a divorce may take up to several months, but soldiers don't have to wait until it's final to change the name of their beneficiary."





Photo by Cassandra Kardeke

## Community mourns loss of 123rd MSB soldier

Dexheim community members console each other following a memorial service at the community chapel at Anderson Barracks June 24. The small church overflowed as soldiers, friends and community members gathered for a memorial service for Sgt. Orenthial Smith, who was killed in Iraq when Iraqis fired grenades at his convoy. Smith was assigned to Company A of the 123rd Main Support Battalion. "He was my friend, my comrade, my neighbor, a fine soldier, my Playstation buddy, my go-kart buddy and a true patriot," said Staff Sgt. Mario Claytor, Smith's squad leader in a tearful tribute during the service.

## Commander's corner

### Safety and force protection lead commander's agenda

By Lt. Col. Christopher C. Franks  
221st Base Support Battalion commander

Soldiers, families and community residents of the Wiesbaden military community, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the very warm welcome you have given to me and my family. While we are neither new to Germany or the Wiesbaden area, we have been made to feel extremely welcome as we transitioned into the 221st Base Support Battalion. We are eagerly looking forward to working with and for all of you over the next two years.

A couple of topics I would like to address are summer safety and force protection.

First, the summer months are in full swing, and with them come additional high risk activities. I would ask you to remind your soldiers, friends and children about exercising caution around the lakes and swimming areas in Germany. Almost every year for the past four years we have lost a soldier, civilian or family member to drowning. Vigilance is a must when in the vicinity of the water. Be sure you check the BSB website for a list of authorized swimming areas. Keep up the great efforts on driving to arrive, and as

always make sure all open fires are completely extinguished before leaving them unattended.

Second, I am no different than any other commander in that force protection is my number one priority. We in the BSB are doing everything possible to protect our residents, but I count on all of you to help us through your increased awareness. You are my scouts and my eyes throughout the community.

Through our combined efforts we can continue to defeat any terrorist efforts to inflict damage or casualties on Americans. Report all suspicious activities to the Military Police station at mil 337-5096 or civ (0611) 705-5096.