IRAQI DESTINY

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Gone but not forgotten:

Comrades pay tribute to fallen soldiers from three units in Mosul

see page 3

Casualties never just a number

By Richard M. Arndt
Editor of the *Belvoir Eagle*

FORT BELVOIR, Va. -- As the body count of U.S. service members killed in Iraq continues to climb, I fear the American public will begin to see those brave souls as mere numbers in a tragic tally.

News anchors introduce stories with phrases like, "As the number of American dead in Iraq continues to rise…"

The stories that air on the evening news seem remarkably similar … a rocket-propelled grenade here…a sniper's bullet there. It all becomes familiar, expected after a while.

The families left behind, though, do not expect it. The young wife, who was looking forward to a lifetime together with her husband, does not expect it. Neither do the sons and daughters, who never really got a chance to know their dad. And the mother and father certainly never expect to outlive a child.

I know the families don't expect it, because I once had the task of bringing a family the news. It wasn't during the Iraq conflict. In fact, it wasn't during any conflict at all. It was 1996, and I had the task of informing a couple that their son, an Army NCO, had been murdered.

I was an Army sergeant first class at the time, stationed at Fort Meade, Md. I came down on the detail roster for casualty notification duty just as all the other NCOs in the battalion did. I attended my two hours of training on Friday and went home for the weekend, never expecting to get the call.

The call came at 6 a.m. Saturday. I shook the sleep from my head as I showered and shaved, and I was already starting to get nervous as I donned my Class A's. I'd never done this before. How was I going to face this family?

See COMMENTARY, page 11

Citizens put soldiers before themselves

By Will Ross
Administrative Judge, U.S. DoD

I hope that you will spare me a few minutes of your time to tell you about something that I saw on Monday, Oct. 27.

I had been attending a conference in Annapolis and was coming home on Sunday. As you may recall, Los Angeles International Airport was closed on Oct. 26, because of the fires that affected air traffic control.

Accordingly, my flight and many others were canceled, and I wound up spending a night in Baltimore.

My story begins the next day. When I went to check in at the United Airlines counter

Monday morning, I saw a lot of soldiers home from Iraq. Most were very young and all had on their desert camouflage uniforms. This was as change from earlier, when they had to buy civilian clothes in Kuwait to fly home. It was a visible reminder that we are in a war. It probably was pretty close to what train terminals were like in World War II.

Many people were stopping the troops to talk to them, asking them questions in the Starbucks line or just saying "Welcome Home." In addition to all the flights that had been canceled on Sunday, the weather was terrible in Baltimore and the flights were backed up. So, there were a lot of unhappy people in the terminal trying to get home, but nobody that I saw gave the soldiers a bad time.

By the afternoon, one plane to Denver had been delayed several hours. United personnel kept asking for volunteers to give up their seats and take another flight. They weren't getting many takers. Finally, a United spokeswoman got on the PA and said this: "Folks, as you can see, there are a lot of soldiers in the waiting area. They only have 14 days of leave and we're trying to get them where they need to go without spending any more time in an airport than they have to. We sold them all tickets, knowing we would oversell the flight. If we can, we want to get them all on this flight. We want all the soldiers to know that we respect what you're doing, we are here for you and we love you."

With that, the entire terminal of cranky, tired, travel-weary people, a cross-section of America, broke into sustained and heartfelt applause.

The soldiers looked surprised and very modest. Most of them just looked at their boots. Many of us were wiping away tears.

And, yes, people lined up to take the later flight and all the soldiers went to Denver on that flight.

That little moment made me proud to be an American, and also told me why we will win this war.

If you want to send this little story on to your friends and family, feel free. This is not some urban legend. I was there, I was part of it, I saw it happen.

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101st remembers fallen Blackhawk crew

By Pfc. Thomas Day
40th PAD

Pfc. Thomas Day

Lt. Col. Laura Richardson, 5-101st Aviation Regiment commander, speaks during the memorial ceremony for her four soldiers who died in a UH-60 Blackhawk crash in Tikrit, Nov. 7

QAYARRAH, Iraq - The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) remembered the four fallen "Screaming Eagles" of the Nov. 7 helicopter crash at a ceremony in Qayarrah Tuesday.

Capt. Benedict J. Smith, Chief Warrant Officer Kyran E. Kennedy, Staff Sgt. Paul M. Neff, and Staff Sgt. Scott C. Rose, all members of the 5-101st Aviation Regiment, were killed in a crash after an attack in Tikrit Friday. Their brothers and sisters in combat honored their sacrifices at the 101st Airborne's "Q-West" Airfield, under the shadows of two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters - the aircraft the crew took their final flight in when the crew received hostile fire.

The crew of Blackhawk 26431, "The Goat," were remembered on Veteran's Day as four unique individuals but with a common love of their families and trust in their fellow soldiers.

"In the deadly chaos of battle, soldiers hold trust and when they fight, they fight for each other because of the trust that resides in one another," said Lt. Col. Laura Richardson, 5-101st Aviation commander. "The crew of aircraft 26431 had that trust."

Capt. Ben Smith, 29

The son of two Missouri pig farmers, Smith was remembered by a friend for his adoration of his wife, his affinity for bacon and his inability to keep his desk organized.

"The funny thing was, you could ask him for a specific memo or paper and he would only have to move two or three sheets to come up with it," said Capt. Patrick Patrino, who delivered Smith's eulogy.

Patrino recalled an experience in breakfast chow hall line where his friend's family roots shined. After Patrino refused bacon from a chow hall server, Smith "proceeded to load his plate up with bacon and told the server, 'I'll have the bacon that he didn't get'."

Smith recently married Capt. Maggie J. (Bradley) Smith before both deployed to Kuwait before the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, she is with 9th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kyran Kennedy, 43

Like another Kennedy from Massachusetts, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kyran Kennedy knew the value of doing what you can do for your country, recalled his friend Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jimmy McElhaney. Kennedy, a native Bostonian, loved a political debate among friends, which the republican McElhaney was happy to give him over a cup of morning coffee.

Kennedy was the crew's safety officer, a responsibility he never took lightly. "He always came up with a way to do it safely," said McElhaney during the ceremony. "He was never there to say, 'no, we can't do it.' He just came up with other, safer ways to do it."

Kennedy was in his 16th year in the Army. He is survived by his wife Kathy and children Christopher, 11, Kaitlyn, 9, and Kevin, 3.

Staff Sgt. Paul Neff, 30

"He left us doing what he loved to do: fly," said Sgt. First Class Jerardo Gamino. "If he were standing here today, he would tell his soldiers, 'get in that aircraft, fly, do your job."

Neff was an honest non-commissioned officer, recalled his friend. He loved the Army, having grown up in Columbia, South Carolina, just miles from the Army's Fort Jackson. "He performed his job in an efficient, professional manor," said Gamino.

Neff asked his girlfriend Sabrina Campbell to marry him before the 101st Airborne Division deployed to Kuwait. She said yes. Neff is survived by Sabrina and his seven-year-old son Christopher.

Staff Sgt. Scott Rose, 30

Like Kennedy, his crew-mate Staff Sgt. Scott Rose was born in Boston. He is the son of a retired colonel and father of five-month old Megan, his first child with wife Michele. He had never met Megan.

Sgt. Bradley Green remembered the day his friend celebrated the Megan's birth this past summer. "He came to me and asked me if I was as nervous as he was when my daughter was born. Of course I said yes, and we talked for hours about being a dad and how wonderful it will be when we go home."

Just before Rose flew his last mission, he told Green that he would soon be leaving the unit to teach Advanced Individual Training in Fort Eustis, Va. Green told his friend that he would miss him. Rose replied facetiously, "you're not going to get all weepy eyed on me?"

"Well Scott, you got me all weepy eyed now."

326th Engineers pay tribute to slain officer

By Spc. Blake Kent
22nd MPAD

Qayarrah, Iraq - Soldiers of the 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), held memorial services Nov. 8, to honor one of their own.

1st Lt. Joshua C. Hurley of Clifton Forge, Va., was killed by an improvised explosive device Nov. 1, 2003, in Mosul, Iraq, during a convoy through the city.

Hurley was a platoon leader in Company A, 326th Engineer Bn., 101st Abn. Div. (AAslt.), where he served during combat operations with 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment.

He was reassigned to the Headquarters Headquarters Company of the 326th, where he served as the Deputy Mayor's Liaison Officer, to the Mayor of Mosul, Iraq, Ghanim Al-Baso.

"He talked about the beautiful park he was helping build in Mosul, how he could look out the window of his office and watch the project grow," said Sgt. 1st Class Chadwick Price, Co. A, 326th.

"There were a few soldiers that stood out for their competence and professionalism, Hurley was one of those," said Cpt. Thomas Wood, commander, Co. A, 326th. "He served with distinction and honor. He was a quiet professional and a friend."

Hurley graduated from the Virginia Military Institute as a mechanical engineer, and entered the Army as an officer in the Corps of Engineers on June 1, 2002.

His military education includes, engineer officer basic course, ranger school, and air-assault school.

His awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, Bronze Star medal, Army Commendation medal, National Defense Service ribbon, Army Service ribbon, Ranger Tab and air-assault badge.

Among the soldiers that served with Hurley, many had fond memories of the friendship and leadership he offered.

"We always harassed each other," said 1st Lt. David Wilson, Co. A, 326th of the bond the two soldiers shared from being from competing colleges.

"Josh always had an ability to not let things bother him," Wilson said. "He always had a kind word. Whenever he was given a task he completed it., and there was never any doubt that Josh would be there in a pinch.

"He should always know that my last push-up of the day will be dedicated to the Airborne Ranger in the sky," Wilson said.

"If you needed him, he would always be there to talk," said Cpl. Dusty Beam, Co. A, 326th. "Lt. Hurley's death has made my fear of death lessen, knowing that I have at least one good friend to reunite with."

Spc. Blake Kent

Lt. Col. Marcus F. DeOliveira comforts fellow soldier Sgt. 1st Class Chadwick Price during the memorial service held for 1st Lt. Joshua C. Hurley, 326th Engineer Battalion. Hurley was killed by an improvise explosive device in Mosul.

Hurley , son of Charles and Christine Hurley, was born April 22, 1979.

He is survived by his wife 1st Lt. Teresa Vaught, mother and father, and sister, Amanda Hurley.

52nd Engineers honor deceased soldier

By Pfc. Chris Jones
40th PAD

On the day after Veteran's Day, one U.S. soldier was honored in a memorial ceremony at the Division Rear compound here after he was killed in an attack on a three-vehicle convoy east of Mosul last Thursday.

At the ceremony Wednesday, fellow soldiers bid their final regards to 21-year-old Spc. James R. Wolf, an engineer who spent eight months serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom

A member of Company A, 52nd Engineer Battalion, Wolf is survived by his mother, father, brother and two sisters.

Wolf was born in Spokane, Wash., May 7, 1982. He later moved to Scottsbluff, Neb., where he spent much of his childhood, graduating from Scottsbluff High School with the class of 2000. He joined the Army immediately after high school and graduated Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training (engineer specialist) at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

After a one-year tour with the 23rd Area Support Group in Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Wolf was assigned to the 52nd Eng. Bn. at Fort Carson, Co. His stay in Colorado was fleeting, as his unit soon joined the 101st in its deployment to Kuwait and offensive into Iraq.

"He always talked about the difference we were making in Iraq," said his platoon leader Capt. Martin Naranjo. "He really believed in what he was doing. And he did indeed make a difference."

Wolf's death came two weeks after he had returned from the U.S. on mid-term leave.

"It gave him the chance to talk to his family and his girlfriend one last time," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael McKimmey, Wolf's platoon sergeant. "He also visited the local grade school to thank the children for the cards and letters they sent us here."

After Wolf's death, McKimmey adopted the mission of gathering his former soldier's personal items to send to his family. In Wolf's foot locker, McKimmey found a poem taped beneath the lid which he read at the ceremony.

"It's the soldier, not the reporter, who gives us freedom of the press," read McKimmey, clutching Wolf's poem. "It is the soldier, not the poet, who gives us freedom of speech… It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who gives the protester the right to burn the flag."

Veterans Day ceremony a tribute to American soldiers

By Pfc. Chris Jones
40th PAD

In the nucleus of the largest city in Northern Iraq, soldiers of the 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) devoted an hour of Veterans Day to pay tribute to those who have served in uniform, past and present.

Col. Joseph Anderson, 502nd commander, spoke to his troops.

"We have honored our fallen comrades, and we must continue to fight to ensure that they have not died in vain," said Anderson. "But today is Veterans Day, not Memorial Day. The reality is that all of you sitting here today are now veterans of war. You have freed a nation from a ruthless dictator and given its people their first taste of freedom."

For some soldiers, the honor of being called a war veteran is still unusual.

2nd Lt. Jacob Lobermeier, platoon leader, 1st platoon, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 502nd, said he had always envisioned what became a reality with Opeation Iraqi Freedom.

Pfc. Chris Jones

101st troops retire the colors in a Veterans Day ceremony in Mosul Tuesday.

"It's a different kind of feeling," Lobermeier said. "It's something I've wanted to do all my life, lead a band of men into war. I feel a lot of pride now."

Though the swell in attacks against U.S. soldiers here, has necessitated many leaders to adjust their unit's activities, Lobermeir said he was glad to see his unit honor Veterans Day with a ceremony amid these hostilities.

"It's an important day for the Army," he said. "It's an important day for Americans. But once this is over, you still gotta keep your game face on. There's a lot of bad guys out there."

In closing, Anderson told his troops to maintain ever vigilant in and outside the gates of their compound.

"The reality is that we are continuing to be attacked," he said.

"We have lost more soldiers while in Mosul than anywhere else in the war. The president declared an end to major hostilities in Iraq on May 1 - apparently some people weren't listening."

Regional airport to help travel to Northern Iraq

By Spc. Joshua Hutcheson
101st Abn. Div. PAO

The former Bakrajo airstrip in northern Iraq, created by Saddam Hussein in 1988 to transport troops, will soon become a regional airport for the people of As Sulayimaniyah.

Soldiers from the 887th Engineer Company, attached to the 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) are working with Kurdish laborers to expand the old airstrip into "a regional hub airport for flights between Baghdad, Mosul and Turkey," said Capt. Andrew Loeb, commander, 887th Engineer Company. "It's a joint project working with the ministry of reconstruction for the As Sulayimaniyah province."

The work began Aug. 20 and is scheduled to be complete by Dec. 1, Loeb said.

The 887th specializes in airfield repair, which is why they were chosen to help expand the Bakrajo airfield, Loeb said.

Their main job is "providing expertise, design and equipment operators for compaction. Which means that basically we're doing everything under the surface of the asphalt," Loeb said.

The engineers have so far helped to build a "hammerhead" where planes can turn around, parking aprons, a 9,500-foot taxiway and have patched and repaired 49 holes in the 10,500-foot main runway.

The soldiers used heavy equipment to lay down and smooth out filler material on taxiways and other portions of the strip. Then asphalt was poured over top and smoothed out to create a level surface for the planes.

The Al-Salam Company was hired by the local government to lay down the asphalt. Hiring the local company was a way to bring money and jobs into the region, which is something the military and the people of As Sulayimaniyah hope the airport will also accomplish.

"One of the things a city this size needs is a regional airport," Loeb said.

The Bakrajo airport will have the potential to bring in tourists from the hotter southern portion of Iraq, as well as from neighboring countries. Coupled with the employment opportunities, the airport could revitalize the underdeveloped northern region.

The soldiers are responsible for expanding the taxiways and parking aprons. Adding the lights, fences, the terminal and other things needed to complete the airport will be the job of local construction companies, Loeb said.

Once it's complete, the airport will be able to handle planes "the size of C-130 cargo planes, and smaller," Loeb said.

The soldiers of 887th are pleased with the work they've done over the last three months, Loeb said.

"They're contributing something to this country that they can walk away from and remember 10 years down the line," he said.

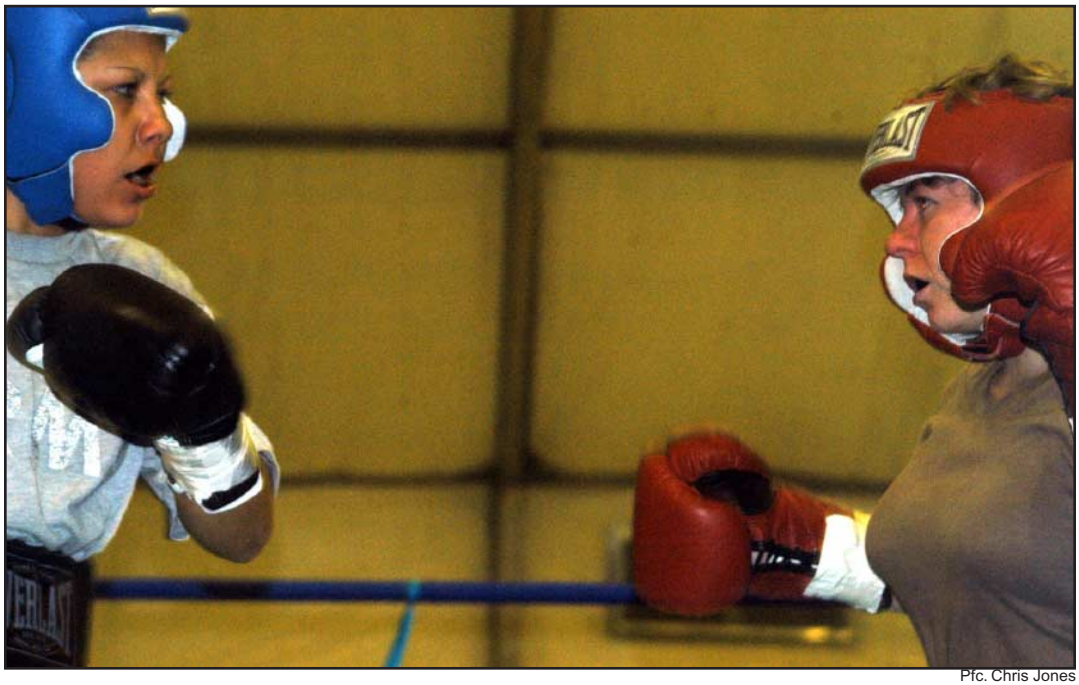
In addition to repairing the Bakrajo Airport, the 877th has contributed in other ways. They've donated clothes and food to the children in the city's orphanages, Loeb said.

"It's been a fun time," he said. "This mission has really boosted morale."

Friday night fury

Second boxing smoker showcases talent in the ring

By Pfc. Chris Jones
40th PAD



Pfc. Chris Jones

The only two female fighters, Spc. Brooke Bussell (left) and Pfc. Emmyly Martinez, in Boxing Smoker 2, stare each other down during the second round of their bout. The Boxing Smoker is a soldier-versus-soldier boxing tournament that lets amateur fighters expend energy in the ring.

The second soldier-versus-soldier boxing tournament for troops stationed here Friday night brought out nearly double the fighters as the first event, held Sept. 21.

Additionally, the sequel also featured double the tension and an immeasurable underlining sadness, as it took place on the same day that five soldiers of the 101st lost their lives, in a helicopter crash near Tikrit and in another separate attack in Mosul.

The event was organized by the 101st's 2nd Bn., 44th Air Defense Artillery. The unit's chaplain, Capt. Jay West, opened the contest with a prayer for the soldiers who had died earlier in the day. His words, clutched in sorrow, rang through the hearts of the several hundred U.S. soldiers in attendance as he spoke "in remembrance and honor of our comrades who fell on the battlefield today."

"Look with mercy upon these comrades of ours and those who have fallen since we last gathered," he said. "Remind us that, although we may be combating this evening, we are united as comrades, serving to bring the crown of liberty to an oppressed country."

> "It just shows the males that the females can do this just as well as they can. When I saw that no ladies had joined last time, I got to talking about if I should join, and here I am."
>
> **- Pfc. Emmyly "Latin Assasin" Martinez**

As the moment of reflection came to an end and a soft murmur grew about the crowd, a thick, potent voice suddenly pierced the heavy air. Staff Sgt. Wayne Ebenreiter of 2-44 ADA, the same feral, inferno-eyed presenter that lit up soldiers in the first Boxing Smoker, returned with his now name-brand barks of zealous animation.

"You had better know it's gonna get rowdy tonight!" He squealed, and without allowing a moment of boredom, sucked in a jug of air and exclaimed, "l-l-lets get ready-y-y-y… to rumble-e-e-e-e!"

Soldiers turned to the exit doors and found an entourage form around a fighter at each door, Pvt. Emilio "The Dealio" Haro and Spc. Jonathon "#1 Stunner" Venero. Each entered the ring, pacing slowly through their peers to the song of their pick.

The rest is history. Venero took down Haro; in the next two fights, Pfc. John "JP" Carrasco pounded his way to a victory, and in the third fight, Pvt. 2 Travis "Yetty" Lufholm beat up on Pfc. Timothy "Terrible" Albino. And 13 fights were still to come. With each bout, a spectacle of blood and sweat poured down from undomesticated American pugilists, triggering dynamic cheers from spectators from the front row to those barely able to fit their heads in the doors of the crowded building.

"This is so great," said Staff Sgt. Eddie Williams, whose front row seat gave him less than five meters of distance between him and the fighters. "This is just great. This is about the best morale boost we have down here. The courage and skill in these fights is just amazing. They've got so much bravery in there, it's even better than a lot of pro fights."

"I know what's happening out there now

Pfc. Chris Jones

Three soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) react after witnessing a hook by Pfc. Andrell McCray knock out Spc. Joseph Caffery during Boxing Smoker 2 at the Division Rear compound, an event pitting soldiers against soldier. The soldier in the center mimicked the blow by falling on his friends' shoulders.

is hard to dwell on," said Williams, referring to the surge of attacks against U.S. soldiers in Iraq since the start of Ramadan. "If you're sitting back in the company area, all you can do is dwell on the attacks. You come here and it's like, wow, the world is still here. I wish we had this every week."

Williams said he waited for more than two hours to get a front row seat. His unit, the 877th Eng. Bn., Alabama National Guard, has been attached to the 101st throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom. Many of his fellow 877th soldiers also got front row seats, and they had much to cheer for, as two fighters from the battalion came away with technical knockout victories.

As the seventh fight concluded, a pair of boxers emerged from the doors to clash in the eighth. They streamed down the aisle, each with gritty, tenacious facial expressions. These soldiers, Spc. Brooke "Da-Shadow" Bussell and Pfc. Emmyly "Latin Assassin" Martinez, were the first and only female boxers in the event. They fought with style and flair, sass and fortitude, each thump by Bussell countered with a blow by Martinez. By the end of the third round, it came to a judge's decision. In a close call, the referee raised the arm of Bussell in victory.

"Don't smoke," said Martinez. "By the second round, I felt every cigarette I've ever smoked."

Though Martinez had never boxed before, she said she was inspired to compete after watching the first Smoker without any female fighters.

"It just shows the males that the females can do this just as well as they can," she said. "When I saw that no ladies had joined last time, I got to talking about if I should join, and here I am."

Sgt. Lavall "The Truth" Younger, who lost to Spc. Michael "Mad Dog" Demoss in the seventh set, said he'd rather have been put in the ring with former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

"Oh he'd go down," said Younger, affirming Hussein wouldn't last the distance. "He'd go down. I'm gonna punish him! I'm gonna punish him! I want him to get back up so I can knock him back down!"

Younger said the event brought out an array of emotions.

"It really is bittersweet," he said. "The fact that I'm over here in the first place, missing the best part of my son's life, then you've the got all the crap that's been happening lately, all the attacks, so it really makes this all emotional."

Boxing Smoker II was financed by legendary promoter Don King. Water bottles, white knit shorts, bags of candy mint in American Flag wrapping, boxing gloves, hats, caps and various t-shirts were among the contributions by King, who also sponsored the first event. Throughout August and September, Staff Sgt. Franklin Eldridge, 2-44 ADA searched tirelessly for a financer, when at last he though, "heck, why not call the King?" When he at last called King's office, he found "gracious approval." Thousands of dollars were donated by King to finance both events, Eldridge said.

Furthermore, King has arranged an exhibition-match for 101st troops in Mosul involving World Welterweight Champion Ricardo Mayorga, who the Associated Press deems "easily one of the most exciting fighters on the planet." The event is being scheduled for early January, shortly before the 101st is scheduled to return home.

"It's all pretty much set right now," said Eldridge, who has been in talks with King since early September. "It's gonna be huge. Huge."

Though lingering sorrow from violence in other parts of Iraq undoubtedly made the sequel a more somber experience, Spc. Robert Gassmann revealed the genuine beauty of Boxing Smoker while snapping pictures of 1st Lt. Jesse "Ali Baba" Freeman in a duel against Spc. Preston "Irish Pittbull" O'Neil.

"Where else can you hit an officer?" he asked.

Americans, Iraqis secure borders

One company of 61 soldiers oversees Northern Iraq from illegal passages

By Pfc. Thomas Day
40th PAD

Pfc. Thomas Day

A cargo truck carrying goods to be sold in the markets of Iraq crosses the Iran-Iraq border into Iraq, as a mural of two ruling Iranian clerics greets travelers going the other way into Iran.

IRAN-IRAQ Border - Coalition eyes have focused on the borders of Northern Iraq in recent weeks, where anti-American terrorists are suspected of moving into Iraq and orchestrating attacks on U.S. soldiers. Standing along the northeastern border of Iraq, one company of soldiers is manning the mission of thwarting any illegal crossings - a task that could take other armies a much larger force to accomplish.

With just 61 soldiers, Company F, 51st Infantry Regiment, in the snow-capped mountains of Northern Iraq, has manned 660 kilometers of Iraqi border, covering the Iranian and Turkish lines. With six to seven member teams, the company has patrolled the border, trained more than 600 Iraqi Border Guards, and taken the fight to enemy forces looking to cross into Iraq.

"We identified points of entry for smugglers and we got tasked to stand up the new Iraqi border police," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kevin Turner. "Bottom line, we don't want anyone crossing who has the intention of destabilizing Iraq."

The "Foxtrot" soldiers have impressed everyone - including their guests last week. Foxtrot company received some help Wednesday from a new source: U.S. Customs. Special Agents Larry O'Donnell and Allan Sperling arrived Wednesday at the main entry-point, deep in the mountains of Northern Iraq. Their mission: to train Iraqi Border Guards and Customs agents the tactics and techniques O'Donnell and Sperling use to combat narcotic movement along the American borders.

After stepping off the Blackhawk helicopter they had flown in to reach the remote location, the agents were greeted by the seven soldiers living in a two-story round castle loaned to the Americans by the Kurdish Democratic Party - an armed militia that opposed Saddam during the former regime.

O'Donnell, a former marine based in Florida, had realized in the helicopter that the task of patrolling the mountainous area was not an easy one.

"I can tell you right now that if I dropped 20,000 troops here, it wouldn't help. Clearly you need help, not so much people but people who have specified knowledge," he told the Foxtrot soldiers.

Isolated, lonely, and cold, the soldiers did not immediately concur with O'Donnell's assessment, but they understood his point: the number of soldiers patrolling the borders is not as important as the skill of the soldiers. That is why these 61 soldiers are lined along the borders, instead of an entire brigade. Foxtrot Company specializes in long-range surveillance, one of only a handful of units in the Army with that capability.

The team has also teamed up with Turkish Special Forces in patrolling the border. With the Kurdish and Turkish soldiers, the Coalition border patrol numbers less than 1,000 - a light force, but one with more "specified knowledge" than the much larger force that patrolled the border before the fall of Saddam.

Border Team

In front of a small classroom just a few-hundred yards from the Iran-Iraq line, O'Donnell and Sperling went to work, introducing investigative procedures, a code of ethics and the techniques of working "confidential informants." The same instructions would be given the next day to a group of Iraqi Border Guards along the Syrian border.

The border patrols now are meant to supplement the existing customs department, which as O'Donnell and Sperling quickly found out, doesn't compare to the system they are used to in the U.S.

Weapons smugglers and terrorists, according to Turner, have moved freely across the border through the remote snow-capped mountains, or by simply walking right by the customs patrol. One three-day operation rounded up 519 suspected terrorists that had crossed the border.

"They meet up with someone, get the cash and weapons and say 'go kill some Americans,'" Turner said.

As the two customs agents watched, unchecked personnel routinely walked around the border check point without any action from Iraqi customs. "How can you sleep at night as terrorists are coming across the borders and killing my guys?" Turner asked one customs agent. The agent had no response.

The Iran-Iraq circus

Ironically, the path used by suspected terrorists crossing into Iraq leads to what was the setting of a major Iranian offensive during the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980's - an area so heavily mined that corpses still remain in the ridgeline untouched. The Northern Iraq mountains remain littered with military equipment from the war.

The circus show that is the Iran-Iraq border is not confined to the Iraq side of the line. "Every time we show up, the Ira-

Pfc. Thomas Day

Iraqi border guards have a difficult terrain to deal with, not to mention the enormous area which they must cover with few troops to handle the work load. Here, one of the border guards trained by the soldiers of Company F, 51st Infantry Regiment and the U.S. Customs Office, goes to work trying to keep the Iran-Iraq border closed off from terrorists and others that would want to illegally pass into the newly-freed Iraq.

nians step up their security procedures," said Capt. Gerald Rebeschini. True to form, the Iranians shot seven mules, presumably carrying nothing more than cigarettes and alcohol into Iran, as the soldiers and customs agents could do nothing more than watch.

The smugglers that mounted the donkeys escaped unharmed; the mules were left for dead.

The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), who the unit is temporarily working for, is lobbying for more border soldiers from the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad.

O'Donnell and Sperling wrapped up their training early, after five hours of training. "It's pretty obvious that some of the concepts we came in with are pretty foreign to them," Sperling said.

"This is a band aid on a sucking chest wound," O'Donnell called the five-hour training block. "There are several problems. They're under equipped, there is an issue of corruption and there are issues with the terrain working against (them)."

101st soldiers have trained more than 2,100 Border Guards who man the borders of Iran, Syria and Turkey.

Pfc. Thomas Day

Capt. Thomas Hough of Okney, Ill., (left), Company F, 51st Infantry Regiment, talks with Special Agents Larry O'Donnell (center) and Alan Sperling (right) of the U.S. Customs Office on a hilltop overlooking the rugged desolate mountains of the Iran-Iraq entry point. The customs officers visited the Iraqi border to help provide training to the border guards.

Nineveh civil defense HQ opens

By Pfc. Chris Jones
40th PAD

The headquarters for all fire stations in the Nineveh Province of Northern Iraq held a grand opening ceremony last Thursday after two months under the reconstruction command of soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

Two months of work and more than $40,000 of Coalition funds were put into restoration efforts of the Nineveh Civil Defense Headquarters in Mosul, which will oversee and support all fire stations in the Nineveh region. A six-soldier team with the 431st Civil Affairs Battalion, an Army Reserve unit attached to the 101st, directed the project. 1st Lt. William Smith, Public Safety Team chief and full-time civilian firefighter, witnessed "a complete improvement" of the headquarters building from Sept. 1 to its ribbon-cutting ceremony last week.

Not only did the facility receive the usual Coalition-treatment, which involved repainting cracked walls, upgrading sewage pumps and electrical lines, fixing broken windows and so forth, but also amenities such as computers, televisions and even improved mattresses for the firefighters' beds, which were donated. With shifts of 24-hours on/48-hours off, it becomes necessary for the Iraqi firefighters to have satisfactory living conditions in the headquarters, Smith said.

Col. Joseph Anderson, commander of the 101st's 502nd Inf. Regt., toured the facility after cutting the ribbon and applauded Nineveh Province fire chief Brig. Gen. Ahmed Selaman on the progress made between Coalition forces and Iraqi public safety officials in Northern Iraq.

"Public safety is the Coalition's first priority," said Anderson to a crowd of Iraqi firefighters. "That will probably never change. It's the most important thing for the safety of Iraqi citizens right now. Firefighting is a dangerous job, and we honor you all as heroes."

During Saddam's reign, the facility also housed Mosul's only fire station.

However, when Coalition officials saw that Iraq's third-largest city had only one firefighting post, the demand arose to build a separate station so fire support could be more efficient.

This demand led to the construction of the Ibn Al Atheer Fire Station, which is still being worked on by engineers contracted by the 101st.

Work on the headquarters building may not be complete, however. The facility, approximately 60 years old, was built on uneven ground, and the earth below has been slowly settling, causing cracks and fractures in the cement, Smith said. Damages to the front ramp took $5,000 to repair, while several large gaps in the pavement behind the building will require an additional $23,000, he said.

Wameedh Wagee, project engineer, said the station looked as if it had been deeply neglected before help from the 101st.

"The situation for the building was awful," he said, "because Saddam ignored all civil defense departments. I could tell by looking at the place that no wo rk was done on it for at least 15 years.

"Now I feel that all the firefighters know that someone is taking care of them and also making a station suitable for them according to the kind of job they do for the city."

"When I say these good things about what Coalition forces are doing for us, I am hoping that everyone will see how much it means to us," he said.

Soldiers aid Iraq with donation programs

By Spc. Blake Kent
22nd MPAD

Qayarrah, Iraq - Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) are working to not only make Iraq secure, but have also been putting time and effort into helping towns and villages with their "Operation Helping Hands" and "Adopt a Village" programs.

With "Operation Helping Hands," soldiers donate money to help provide families with food and healthcare necessities.

"Our brigade commander, Col. (Benjamin) Hodges, came up with the idea of helping the poor families in our area," said Major Rodie Lamb of Buford, S.C., chaplain, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne, "especially now during Ramadan, when families and friends are coming together for evening celebrations."

Each unit takes the money they collect and puts in into the district that they are working in.

"Down to the unit level, the soldiers get to go out into the community to see where their money is helping," Lamb said.

"We've collected several thousand dollars," Lamb said. "Our soldiers have been very generous."

Outreach to help the people of Iraq has not only been coming directly from the soldiers though, through the "Adopt a Village" program, individuals and organizations have been donating goods as well.

"We have people from the states sending boxes with medical supplies, personal care items and school supplies," Lamb said. "The response has been overwhelming. The people in the U.S. don't get to see what we are doing here first hand, and it has been amazing to see their desire to get involved."

"We identified towns and cities that could donate goods for Iraqi villages," said Cpt. Charles Atanasio of N.J., chaplain, 426th Forward Support Battalion, 101st Airborne

According to Atanasio, he also contacted the "Adopt a Platoon" group that he had already been involved with, and has been receiving help from them as well.

"We have the donators send pictures of themselves as well as a brief story about themselves, and then we send them a picture of the people they are helping," Atanasio said.

According to Atanasio, packages have been coming in from all over the U.S. in support of the villages.

"I'm just really glad to be a part of the process and helping reach out to the people here," Atanasio said.

101st striking back at terrorists

7 detained in night cordons, caches found and citizens turn in weapons

PRESS RELEASE
101st Abn. Div. PAO

Three separate weapons caches were recovered by the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Nov. 10.

In the first incident, an Iraqi citizen led soldiers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team to a cache buried 6 inches under ground.

The cache consisted of one rocket propelled grenade launcher and six RPG rounds.

In a second incident, the Coalition for Iraqi National Unity turned in four RPG launchers, 144 RPG rounds, two 3.5 inch rockets, and a bazooka tube to a 3rd Brigade Combat Team tactical operations center.

In the third incident, Iraqi citizens provided the 1st Brigade Combat Team with the location of a cache site.

The site contained one RPG launcher, and two improvised explosive devices.

A series of overnight cordon and knocks resulted in the detainment of seven individuals in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) area of operations.

Those detained were suspected in previous attacks on coalition forces, and of harboring weapons caches.

A variety of weapons were also confiscated.

In a separate incident, an Iraqi citizen turned in a significant cache of weapons to the 101st Division Main.

The cache consisted of 333 grenades, 92 rocket propelled grenade rounds, and two RPG launchers.

COMMENTARY, from page 2

My trepidation only got worse as I drove to the post. The casualty affairs NCO on duty must have seen it written all over me as I picked up the briefing packet and address in his office. I still remember his words: "You're going to do this just fine, Sergeant Arndt," he said. "This is a fellow NCO's family. He needs you to do this."

The parents I had to notify lived near Frederick, Md., so I had a good bit of time during the drive to compose myself. I rehearsed the words over and over again as I drove: "The President of the United States regrets to inform you…The President of the United States regrets to inform you…The President of the United States regrets to inform you…"

The small town where the family lived was a long way from the nearest highway, and I had to pull the government sedan into a gas station to ask directions to the street. The attendant, suspecting the reason for my visit, asked me whom I was going to see. When I told her I wasn't at liberty to say, her only reply was a quiet "Oh my God…"

I pulled into the short driveway leading to the small, single-story house. A neighbor was working on his car in the driveway next door. He was a graying man…old enough to recall a time when other soldiers in uniform had knocked on other neighbor's doors. He eyed me up and down, and asked, "Their son's alright, isn't he?" When I didn't respond, he turned visibly pale. "Oh no…" he said.

I knocked on the door with my hat in my hand and my heart in my throat. The door opened, and a 50-something lady looked out at me. She knew the minute she opened the door what my presence meant. The look of horror on her face made me stammer as I asked, "Are you Mrs. 'Smith'?" She nodded, a tear forming in the corner of her eye. "I have news about your son," I said. "May I come in?"

The rest of the words I said that day are a blur, despite the number of times I rehearsed them. I remember Mr. and Mrs. Smith sitting together on the sofa as I told them the news. I remember Mrs. Smith's sobs and tears, and Mr. Smith's stoic resolution to be strong for his wife, even as his heart was breaking. I remember my own tears, shed despite my best efforts, as I struggled futilely for words that would help ease this family's grief.

After the initial wave of tears, I began telling the Smiths some of the details that they could expect over the coming days, of people who would be calling them, of chaplains who were there to help them, of the casualty assistance officer who would be helping them through the process of resolving their son's death.

As I was explaining these things, Mrs. Smith looked at me suddenly, and asked if I knew her son. When I told her that I did not, she asked me why I was chosen to notify them.

I explained to the couple that the Army always notifies families in person, and that since her son was an NCO, I was chosen from a pool of NCOs to conduct the notification. She then asked if this was my job all the time. I told her that my normal job was an Army journalist, and this was the first time I'd had to notify a family of a Soldier's death.

"So you were just ordered to do this?" she asked.

"Yes Ma'am," I replied.

Her eyes filled with tears once more as she leaned forward and hugged me. "You poor thing," she said. "What an awful thing to have to do."

I was shocked. I had just told this woman that her son was dead, and she was feeling sympathy for me for having to be the one to break the news. I struggled for a response.

"It's my duty, Ma'am," I managed. "It's the least I can do for your son."

She leaned back and looked at me. "Thank you," she said.

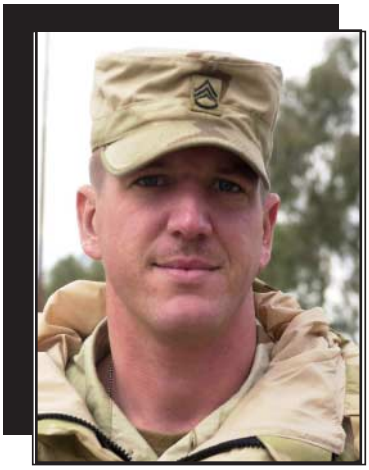
Some moments in life you never forget. Every time I hear a news report about a service member killed in Iraq, I remember Mrs. Smith. I remember the horror, the profound sadness, and the sympathy in her eyes.

Those service members will never be numbers to me, because I know that for every one of them, there's a Mr. or Mrs. Smith, who will get that knock on the door by a man or woman in uniform, bearing the news that their son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, is dead.

For those who haven't known a Mrs. Smith, those news reports may seem like numbers. Those who have seen the human side of the reports know that they're not. I can only hope that the American public knows the difference…for the sake of all our service members - and their mothers.

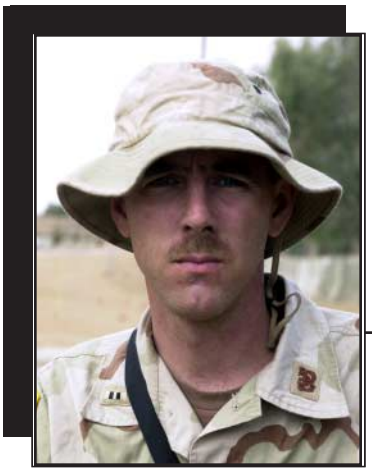
Man on the Street

What does Veterans Day mean to you in Iraq?



"It's a day of remembrance; a day designated to look back."

- Staff Sgt. Stephen Welles of Tacoma, Wash., 501st Signal Bn.



"It's a celebration of what past soldiers have done for us."

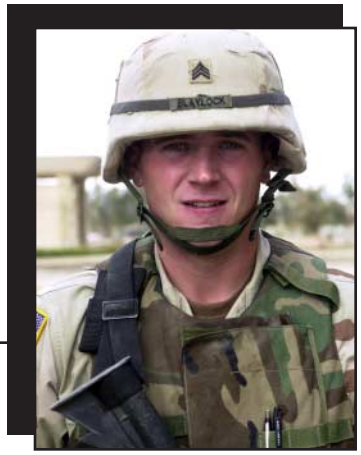
- Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mike Johnson of Cedar Point, Ore., 3-11 Military Intelligence Bn.

"It's a chance for us to remember our fallen soldiers."

- Pfc. Jake Thomas of Joliet, Ill., Co. B, 326 Engineers

"It is a day to give thanks to the sacrifices that have been made."

- Sgt. David Blaylock of Milan, Ill., 3-320th Field Artillery



"Veterans Day to me is what America is all about."

- Capt. John Kaires of St. James, N.Y, 800th Military Police Brig. (Reserve Unit from Uniondale, N.Y.)

"I'm kind of joining a legacy now. Both my grandfathers are veterans."

- Spc. Robert Groves of Jackson, Tn., 431st Civil Affairs Bn.