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DESERT VOICE

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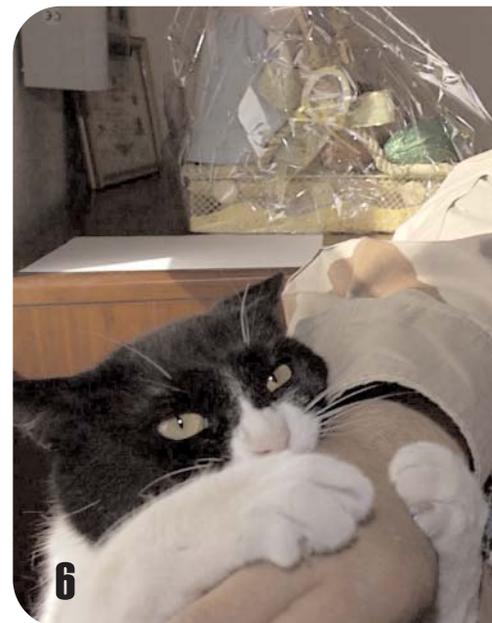
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Photo by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

A long wait, a longer trip home

Story and photo by Spc. Curt Cashour

More than 99 percent of its personnel have already landed in the United States, but for some members of the 81st Brigade Combat Team the deployment isn't over yet.

A 33-man contingent has stayed behind in Kuwait to put the finishing touches on the brigade's yearlong tour in Iraq.

The Soldiers are busy making last-minute adjustments and arrangements in order to ensure the return of the unit's equipment and remaining personnel. Such activity is common with large units given the massive amounts of resources unit officials must account for.

One of three 81st Soldiers based at Camp Arifjan, 25-year-old 1st Lt. Leonard Della-Moretta is serving as the unit's liaison officer, or LNO, at the Coalition Operations and Intelligence Center. As the LNO, Della-Moretta acts as a relay between Coalition Forces Land Component Command officials in Kuwait and 81st BCT leaders back in Washington state.

"Whenever something pops up, I track down people to make things happen," Della-Moretta said. The latest thing to pop up: a flight for more than 100 Soldiers who had stayed behind to help wash the unit's vehicles and equipment was delayed for more than 48 hours.

"It's the Army. These things happen," he said.

Hundreds of pieces of equipment belonging to the 81st, a National Guard unit headquartered in Tacoma, Wash., are sitting at Kuwait's main military seaport, the Seaport of Debarkation.

About 30 81st Soldiers are based there and tasked with ensuring the equipment is loaded on a ship and safely sent back to Fort Lewis, Wash. Before coming to the SPOD, the Soldiers were based at Camp Victory, Kuwait, where they helped receive shipments of the unit's equipment from Iraq.

"Accountability is my number one mission now," said Master Sgt. Darrell Weaver, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the 81st redeployment assembly area at the SPOD. Weaver's main project is constructing a massive database that tracks the location and status of all the unit's remaining equipment in Kuwait.

As Weaver tracks the equipment, other 81st Soldiers ensure the unit's items are loaded onto cargo ships.

Once a ship is loaded, 81st Soldiers will then board the vessel and accompany the equipment back to the United States. The trips last about 45 days each.

Weaver will travel home on the last ship,



Spc. Richard DeMorris, of the 81st Brigade Combat Team's 898th Engineer Battalion, directs Humvee traffic in the hull of a ship at the Seaport of Debarkation April 1.

which is scheduled to leave in mid April. The length of the trip will stretch Weavers deployment to nearly 15 months, but the 50-year-old Active Guard Reserve Soldier said he doesn't mind the long deployment.

"I have no problem with deployments. In fact, I actually enjoy being over here," he said.

The way he sees it, showing up early and staying late to ensure a unit's success is part of the job of an AGR Soldier, Weaver said.

"Even on drill weekend, we start getting things ready a week before and don't tear down until a week after," he said.

Spc. Nathan Hamberg will also be riding back home on a ship. To keep busy during the long ride, he plans on watching movies and working out, he said.

And if Hamberg gets his wish, the trip will be an eventful one. The 22-year-old cavalry scout hopes to witness a hurricane during the voyage.

"I've never seen one before," he said.

While he's looking forward to the trip – his first journey on a ship – Hamberg said he volunteered to stay in Kuwait for a different reason.

Instead of spending a year in Iraq, Hamberg and his unit, E Troop, 303rd Cavalry Regiment, were tasked with a force protection mission in Kuwait.

Disappointed by the fact that he didn't get to go into Iraq, Hamberg saw staying behind for the redeployment mission as

another way to contribute to the unit, he said. By the time he gets home, Hamberg will have been deployed for almost 16 months – the longest of any 81st Soldier. It's a distinction he shares with two other Soldiers from his unit who also volunteered for the redeployment mission.

Della-Moretta's deployment will end up being about 14 months. Although not quite as long as Hamberg or Weaver's, the tour was just the beginning of a nearly non-stop deployment and training routine for Della-Moretta that will last more than two years.

Following a two or three-week vacation upon returning to the United States, Della-Moretta will attend the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga., and then deploy to Afghanistan for a year with the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Della-Moretta admits the pace will be hectic, but he has a simple explanation for all the activity.

"Why not," he asked rhetorically.

Given the fact that the 81st is coming off its first combat assignment since World War II, the deployment and redeployment process had a few rough stretches. But Weaver said he's been thinking about ways to streamline the unit's deployment process.

"[There are] a lot of things that can be done to get us in and out quicker," he said, adding that one of the main problems during this deployment was the fact that the unit brought too much equipment.

Way home is through Kuwait

Story by Sgt. Maj. Joe Adelizzi

Logistics Support Area Anaconda
Consolidated Press Center

Units returning from tours of duty in Iraq and Kuwait will go home on schedule in part due to the efforts of the 1st Corps Support Command, which is stationed at Camp Arifjan.

"Our role is to [help] unit commanders get through the redeployment process," said Lt. Col. Anita Raines, 1st CSC redeployment cell commander.

From her Camp Arifjan headquarters, Raines and her staff monitor the disposition of more than 400 units in theater. When those units' tours are over, the 1st CSC oversees the redeployments of thousands of Soldiers, vehicles and pieces of equipment.

Once a unit's replacement has been identified, the unit can be released from its mission. All of the redeploying unit's personnel and equipment undergo a theater clearing process, which ends with an air or sealift movement from various bases in Kuwait.

"We hold monthly planning conferences to ensure units nearing their rotation date understand what the process entails and when the issues should be addressed," Raines said.

These conferences provide a clear picture of who's going where with regards to camp assignments, and the numbers of personnel and equipment involved.

"Once [commanders] connect with the right people, things begin to flow smoothly," Raines said.

When the camp assignments are made and movement orders are cut, units then plan whether they will convoy their equipment to sites in Kuwait or have it transported. Once the vehicles and equipment arrive at the camp, the vehicles are unloaded, de-armored and washed before clearing customs. They are then declared sterilized and moved to a sterile yard where final disposition takes place. Finally they are loaded onto ships for the voyage to the designated port.

Deploying units are urged to contact the unit they will be replacing to determine if any equipment or vehicles will be staying behind in theater. This ensures that the replacement unit doesn't bring any unnecessary equipment with them, and reduces the amount of equipment moving through the ports.

Once the more detailed vehicle and equipment status has been determined, the focus of Raines' staff shifts to the processing of Soldiers who are redeploying to their



Photo by Spc. Curt Cashour

Rows of CH-47D Chinook helicopters sit at the Seaport of Debarkation waiting to be put on ships April 1. The aircraft belong to C Company of the 193rd Aviation Battalion, a Hawaii National Guard unit that is redeploying from Logistics Support Area Anaconda, Iraq.

home stations or new duty assignments. For them, things can move very quickly, depending on the amount of stay-behind equipment the unit is leaving in theater.

Soldiers attend mandatory finance, medical and customs briefings while checks are made to determine if all theater accounts have been cleared by the unit, Raines said.

Warrant Officer Manuel Rodriguez, 1st CSC redeployment cell operations officer, is responsible for ensuring all redeployment cell staff members understand the entire process from mobilization to redeployment, he said. "I spent my first three months here team building and laying the foundation of what we do in order to be able to help our customers - the units."

"We held weekly classes that initially taught how things worked. Later, I introduced scenarios and asked for solutions to common problems found in units," he said. This method helped Rodriguez determine if his staff had grasped the concepts of redeployment.

Once his staff understood the concept, he was able to determine how smooth operations would run, he said. "We really grew as a staff, it was great," Rodriguez said.

One of only 45 warrant officers in the Army who specialize in mobility operations, Rodriguez's role as both teacher and fireman make him a huge asset, Raines said.

"The underlying goal of the redeployment cell is to make the transition from war to

peace as smooth as possible for all returning servicemembers. Once their tours are finished, they deserve no less," Raines said.

Editor's note: U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Adelizzi is a member of the 301st Area Support Group, an Army National Guard unit from Fort Totten, N.Y., and is deployed to Iraq in support of units at Logistics Support Area Anaconda.

Safety Corner

Driving safety

From the 377th Theater Support Command Safety Office

All personnel operating or riding as a passenger in a vehicle have to wear safety belts both on and off Department of Defense installations. Personnel cannot ride in seats from which safety belts have been removed or rendered inoperative. The vehicle operator is responsible for informing passengers of the safety belt requirement, but the senior occupant in the vehicle is responsible for ensuring enforcement.

Questions or comments should be referred to 1st Lt. Rene Surgi or Maj. Nathan Phelps, 430-5414.

Going postal:

In Kuwait, it's usually the customers, not the employees, going over the edge

Story and photo by Spc. Curt Cashour

Spc. Amanda Meadows is full of great stories.

There's the one about the burning sleeping bag and the one involving leather body suits, chains and hand cuffs.

But Meadows isn't a thrill-seeking pyromaniac or dominatrix. She's just a military postal inspector recounting a day's work.

Inspectors like Meadows are stationed at each of Kuwait's U.S. military camps, where they make sure servicemembers don't mail home items that violate Coalition Forces Land Component Command or U.S. customs regulations. From irate customers to embarrassing and downright weird packages, these military mail gurus have just about seen it all.

An inspector and finance clerk at the Camp Navistar Post Office, Spc. Leonard Adams said the strangest thing he's seen sent through the mail was 70 pounds of laundry detergent.

"No name brand, no boxes, just powdered laundry detergent," said Adams, 20.

The detergent, which was in a garbage-

bag lined foot locker, belonged to a sergeant first class who was well aware of the weight limit for parcels in theater. When a clerk first weighed the foot locker, it came in just over the 70-pound limit, but the customer fixed things by scooping out detergent with a measuring cup until the package met the weight requirement, Adams said.

So why would someone mail out 70 pounds worth of laundry soap? The answer may never be known.

"I was just so shocked I didn't ask him," Adams said.

While Meadows has had a few brushes with the bizarre during her time as an inspector at Camp Victory, one of the strangest packages she's seen came through about a month ago, she said.

A female Soldier had a box that was closed and ready to be sealed. When a post office employee informed the Soldier that the package would have to be searched, the Soldier started to appear apprehensive and requested that a female perform the search, Meadows said.

When she opened the box, Meadows found two leather outfits, chains, several "toys" and a pair of handcuffs, she said.

Regardless of the Soldier's penchant for punishment, the only thing in violation of theater mailing policies was the batteries inside the "toys," which the Soldier tried to remove as discreetly as possible, Meadows said.

Although she was calm and respectful during the search, Meadows said the incident made her think.

"I just wonder where she was chaining people up at," Meadows said.

There are a number of items prohibited from the mail system under CFLCC and customs regulations. According to Adams, the restrictions barring TA-50 and military-issue items from the mail system can sometimes be a source of contention for customers.

"Some customers understand completely. Others try to take it up higher. They try to get their company commander or 1st sergeant involved and it doesn't work," he said.

On March 29, the staff at the Camp Victory Post Office had a confrontation with one such customer. A male sergeant was attempting to mail out a foot locker containing a portable CD player, Army sleeping bag, poncho and Goretex jacket. When post office staff informed the Soldier that he



Spc. Jose Rojas, a postal inspector with the Camp Arifjan Post Office, inspects Marine Cpl. Mark Schinaman's foot locker April 2. Rojas said he's seen servicemembers try to mail a number of items barred from the mail system under CFLCC rules, including loaded magazines, weapon parts and dead scorpions.

would not be able to mail the military-issue items, he grew angry and threatened to smash the foot locker and all of its contents, Meadows said.

Employees told the man it was up to him what he did with his property, but if he intended to make a mess he would have to go outside. The man then carried his belongings outside to the back of the post office, where he repeatedly stomped on his CD player and later set his sleeping bag on fire, Meadows said.

Post office employees called the command cell, and authorities soon arrived to put out the fire and deal with the Soldier, Meadows said.

Even without the problem customers and interesting packages, working in a military post office can be tough.

"It's either so busy you can't sit down or so slow we don't know what to do with ourselves," said Sgt. 1st Class Ann Schwartz, postmaster for the post office at Camp Arifjan.

Nevertheless, postal employees know how important mail is to deployed Soldiers.

"We know how much we like to get our mail, so we like to get it out to everybody else too," Schwartz said.

You can't mail:

- Products made in North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, Cuba or Iraq
- Obscene material and pornography
- Counterfeit currencies, stamps, stocks, lottery tickets, trademark/copyright violations
- Narcotics, dangerous drugs, controlled substances and drug paraphernalia
- Switchblades, butterfly knives, spring-loaded knives (to include spring-loaded Benchmade knives)
- Explosives, pyrotechnics and flammable substances
- Brass ammunition, projectiles or any portion of those items (to include any type of ammo container)
- Sand, soil, dirt or rocks
- License plates
- Privately owned/enemy weapons or any part of a foreign weapons system
- Any contents of enemy decon kits
- Personal effects of deceased or living Iraqi soldiers
- Unsheathed knives and sharp instruments
- All TA-50, regardless of being personally owned or not
- Military equipment or unit property
- Drug paraphernalia to include bongos and water Pipes.



Vets of foreign wars

Story and photos by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

Ever since she can remember, Capt. Jennifer Huntington has been in love with animals. Growing up, she owned a horse and several cats and dogs. She was just four years old when she witnessed her first birth.

"I went out one day, and when I came back my dog had had a puppy on my bed," said Huntington, now an Area Support Group-Kuwait veterinarian deployed to the Veterinary Treatment Facility at Camp Arifjan. "This was after the veterinarian told me she wasn't pregnant."

Since coming to Kuwait about a year ago, she and other animal doctors have worked hard to provide quality animal care and preventive medicine to deployed working dogs and civilian pets. "There's a satisfaction in knowing you've helped something that couldn't help itself," said the seven-year general practitioner.

Working dogs, which are the primary responsibility of military veterinarians, receive the same or better treatment as regular troops do, said Huntington. Because they've been assigned to various military police K-9 units in charge of patrolling operations and detecting explosives and narcotics, "they're considered Soldiers," she said.

Many of the animals pawing around on the cold steel of the examination table are in need of health certificates and vaccinations required for travel between countries. Furry Soldiers like Ringo, a 12-year-old working dog with the Air Force's 386th

Security Forces Squadron, have to visit Huntington's office to get medically cleared to leave Kuwait.

Huntington voiced her concerns over the canine's agility. "He's a little overweight," she said. "This can put extra pressure on their joints."

"What are you talking about? He's twisted steel and sex appeal!" said Tech. Sgt. James Pilkenton about his Belgium malinois counterpart.

Military dogs, though, aren't the only animals visiting the vets regularly. U.S. Embassy personnel, deployed troops who are accompanied by their families, including pets, and retired military workers serving under the Department of Defense in Kuwait can also take advantage of the veterinary services at Arifjan at a reduced cost compared to private practices in the civilian sector. Such people are exempt from General Order Number 1, which states deployed troops cannot have pets or mascots while on tour.

Huntington said she hopes to improve the facility's ability to provide comprehensive care and has made purchase requests for x-ray and blood machines as well as ultra sounds used to check for bladder stones and cancer. She already stocks her shelves with over-the-counter preventive

medicines like shampoo, ear cleansers, oral cleansing gels, dietary supplements, flea and tick killers and heartworm pills.

Taking care of the pet, however, wouldn't be complete without also taking care of the pet owner, said Sgt. Shelia Hamlett, a veterinary technician with ASG-Kuwait Veterinary Services.

"A lot of owners think what they're doing for their pet is enough," she said. Part of the veterinary facility's job is educating the pet-owning community about animal diets, dental hygiene, and heartworm prevention among other needs.

"People think, for example, that a flea collar will fix the problem of fleas and ticks when it only works on part of the dog," said Hamlett. "They assume it's working when it's not."

The better informed the owner is, the better able they are to tell if something's wrong with their pet, said Huntington. "Rotten teeth, nasal discharge, heart murmurs ... we rely on the owner's input before giving a thorough exam," she said.

But taking care of clawed creatures is only part of the job, said Huntington. The veterinary facility's other, more obscure mission deals with food inspection.

"We're constantly on the move from dining facility to dining facility," said Staff Sgt.

Jaime Carvajal, a food inspector with ASG-Kuwait Veterinary Services.

Carvajal and his small crew inspect between seven and nine tons of food every day at Camp Arifjan alone, he said. The team also ventures out to perform the same mission at Camp Doha, the Sea and Aerial Ports of Debarkation, and Kuwaiti Naval Base.

Paying attention to contamination concerns like dates of expiration on perishable items and broken seals on packages helps with force protection measures, said Carvajal. Giving recommendations to dining facility managers, like rejecting unapproved sources, assists in preventing a contaminated food outbreak.

"Large ice crystals on pork loin and ice cream, for example, mean loss of temperature and thawing, which promotes the growth of bacteria and can make troops sick," he said. "We're protecting the financial interests of the government by making sure they're getting what they paid for."

The veterinarian's increasing role in the military has coincided with the actions of a post-9/11 world, said Huntington. "The war on terrorism has made military working dogs more prevalent," she said. "Veterinary facilities must provide a continuity of animal care."



Above, Staff. Sgt. Jaime Carvajal, Area Support Group-Kuwait food inspector, plays with Burka, a stray that was adopted by the vet facility. Far left, Rocky, a Chihuahua, mugs for the camera with his owner Joseph Parada, who works at the education center at Camp Doha. Left, Nashua, a Siamese cat from Cairo, Egypt, is examined by Capt. Jennifer Huntington of ASG-Kuwait Veterinary Services.

Romanian soldiers wary but fearless

Story and photo by Spc. Aimee Felix

With troops already committed to the fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, Romania's role in the global war on terror is long established. But they've upped the ante with 100 more troops to guard the U.N. in Iraq.

The Romanian Army's 1st Company, or UNAMI Company, of the 26th Infantry Battalion arrived at Camp Virginia March 21 on their way to a six-month deployment in Basra, Iraq. There they will provide force protection for the United Nations' liaison office, which is directing health, education, water, sewage and power supply programs for all of southern Iraq.

The company, a combination of mechanics, force protection specialists and shooters - one rifleman and one sniper per squad - is equipped with experienced soldiers, some of whom have already deployed to Iraq once before.

One of those experienced soldiers is Deputy Platoon Leader Junior Staff Sgt. Ilie Fratostiteanu. "He was asked to return, and like a good soldier he said yes," said Capt. Catalin Giurgiu, Fratostiteanu's company commander. Fratostiteanu, who plans on being a career soldier, was deployed to Baghdad less than a year ago. He took the offer to return because, aside from the fact that it would be good for his military career, he knew he could teach his soldiers a lot from his experience in Iraq, he said.

Unlike the younger soldiers in the compa-

ny, Fratostiteanu is not excited in a 'let's kick some butt' sort of way, but in a 'let's get the job done and return home safely' sort of way. "This is a great honor, but also a great responsibility. I have to bring all my people back," he said.

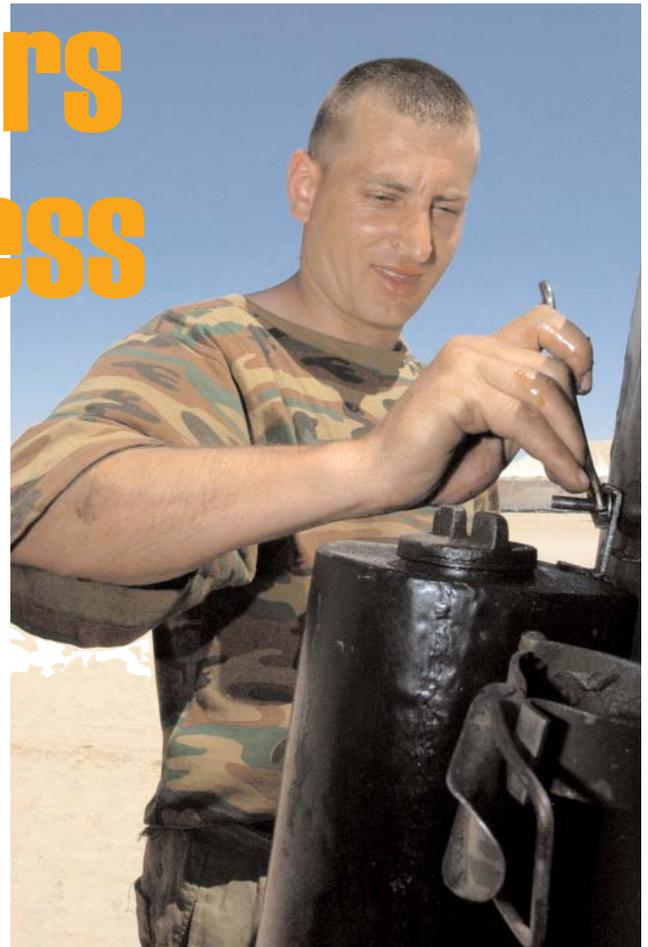
In contrast, Cpl. Irinel Nedelcu, one of the brave hearts and a squad rifleman who is working on being a sniper, said he's excited and unafraid. "I'd volunteer again. I'm proud of the uniform, and I like the army," he said eagerly.

It's this combination of fearless youngsters and prudent noncommissioned and commissioned officers that Giurgiu attributes much of his company's readiness to. "The young ones are motivated, and the ones in charge [gear] that motivation in the right direction," said Giurgiu.

This is Giurgiu's first time deployed as a company commander, but not his first deployment. He's been in the army 18 years and in that time has deployed to Angola, Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. A quarter of Giurgiu's troops have also deployed to Iraq, and most of the remaining 3/4 have deployed to Afghanistan, Kosovo and/or Bosnia. "The ones who deployed to Iraq know better than me what to expect, so I learn from them," said Giurgiu.

Aside from their combined deployment experience and balanced blend of personalities, having to submit to both U.N. rules and British military rules has perfected the company's readiness, said Giurgiu. The Romanian army has mostly trained under the British army, and most of the Romanian troops presently deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the coalition are supported by the British Army. So, the UNAMI Company had to learn the British rules of engagement and meet the British training standards while also fulfilling U.N. training requirements.

As far as motivation, if these 100 Romanians were lacking any at all - which Giurgiu assures wasn't the case - the recent kidnapping of three Romanian jour-



Junior Staff Sgt. Nicolae Ionica fixes last minute details on his armored personnel carrier at Camp Virginia March 29.

nalists in Baghdad gave them all the motivation they needed to want to do their part in making Iraq a safer place. "It was like an adrenaline injection when we heard about [the kidnappings]," said Giurgiu. He and his troops heard about the abductions while at Camp Virginia where the Romanians readied their vehicles for the Iraqi summer.

While the UNAMI Company deals with the desert heat, sand and insects of Iraq this summer, Giurgiu's six-year-old son will be getting ready to start school for the first time, he said.

As he spoke of his son, Giurgiu explained that soldiers in the UNAMI Company will be able to communicate with their families at least twice a week while in Basra, said Giurgiu. "That will make up for their absence," he said.

Some soldiers won't have to call home to communicate with family as a few of the soldiers deployed on this mission are deployed with siblings. There's even a set of twins in the company. "I can never tell them apart," Giurgiu said chuckling.

This light heartedness, a common trait among the soldiers, seems to be what will keep morale up during the next six months. That is, aside from the pride they have in their service. "I deployed for my country; it needed me, and so I'm here" said Nedelcu.

Romanian facts

The Romanian military consists of the following branches: Ground Forces, Naval Forces, Air and Air Defense Forces, and Civil Defense.

The Romanian military has about 165,000 servicemembers - all males. That adds up to one servicemember for about every 140 Romanian citizens. Bucharest is the capital of Romania, and it was once known as the "Little Paris" of Eastern Europe.

Count Dracula, a fictional character in the novel *Dracula*, was inspired by a well-known figure in Romanian history, Vlad Dracula, the ruler of Wallachia from 1456 to 1462. Dracula was also known as Vlad the Impaler.

The Internet has revolutionized the way people communicate, but the question today isn't "do you have e-mail?" or even "do you have a Web site?" Now it's "do you have a blog?"

Commentary by Sgt. Matt Millham

Hundreds of servicemembers in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan have created blogs, online journals that can be anything from a diary to a message board to a collection of news clippings and may even include sound and video files. The truth is, there is no one way to define what a blog is exactly – even the Web sites that host them appear to be unable to come to a consensus.

The only thing that all blogs seem to have in common is that they are at least a reflection, if not an outright representation, of the people posting them.

This is part of what makes blogs from a war zone so interesting, because they end up providing a wide spectrum of views on what is going on at a particular time and place, and they make it seem real in a way the mainstream media can't wholly capture. Not only are American troops taking time to give us their spin, but so are Iraqis, Afghans, journalists, ex-patriots and others.

Bloggng, once a sort of off-beat forum for individuals to just talk about themselves and their interests,

has become both mainstream and fashionable. Bloggers are opening up debate in the United States about their role within or outside the established American media, and whether they should be afforded the same protections as traditional journalists. While opinions about whether or not bloggers are real journalists are varied, it is an incontrovertible truth that people – some people anyway – pay attention to what bloggers are saying.

One Soldier blog from Iraq became a huge mainstream hit, achieving a sort of cult status that has fans hooked, even months after the majority of its content was taken down from the site at the behest of the Soldier's commander. That blog, "My War," composed by a Soldier who went by the moniker CBFTW, has jumped into the commercial realm with a major book deal. The

now-named Soldier – Spc. Colby Buzzell – was an infantryman deployed near Mosul with the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom 2. He said he started the blog as a way to combat boredom. "I'm just writing about my experiences," Buzzell told National Public Radio. "I'm pretty much putting my diary on the Internet – that's all it is."

Buzzell's irreverent and ranting blog has been called "the most extraordinary writing yet produced by a Soldier of the Iraq war" by Esquire magazine.

"I found out about this blog website stuff in an article that was printed in the new Time magazine," Buzzell wrote in an early posting on his blog. "It sounded like a good way for me to kill some time out here in Iraq, post a little diary stuff, maybe some rants, links to some cool s***, thoughts, experiences, garbage, c**p, whatever. I have no set formula on how I'm going to do this, I'm just going to do it and see what happens."

– Spc. Colby Buzzell

In an e-mail to NPR, Lt. Col. Paul Hastings, a spokesman for Buzzell's unit, said the popularity of bloggng has increased the chance that soldiers may inadvertently give away information to Internet-savvy enemies. Because of that, Buzzell's content had to be reviewed by his platoon sergeant and another senior officer, according to Hastings' e-mail. The fact that My War was at the time being accessed upwards of 10,000 times a day by a loyal and growing number of fans probably added to his command's sensitivity.

Lt. Col. Barry Venable, a Pentagon spokesman, said blogs are tolerated so long as they don't violate operational or informational security. "We treat them the same way we would if they were writing a letter or speaking to a reporter: It's just information," he said in a Sept. 9, 2004, article in The Wall Street Journal by Christopher Cooper. "If a guy is giving up secrets, it doesn't make

much difference whether he's posting it on a blog or shouting it from the rooftop of a building," said Venable.

But not all Iraq war blogs read like Buzzell's. There are plenty of others by troops from the bottom to somewhere near the top of the ranks, and they are as varied as the people writing them.

Sgt. Kevin Kiel, an Army Reservist with the 818th Maintenance Company, which is deployed to Forward Operating Base Endurance, Iraq, posts some interesting anecdotes about the culture clash between Americans and Iraqis on his blog, titled Kevin Kiel.

"Reading through Mosul Today, I was struck at how frivolous it seemed to have pictures of Christina Aguilera, Elizabeth Hurley, and a few other women I couldn't identify on the front page, while there seemed to be stories about terrorists in the middle pages, and politics on the back," wrote Kiel in one of his posts. "Is this really what Iraqis value? Is this what their readers are most interested in? Is this what we have exported with our blood and treasure? It turns out that I was reading the newspaper backwards."

Closer to home, a Third U.S. Army Soldier who identifies himself as an engineer stationed at Camp Arifjan and goes by the name REDWOOD13, has a blog named Pure-randomness, which is essentially a running opinion column. In one March entry, the Soldier wrote, "The Bowflex is a good idea. In Iraq. We have four gyms here. (That means no excuses). It's more than enough to make the guys up north hate us for it. But hey, I didn't pick Arifjan, the Army sent me here. So stop writing your hatred for us on our porta-johns." REDWOOD says he spends a lot of time reading (when he's not typing), and tells his readers, "Right now I'm bouncing between a book on Ecclesiastes, and the memoirs of General Patton ... Interestingly enough, I am serving in the Third Army, 'Patton's Own'."

If you find yourself wanting to enter the "blogosphere," as the blog culture is called, run a search for **blog Web sites** or try one of these popular sites: blogger.com; blog-city.com; diaryland.com; livejournal.com.

"I found out about this blog website stuff in an article that was printed in the new Time magazine. It sounded like a good way for me to kill some time out here in Iraq ..."

A pair of family reunions, thanks to OIF

Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks
3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment Public Affairs

Many parents whose children serve in the military don't catch a first glimpse of their child in uniform until basic training graduation.

But Sgt. 1st Class Stanley Gillens first saw his son-turned-Soldier at the edge of a combat zone.

Gillens met up with his son, Pfc. Kelton Gillens, March 28 at Camp Buehring, seven months after Kelton left for Fort Knox, Ky., to become a tanker.

The elder Gillens, assigned to the 412th Replacement Company, deployed to Kuwait in December 2004. Four months later, his son arrived with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

"Before he left, I told him that not long after completing his training, he'd probably be going to Iraq," Gillens said. "He said he understood that, but it's something he wanted to do."

Stanley, a veteran of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, originally hoped he would also see his middle son, Stanley Jr., while in Kuwait.

"It would have been a nice family reunion, but it didn't happen," Stanley said.

Despite not being able to see Stanley Jr., Stanley said the opportunity to see Kelton as a Soldier meant a great deal to him. The day prior to seeing his 'baby boy,' he reflected on Easter Sundays past spent with his family in South Carolina and what advice he'd give his son during their reunion.

"I just want to make sure he remembers all the things and values he was taught growing up," Stanley said. "As long he does that he'll be fine."

Upon entering his tent and noticing his father standing at his bunk, Kelton revealed a huge smile that only a child can give a parent.

"I couldn't even talk, I was very excited," Kelton said. "I can't even think straight right now."

Kelton, assigned to Eagle Troop, 2nd Squadron, 3rd ACR, said his father advised him to be a perfect Soldier, do what he's told to do, be safe and look out for his battle buddies. "I'm doing all those things," he said.

While embracing his son, Stanley reminded him to stay focused and, "to remember first and foremost we're still at war."

The reunion was made possible through the efforts of Capt. Stanley Robinson, 377th Theater Support Command, who served with the 3rd ACR during Desert Shield/Storm, and E Troop 1st Sgt. Hernando Pena.

"I have a son in the Navy, so I can understand what it would be like to have your father in the same theater – something tangible where you can reach out and touch him. That's awesome," Pena said.



The Navy and Marine Corps team quickly arranged for a family reunion at Camp Victory, Kuwait, between Lance Cpl. Elizabeth Bentley, of the 9th Communications Battalion out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., and her father, Petty Officer 2nd Class David Bentley of Expeditionary Medical Facility – Dallas. Mr. Bentley recently arrived in Kuwait to start his yearlong tour while Ms. Bentley had just completed her mission in Iraq and was headed home.

For some, it's never too late

Story by Command Sgt. Maj. Betty Rice, 461st Personnel Services Battalion and Staff Sgt. Linda Lee-Tucker, 687th Quartermaster Battalion

On March 28, Camp Virginia held its first formal noncommissioned officer induction ceremony of Operation Iraqi Freedom 04-06 in the camp's new chapel.

Before the ceremony, Spc. Otencia Guise of the 687th Quartermaster Battalion reenlisted for six years, receiving a \$15,000, tax-free, lump-sum bonus.

The ceremony, hosted by the 461st Personnel Services Battalion, began with 69 NCO inductees from the ranks of sergeant to first sergeant who had never been formally inducted into the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers. Some were promoted to sergeant as early as 1989.

The inductees came from seven different units: the 461st PSB, the 79th, 183rd, 1993rd Adjutant General Personnel Services Detachments, E Company of the 2/172nd Armor Battalion, the 687th Quartermaster Battalion, and C Company of the 844th Engineers Battalion. The units came from three camps: Victory, Virginia and Buehring.

As each NCO stepped under the saber arch and signed the official ledger and oath, pledging to uphold the NCO code, they were officially inducted into the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers.

The new 300-seat chapel was the formal setting for this eloquent occasion. The room was filled with Soldiers, Sailors, and multinational guests. The official party consisted of Camp Virginia's Chaplain (Maj.) Taz Randles, 1st Sgt. Corey Burnor, first sergeant of E Company 2/172nd Armor Battalion, Command Sgt. Maj. Betty Rice, command sergeant major of the 461st PSB, Command Sgt. Maj. Catherine Cunliffe, command sergeant major of the 687th, Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Smith, command sergeant major of the 844th Engineer Battalion and Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Goodrich, command sergeant major of the 172nd Armor Battalion. The Master of Ceremonies was Sgt. 1st Class Peter Labrie, who is in E Company 2/172nd Armor Battalion.

Burnor was the key note speaker of the evening. His speech emphasized the importance of integrity as NCOs, and the importance of leading Soldiers.

The evening ended with a benediction by Randles and with the retiring of the colors by the 461st PSB's color guard, whose members were Sgt. Jeremy Ivey, Sgt. Jose Aguilar, Spc. Elaine Ust, Spc. Marquette Barnes, and Pfc. Leonard Adams.

Editor's note: Due to the high volume of submissions this week, items that would normally appear on the back page are appearing here.

Community

happenings for April 6 through April 13

Arifjan

Wednesday

Arifjan Boxing Team, 7:30 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR
Combat Kick Boxing, 5:30 a.m., Power
Stretching, 8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout, 10 a.m.,
Body Pump Workout, 1 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 gym tent
Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent

Thursday

Country Music Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Spinning Class, 5:30 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent
Open Mic Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area
Karate Class, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area
Basketball signups begin, Zone 1 gym

Friday

Arifjan Boxing Team, 7:30 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Salsa Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 MWR tent
Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent

Saturday

R&B Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR
House Music Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Charlie Daniels Band, 6 p.m., Zone 6 stage
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching
8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump
Workout 1 p.m., Combat Kick Boxing 3 p.m.,
Zone 1 gym tent

Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool

Sunday

Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Bench/Step Workout 5:30 a.m., Super Abs 8 a.m.,
Power Stretching 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1
p.m., Bench/Step Workout 3 p.m., Zone 1 gym
tent

Monday

Arifjan Boxing Team, 7:30 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 2 stage
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching
8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump
Workout 1 p.m., Combat Kick Boxing 3 p.m.,
Zone 1 gym tent
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 gym tent

Tuesday

Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Bench/Step Workout 5:30 a.m., Super Abs 8
a.m., Power Stretching 10 a.m., Body Pump
Workout 1 p.m., Bench/Step Workout 3 p.m.,
Zone 1 gym tent

Wednesday

"We run where you run" 5K AAFES run, 6 a.m.,
Zone 6 gym parking lot
Grand Opening, all day, Zone 6 MWR facilities
9 Ball Tournament, 7 p.m., Community Center
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching
8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump
Workout 1 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent

For more information call 430-1202

Buehring

Wednesday

Walking Club, 5:30 a.m., command cell flagpole
Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., Tent 4

Thursday

Karaoke, 9 p.m., MWR bunker
Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 p.m., MWR Tent #1

Friday

Walking Club, 5:30 a.m., command cell flagpole
Massage Therapy, 9 a.m., MWR tent #4

Saturday

Bazaar, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Tent 1
Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 p.m., MWR tent #1

Sunday

Bazaar, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Tent 1
Walking Club, 7:30 a.m., command cell flagpole

Monday

Walking Club, 5:30 a.m., command cell flagpole
Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., MWR tent 4

Tuesday

Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 p.m., MWR tent 1

Wednesday

Walking Club, 5:30 a.m., command cell flagpole
Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., Tent 4

For more information call 828-1340

Doha

Wednesday

Apollo Style Open Mic Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Friday

Karaoke Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Saturday

Bingo Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Tuesday

Spades Doubles Tournament, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Wednesday

Spring Fling Dance Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

For more information call 438-5637

Kuwaiti Naval Base

For more information call 839-1063

Navistar

For more information call 844-1137

Spearhead/SPOD

Wednesday

Bazaar, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., outside PX area

Friday

Ping Pong Tournament, 6 p.m., MWR tent

Tuesday

Free Throw Contest, 7 p.m., MWR basketball
court

For more information call 825-1302

Victory

Wednesday

Basketball practice, 6 p.m. (Call for info)

Friday

Basketball practice, 6 p.m. (Call for info)

Monday

Basketball practice, 6 p.m. (Call for info)

Volleyball and Softball league starts (Call for info)

Tuesday

Movie Night, 8 p.m. (Call for info)

Wednesday

Basketball practice, 6 p.m. (Call for info)

For more information call 823-1033

Virginia

Wednesday

Bazaar, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Dusty Room
Country Western Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Thursday

Karaoke Night Contest, 7 p.m., Dusty Room
Karaoke Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Friday

Salsa Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Saturday

Ping Pong Tournament, 6 p.m., MWR tent
Hip Hop and R&B Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Sunday

Spa Day, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., MWR Tent
Old School Jams Contest, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Monday

Billiards-Singles Tournament, 4 p.m., MWR tent
Movie Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Tuesday

Unit Feud, 6 p.m., Dusty Room

Wednesday

Country Western Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room
Billiards-Singles Tournament, 4 p.m., MWR tent

For more information call 832-1045

**Camp Arifjan Zone 6
Grand Opening April 13**
New PX, gym and MWR facility

Doha/Arifjan Shuttle Schedule

Departs Doha Stop 1*	Arrives Doha Stop 2*	Departs Doha Stop 2*	Arrives Arifjan	Departs Arifjan	Arrives Doha
				0545	
	0700	0715	0830	0845	1000
1015	1025	1040	1200	1300	1430
1445	1450	1505	1615	1630	1745
1900	1910	1925	2045		

* Stop 1 is behind the Building 6 PAX Tent
Stop 2 is between Buildings 28 and 31

Doha/Al Salem Bus Schedule

Departs AAS	Arrives Doha	Departs Doha	Arrives AAS
		0615	0745
		0815	0945
0800	0930	0945	1115
1000	1130	1245	1415
1130	1300	1415	1545
1430	1600	1615	1745
1600	1730	1745	1915
1800	1930	1945	2115
1930	2100	2115	2245
2130	2300	0015	0145
2300	0030	0145	0315
0200	0330	0445	0615
0330	0500		
0630	0800		

**Are you holding an event
you'd like to see listed in
the Desert Voice?**

send your event listings to the
Desert Voice editor at the e-mail
address listed on the back page of
this issue.

Here and gone, a border oasis remembered

Story by: Capt. Lynn A. Morehouse, 43rd Area Support Group; **Staff Sgt. LaDla Jones-Singh**, 1644th Transportation Company; **Staff Sgt. Amy Lofflin**, 295th Ordnance Company; **Spc. Ruth Peredes-Davis**, 942nd Transportation Company

Before the Army can be armed, equipped and trained to fight, first and foremost it must be fed. Without adequate food, the most dedicated, spirited Soldiers in the world will not long survive, on or off the battlefield. As the old French proverb would have it, "the soup makes the soldier."

Since Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield, Army field feeding and the role of cooks in tactical environments have changed drastically. The profession has diminished in importance with the introduction to contract-run dining facilities. In today's Army, cooks are limited to dining facility operations in which they watch over civilian contract workers and take head counts as people come through the door. Because there is no requirement for Army cooks to perform their job, their talents and skills are minimized, and their skills diminish.

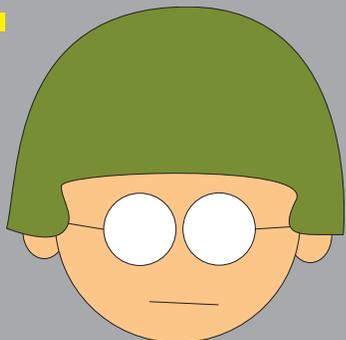
NATURE CALLS

By Capt. Paul Nichols, 377th Theater Support Command



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Photos courtesy of The Desert Splash Staff

Above, USO employees serve troops during a special event at the Desert Splash. Right, the dining facility's name spelled out in stones outside.



However, 16 soldiers from the 43rd Area Support Group got the opportunity to pull out their cook whites, recipes, pots and pans to feed redeploying units at the 35th Mubarak Armored Brigade washrack. Just thirty miles south of Kuwait's border with Iraq, the 43rd ASG set up the only tactical field feeding site in Kuwait – The Desert Splash. The group of Army cooks came from five transportation companies and two ordnance companies - the 942nd, 1644th, 2168th, 778th, Transportation

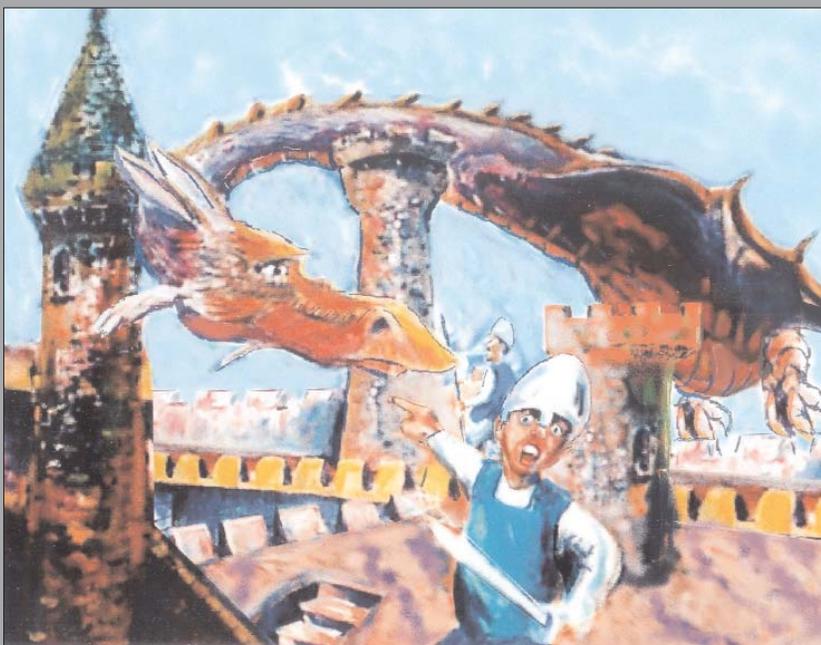
Companies and the 80th and 295th Ordnance Companies.

The site, which closed last month, consisted of two Mobile Kitchen Trailers, field feeding equipment introduced to the Army in the 1970's to push sustenance forward on the fast-moving battlefield. In addition to the tactical MKT site, the Desert Splash also had a newly-introduced field sanitation center, two ration storage containers, a 100-foot feeding tent and two refrigeration vans.

In a 24-hour period, the 35th Brigade DFAC provided up to 1000 meals through its short order menu and main lines. In all, the cooks at the Desert Splash fed more than 30,000 Soldiers at the 35th Mubarak washrack.

ARMY LIFE

By Lt. Col. Michael Verrett, CFLCC C4



Throughout the history of guard duty, one thing remains the same... you have your good days, and you have your bad days.