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DESERT VOICE



DUSTOFF

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On the Cover A MEDEVAC helicopter takes off from Udairi Airfield at Camp Buehring.

Photo illustration by Sgt. Matt Millham

Automatic E-5 for some Soldiers

The Army hopes its new promotion policy will help resolve the chronic shortage of sergeants in dozens of Military Occupational Specialties.

Story by Sgt. Matt Millham

In an effort to stave a shortage of junior leadership that has existed for nearly a decade, the Army announced that, beginning in April, some Soldiers will be promoted to sergeant automatically without going through the normal board process.

The new policy affects specialists and corporals who have at least four years time in service and at least 12 months time in grade in all military occupational specialties.

Official estimates suggest roughly 19,000 specialists and corporals would be immediately affected by the change to the Army's promotion policy.

Under the new policy, the Army gives 350 promotion points to Soldiers who qualify and integrates them onto the sergeant promotion list. Then, if the number of sergeants needed for a given MOS drops below 100 percent and the need cannot be met by promoting specialists and corporals who went through the board process, Soldiers on the integrated promotion list will fill the remaining need.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston supports the change, saying the policy "ensures that eligible soldiers are considered for promotion at a critical time in their career."

"After thinking this through, I am in total agreement that this is the best solution [for the shortage of sergeants]," he said.

Soldiers can still receive more than 350 points by going through the normal board process, but Soldiers who are integrated automatically cannot increase their points above 350 without going to the board, according to a message from the Army's Human Resources Command that delineates the new policy.

If a commander thinks that a Soldier who has been integrated onto the new list is not ready for promotion, they will be able to remove Soldiers from the list by following the normal procedures for denying a promotion.

"The most important thing for leaders to understand is that they still have control over the process," Preston said.

Commanders will get a copy of the new list and will have 15 days to remove any of their Soldiers they believe shouldn't be promoted to sergeant, said retired Sgt. Maj. Gerald Purcell, the Army's personnel policy integrator for enlisted professional development.



The policy, which went into effect earlier this month, "is really is a forcing mechanism to get soldiers in a promotable status to satisfy requirements, but it keeps the chain of command fully involved in that entire process," said Purcell.

The result of the new policy is that thousands of active-duty Soldiers who would not otherwise be promotable will appear on the March list, Purcell said.

This does not necessarily mean that any of these troops will get promoted. Even if commanders decide to leave their Soldiers on the list, the minimum cutoff score of 350 is nowhere near competitive in most MOSs, Purcell said.

In MOSs where there are severe shortages of sergeants, soldiers with 350 points could be promoted. Most of those promoted under the new policy will come from Star MOSs - jobs that do not have the full requirement of sergeants but have specialists and corporals who meet the requirements for promotion to sergeant.

The first list under the new policy was released March 3, and commanders have until March 18 to remove Soldiers from the list. In order to meet the demand for sergeants as quickly as possible, the Army is implementing a one-time procedural exception to the new guidance. Under the exception, all Soldiers placed on the list in March will be given an effective date of recommendation for promotion of Feb. 1 so that Soldiers could be promoted as early as April 1.

In the future, the integrated list will work essentially the same as the regular list. For example, a Soldier who qualifies for promotion under the new policy by June 6 will be placed on the recommended list May 1 and will be eligible for promotion by July 1.

Soldiers automatically added to the promotion list will have the lowest priority for promotion, and they will only be considered if there is a shortage of recommended Soldiers who went through the board process. Automatically recommended

Soldiers will be promoted based first on their time in grade and then on their basic active service date.

Specialists and corporals automatically added to the list recommending Soldiers for promotion are not eligible to have their promotion scores recomputed. In order to receive the full number of points they might otherwise be eligible for, Soldiers must go through the regular promotion board process.

Soldiers who are put onto the integrated list and who want to go through the promotion board process anyway can do so, but if the board decides not to recommend them for promotion, they will be taken off the list entirely. If a Soldier on the integrated list appears before a board and is recommended for promotion but doesn't have the minimum of 350 points needed for promotion, that Soldier will still automatically receive 350 points, according to the new guidance.

Purcell pointed to a number of reasons for the shortage of sergeants. The ongoing active-duty end-strength increase of 30,000 Soldiers is partly to blame, he said, but at the same time, "the number of eligible specialists who are on a promotion list have dwindled to the point where we can't fill all the sergeant requirements," Purcell said.

Advancement from private to specialist is automatic, based on time in service and time in grade, but commanders are recommending only 10 percent of all eligible soldiers for promotion, Purcell said. In 1996, 32 percent of eligible specialists and corporals were recommended for promotion, he added.

The problem is that many unit commanders demand their Soldiers meet higher standards than the Army requires before promoting them beyond specialist or corporal, Purcell said.

"The notion that you have to be fully ready to be a sergeant is a bad notion ... I'll tell you, if that were true, I'd never have been promoted," he said.

Want more information?

The complete list of Soldiers integrated onto the new list can be found at:

<https://www.perscom.army.mil/select/SgtIntegration05.htm>

The list of those recommended for promotion from the integrated list will be available on the Army's Human Resources Command website, <https://www.hrc.army.mil>, by March 21, according to a letter from HRC outlining the new policy.

With cleanup done, it's party time

The U.S. military and Kuwait celebrated the completion of a vast cleanup project that restored areas in Kuwait affected by the initial surge of troops into Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Story and photo by Spc. Brian Trapp

U.S.-Kuwaiti relations took another cooperative step March 8 at Sabah Al-Ahmad Natural Reserve with the first Desert Environment Day, which marked mission complete for the U.S. military's efforts to clean thousands of square kilometers of desert.

The event brought together members of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command and representatives from the Kuwaiti community and the Kuwaiti Volunteer Society, including Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, chairperson of the Kuwaiti Volunteer Society under the Council of Ministers and the sister of the Amir (ruler) of Kuwait.

"It's a great opportunity to show the way the U.S. military has established they care about taking care of the environment," said Matt Tueller, U.S. embassy deputy chief of mission, the embassy's second highest position. "Kuwait understood the presence was needed at the time, and they've come to know this is the way the U.S. military operates. We shouldered our responsibility and we returned the desert to its original condition."

The project started nearly a year ago when the U.S. military presented the initial plans for the cleaning to the Kuwaitis. The Americans and Kuwaitis celebrated completion of the project with an event that included presentations about the effects the military had on the environment and the progress of the mission from the beginning to its successful end.

Col. Albert Marin, CFLCC deputy chief of staff for the engineer section, explained what was done to clean the areas once occupied by U.S. and coalition forces.

The area cleaned was the site of 27 military camps covering about 60 percent of Kuwait. About 140,000 troops temporarily occupied those camps before Operation Iraqi Freedom, and they left in a hurry.

"You have to remember these were young kids under combat conditions . . . so they didn't pay as much attention to their trash," Marin said.

The troops' hasty move out of the camps created a considerable amount of work to return the desert to its original state.

Nearly 260 miles of berms were taken down, contaminated soil was treated, about 1,000 plastic culvert pipes were removed to be reused, and thousands of pounds of expended ammunition, garbage and con-



Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, chairperson of the Kuwaiti Volunteer Society under the Council of Ministers and the sister of the Amir presents Col. Albert Marin, CFLCC deputy chief of staff of engineers, with a dhow, a Kuwaiti national symbol, at the event.

certina wire were picked up from the deserted tactical assembly areas.

The soil, contaminated by minor oil spills, was cleaned using microorganisms that eat petroleum. Once the oil is gone the organisms die off. Roughly 16,350 cubic yards of soil were cleaned this way.

"We did a pretty good job. It looks like no one has been there," said Maj. Keith Baur, desert cleanup project officer with CFLCC engineers.

Once the cleanup was finished, it was checked through joint inspections by the Kuwaiti Volunteer Society and the U.S. military. The inspections were done from both the air and the ground, and random soil samples from the cleaned areas were taken before the land was declared ready.

"They did a brilliant job working side-by-side with our scientists," said Ahmad Al Mershed, assistant undersecretary for Ministry of Parliament Affairs and member of the Voluntary Work Center, about the soil sampling done during the inspection process.

Now that the sensitive desert environment has returned to its original condition, it can start its road to recovery, said Dr. Abdullah Al-Enizi, one of the scientists involved with the soil testing during the cleanup.

"We are happy there is environmental

awareness in the military," Al-Enizi said.

"You started the first step [by] bringing it up to what it was."

While the desert is clean, it hasn't fully recovered from the damage. That's going to take time.

Al-Eniz said one month of military activity does more damage than other activities, like animal grazing or recreation, can do in two years. The damage is done through soil compaction, plant deterioration and disruption of surface sediment. But now, he hopes to see the cleaned areas recover within two to three years.

Declaring the mission complete doesn't mean that CFLCC won't continue to be a good steward of the environment, Marin said.

The land also comes with an agreement similar to a five-year warranty, Baur said. If anything is found from U.S. or coalition forces in the areas, the military will come out and clean it.

The cleanup is "just a continuation of the cooperation with the Kuwaitis. Everything we do is through the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense, and so was the cleanup," Marin said. "This doesn't signify the end. There are several camps still occupied, and as long as we are here we will continue . . . We want to be good stewards of the environment."

At last, a four-day pass

Story by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

The sport of skiing is most often associated with cold, wintry climates, heaps of snow, alpine mountains, sniffing noses and gloves.

But hypothermia is the last thing worrying servicemembers as they ski down 100-foot sand dunes with 40-degree slopes in Qatar during the four-day pass program.

The Qatar pass program, originally set aside for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, will be available to all units deployed to Kuwait beginning April 1.

The application process works the same as for the Rest and Recuperation program, which starts with filling out a leave and request form and getting it approved through the servicemember's higher headquarters.

"You turn in the information to the same people as the [R&R] leave program," said Lt. Col. Frazier Pope, theater chief of league programs, who added that going on R & R doesn't disqualify troops from the Qatar pass program.

The program is geared toward helping deployed troops recoup while serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. As long as a unit's leadership approves the pass request, servicemembers can go to Qatar more than once during a one-year tour.

"The program was specifically set aside to pull the war fighter off the front lines for a brief respite from things such as carrying weapons and pulling guard duty," said Pope. "It's a heaven and a luxury not being on call."

While there is no time limit for eligibility, priority for the program will go to servicemembers who were assigned to Iraq for 90 or more days, who have not previously participated in the program, and who are not eligible for the R & R program because their deployments are less than nine months.

Daily flights from Ali Al Salem Airbase to Camp As-Sayliyah, Qatar, can accommodate up to 56 troops from the total participating units. The four days begin once troops hit the ground in Qatar, said Pope.

On the day of the flight, pass program



Above: Troops on pass in Qatar can take advantage of a number of trips around the small nation, including a foray into the desert during which experienced local drivers navigate steep sand dunes, which troops can also ski down. Left: Qatar is surrounded by the Arabian Gulf, and troops can take advantage of various water sports and beaches.

participants report to Ali Al Salem Airbase in uniform, just as

they would for R&R leave. And because it is vacation, weapons and load-bearing equipment are not allowed on pass program flights.

Personnel are limited to one checked bag weighing less than 50 pounds and one carry on bag weighing up to 15 pounds. Units are responsible for getting their troops to and from Ali Al Salem.

The program, home-based out of U.S. Central Command's Headquarters (Forward) at Camp As-Sayliyah, provides vacationing troops with on-post delights including a movie theater, gift shops, day spa, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and many restaurants such as a Chili's to dine in.

Another post facility is the Top-off Night Club, which is open from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. At the Club, troops can drink alcoholic beverages on a three-drink limit that is strictly enforced.

A United Services Organization room also makes playing video games, accessing the Internet, and calling home easily available to troops.

In order to give troops the opportunity to enjoy Qatar's culture and activities, the pass

program has off-post venues including dinner cruises, mall excursions, lake fishing, horseback riding, putt-putt golfing, batting cages, water sports, cultural tours and desert safari trips.

The desert safari trip in particular takes troops into the sand dunes of Qatar. Experienced local drivers drive troops up and down steep sand dunes in sports utility vehicles for about an hour, and then stop at a campsite along the Arabian Gulf.

At the campsite, troops are able to eat a traditional Arabic meal, ski down a sand dune slope, play sand volleyball and swim in the warm waters of the Persian Gulf.

Camp As Sayliyah is located about 30 minutes from the Qatar capital city of Doha, where almost half of the country's 850,000 population lives.

During off-post trips to Doha, troops can travel to the City Center Shopping Complex, a three-story mall that is the biggest shopping complex in the Middle East.

Another popular place in Doha is the Gold Souk, which means "market" in Arabic. In the Gold Souk, troops can purchase gold and silver for about one-third the cost of similar items in the United States.

Qatar, a peninsula stretching out from Saudi Arabia into the Persian Gulf, is about the size of Connecticut.



DUSTOFF



Staff Sgt. John Sanchez, flight medic with the 236th, puts his gear in the aircraft as his crew switched to the first up standby.

Story and photos by Spc. Brian Trapp

Someone's life hangs in the balance. Mere minutes are the difference between life and death. The call is made for a medical evacuation. Nine lines of information go out, and an air ambulance crew goes into action.

The 236th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) took over air ambulance service for the U.S. military in Kuwait about a month and a half ago. Stationed at Camp Buhering's Udairi airfield, the company has already responded to roughly six dozen MEDEVAC calls. They are here to save lives, and they have.

With crews on standby at all times, they wait, restricted to the airfield, for the call to send them into action. When the call comes, they move like a bullet.

The calls come in to the company's operations office, where they have a 24-hour watch to take the next nine-line MEDEVAC call. Two-man teams keep an eye on the "Bat Phone," the phone line designated for MEDEVAC calls. Very few calls come in over the radio sitting on the desk next to the phone.

When the phone rings, everyone tenses up, said Sgt. Robert Patterson, who works in aviation operations with the 236th. Everyone in the office either assists if they can or makes way for the crew-members who will burst through the door within seconds.

As the operator takes down the information for the nine-line report, they send out the call over the radio alerting the MEDEVAC team on standby.

Getting a MEDEVAC call, "feels like your child is calling for help and you don't know what's the matter with them," said Staff Sgt. John Sanchez, flight medic with the 236th.

"When we hear MEDEVAC, MEDEVAC, MEDEVAC over the radio, I run out and immediately start the aircraft," said Warrant Officer Josh Collins, pilot with the 236th. "From the time we get the call, I'm at a

dead sprint to get the aircraft moving."

Not all accidents happen during normal business hours, so the crews pulling the overnight standby shift sleep in trailers on the airfield. When Collins is standby overnight, he normally sleeps with his flight suit on and his boots next to the bed ready to go.

"You wake up . . . your adrenaline is pumping," he said.

While one pilot is starting the helicopter, the other pilot and crew chief head for operations to get information about the call. Usually they get into the office before the call is even done. To make sure they're safe to fly, they get an up-to-date weather report. The crew heads out to the helicopter, loads up, and takes off, toward the patient at about 170 mph. The whole trip, from alert to landing at the hospital, takes from more than an hour for some areas, to about 45 minutes for the southern camps.

The information the crew gets before leaving is not always what it seems when they're headed out.

"Usually when you get a nine-line, 85 percent of the time it's completely different when you arrive on the scene," said Sgt. 1st Class David Cardona, flight medic platoon noncommissioned officer in charge. As the helicopter is landing, the medic is surveying



the scene before they even step out.

Once on the ground, the medic evaluates the patients and their injuries, stabilizes them, puts the patient onboard and then heads out toward U.S. Military Hospital-Kuwait at Camp Arifjan.

"The people on the ground just see me coming out of the helicopter to help their buddy," Sanchez said. "It's not just me, it's the whole unit . . . It's not just the guys in the aircraft, it's also the guys behind the scenes."

A big part of the behind-the-scenes operation is the maintenance platoon. They work as long as it takes to keeping the units six Kuwait-based helicopters in the air.

"We don't wait until tomorrow," Staff Sgt. Joseph Bonish, avionics squad leader. "As soon as it lands we're on it."

Their mission is on a "much higher priority" than the average passenger-centric avia-

tion unit. When there's a problem, the maintenance team doesn't stop until it's fixed, sometimes working into the middle of the night.

"These guys know if they don't get the aircraft working . . . (the crews) can't save anybody," Bonish said.

The 236th has seen an array of injuries while answering more than five dozen calls. They've responded to cases ranging from severed fingers and appendicitis, to vehicle roll-overs and major head traumas.

One of the calls that Collins won't likely forget was the first call he got after arriving in Kuwait.

It was a cardiac case. They did everything right. The helicopter was five minutes away from the site when they got a call telling them to return to station.

"He was confirmed dead. There would

have been nothing that we could have done for him," said Collins, who has flown more than a dozen missions now. "It was sobering."

"Our primary concern is getting there as fast as we can so you won't have any doubt that you did the most you can for the [patient]," Collins said.

To make sure they can do the most for the patient, the medics train constantly to keep themselves ready. Flight crews fly patient transfers from the hospital at Arifjan to Ali Al Salem Airbase for patients going to Landstuhl, Germany, the 236th's home base, for further medical treatment.

The unit also trains other troops how to set up landing zones and how to give nine-line calls in case of the unexpected.

When that happens, the 236th will certainly be standing ready.



Clockwise from above: Warrant Officer Josh Collins, demonstrates preparatory systems checks to get the aircraft ready for takeoff. Spc. Christopher Russell, with the 236th maintenance platoon, changes a hydraulic servo for a tall rotor on one of the company's helicopters. Collins and Sgt. Juan Canez, flight medic, wait for the next call to send them into action. The "Bat Phone," while not a direct line to Bruce Wayne, is where many of the nine-line MEDEVAC calls come in.

Unexpected friendship

Story and photos by Spc. Brian Trapp

Americans don't normally build friendships with other countries around the Russian Pulemyot Kalashnikov machine gun, but that's what brought together two blue-collar American guys and one Georgian army soldier.

The two blue-collar guys, Matt Middleton and Robert Huffman, are machinists who staff Camp Arifjan's Mobile Parts Hospital. Their skill is fabricating specialty parts for troops. They've designed and specially made weapons mounts for a slew of American troops. Recently, they did the same with the Georgian army's PK machine gun. The general-purpose machine gun is used as a crew-served weapon by Georgians patrolling Iraq.

Georgia, a coalition partner since August 2003, needed gun mounts to fit their Russian machine guns. Originally they adapted a pintle designed for an American .50-caliber machine gun. The Frankenstein-like creation, with nuts welded onto the side and bolts screwed into those, held the gun in place to a point, but it wobbled too much.

The Georgians needed a more reliable gun mount. The MPH — creator of the .50-caliber mount the Georgians started with — had the answer. Central Command said the Georgian troops needed a better pintle and more protection for their mounted patrols. Task Force Gator introduced the Georgians to the MPH and worked on getting them the armor they needed, said Lt. Col. Roy Carrington, Officer in Charge of Task Force Gator.

That's where Georgian army Staff Sgt. Koba Tsaava, an operations sergeant and machine gunner, came into the picture. It's also when the culture-crossing friendship began.

Tsaava came to Camp Arifjan from Baqubah, Iraq, to oversee the project and act as a liaison between the Georgian army and the MPH. He brought the PK to Middleton and Huffman to start the design process.

From then on, Tsaava stopped by the MPH every morning to visit with Huffman and Middleton for a few hours.

The MPH shop, housed in a converted shipping container, has a cozy feel that

lends itself to talking about home, even if that means shouting over the noise of the lathe as it churns out parts.

Before the MPH could start churning out the parts for the Georgian army, they had to come up with a completely new design for the pintle mount. Starting from their .50-caliber mount, they essentially invented and created a brand-new piece.

"It helped that they had a gun right here with them," said Huffman, senior precision machinist. "Without it, we wouldn't have been able to make [the mount]."

After reviewing several designs and prototypes for the new pintle mount, the friendly Georgian with a robust Eastern-European accent chose what he wanted and had the new part in the queue for production. The new mount not only fits and holds the gun

ect and collecting new Level-2 up-armored Humvees for his fellow Georgians.

"They are great guys; they do the best to help make us happy," Tsaava said. "They always ask, if I'm happy. I tell them, it doesn't matter whether I'm happy. [What matters] is my commander, and if he's happy, I'm happy too," he said with a chuckle.

This is the first time Middleton and Huffman ever did a job for the coalition, as far as they can remember. But this probably won't be a job they'll forget.

When Huffman signed on for his second trip to Kuwait with the MPH, he wasn't under the impression that he would be working with other countries, he said.

For Tsaava and some of his comrades, their missions in Iraq are relatively new experiences as well. The Georgian troops



Above: Georgia's Cpl. Levan Paeradze, left, and Staff Sgt. Koba Tsaava test out an American-fabricated gun mount. Left: Robert Huffman, a fabricator with the Mobile Parts Hospital, shows the new mount, right, next to the MPH's Improved Squad Automatic Weapon pintle mount.

better, it also gives the gunner the a greater range of motion for aiming at

rooftops and high windows.

The three men built a friendship over a short time by working together, visiting, and learning about one another's origins and cultures, with a mutual respect for their positions in supporting the war on terror.

"If all the people in Georgia are like Koba, I would love to visit [the country]," Middleton said. "[The Georgian's] are very friendly and very proud of their culture and history."

Tsaava has been in Kuwait for several weeks overseeing the progress of the proj-

ect and collecting new Level-2 up-armored Humvees for his fellow Georgians. don't normally drive with mounted weapons, and these are some of their first experiences with convoy escorting, Tsaava said. The Georgians are coming from a relatively peaceful country that became mired in internal conflicts about 15 years ago.

Even though he's enjoyed the company of Middleton and Huffman, Tsaava said he was ready to return to Iraq.

The Georgian soldiers who deployed to support Operation Iraqi Freedom with force protection and convoy escort missions were all volunteers. Tsaava is no exception, and he said he hopes to get back to his unit in Iraq soon.

Georgian troops, U.N. mission, U.S. training

Story by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

When 558 soldiers from Georgia showed up at Camp Virginia at the end of last month, the U.S. military brought in eight interpreters to communicate with them.

That's because they weren't from the Georgia most Third Army Soldiers know. The 113th Georgian Light Infantry Battalion comes from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, which has helped to bring stability to Iraq for nearly two years.

The Georgians arrived at Virginia for more than two weeks worth of American-led deployment training intended to help them in their mission of guarding the perimeter of the U.N. compound in Baghdad's International Zone.

U.S. troops from the 377th Theater Support Command, 43rd Area Support Group, 62nd Medical Brigade and 146th Quartermaster Company were among the dozens of personnel who instructed the 113th.

"It's a team effort," said Maj. Gene York, a 377th transportation officer. "The better trained they are, the better trained we'll be with protecting our and their assets."

The training at Camp Virginia and at Camp Buehring's Udairi Range will help the 113th integrate more smoothly with American and other coalition forces in Iraq, York said.

The training sessions covered everything from radios to vehicles to combat. Live fire convoy exercises and close quarters marksmanship lanes at Udairi Range helped prepare the troops for urban clashes.

Because the Georgians used American vehicles for the training, they went through hours of familiarization with five-ton trucks and Humvees, as well as with the SINCGAR radio system. Theater-specific individual readiness training, identical to the training U.S. troops receive as they prepare to head north, covered things like encounters with improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, recognizing friendly forces, cultural awareness and rules of engagement.

"The training is excellent preparation for Baghdad," said Georgian army Sgt. Max Djavidani through a translator. "Everything has gone to plan so far."

Georgian soldiers are no strangers to the battlefield, as many have combat experience from fighting pro-Russia separatists on their own soil, according to Georgian Lt. Giorgi Akhalmosulishvili, who came down from his job serving under Multinational Force-Iraq to help prepare the 113th for their mission.

But while the enemy in Iraq uses the tactics of terrorism to carry out attacks on troops and civilians, the Georgians have mostly fought in force-on-force combat, pitting infantry against infantry and artillery against artillery. "That's the real war," he said, dismissing the Iraqi



Photo by Sgt. Matt Millham

43rd Area Support Group Staff Sgt. Aaron Campanella heads out on a ride-along with Georgian soldier Manuchar Dumbadze during a Humvee training class at Camp Virginia March 8.

insurgents as terrorists, not soldiers.

The Georgian troops most liked the simulation aspect of the entry control point range, at which vehicle targets move on tracks toward a checkpoint. With the moving target coming toward them, the Georgians demonstrated their close-quarters marksmanship skills by putting two rounds each into a silhouette in the driver's seat. It taught the soldiers, many of whom will pull guard duty at stationary posts, how to react to vehicle-borne IEDs.

"They're very good marksmen," Rodefer said.

During the convoy live fire exercises, which averaged up to four hours per lane, Georgian troops were forced to react to IEDs and rocket-propelled grenades, perform casualty and downed-vehicle evacuations and other moving battle drills.

The Georgians are inquisitive students, said Sgt. Blake Anderson, a communications sergeant with 43rd ASG, who instructed the Georgians on the use of the SINCGAR radio.

"They seem really interested in what every knob does, what kind of range it will give them and what to do if something goes wrong," he said.

Driving instructor and 43rd member Sgt. 1st Class William Westmoreland agreed the Georgians are thorough learners, adding that every Georgian had a notebook ready without prompting – something he hadn't seen from American troops.

The focus of the vehicle training was to help the Georgians understand the capabilities of the vehicles and to understand how to operate them so they could avoid breakdowns. Westmoreland said he taught the dos and

don'ts of the engine compartment, how to read the instrument panel gauges, how to conduct Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services, and other concepts designed to keep the vehicles running so that they can be driven safely on a daily basis. Emergency techniques like rollover drills were also stressed.

The SINCGAR and Humvee tutorials were broken down into slideshow classes in Russian followed up by longer, hands-on segments. The U.S. military doesn't have many interpreters who speak Georgian, but about half of the Georgians speak Russian. Of the eight interpreters brought in from the states, two speak Georgian and six speak Russian.

The importance of the training reflects the 113th battalion's entry into a hostile area, said Rodefer. "We're helping to prepare coalition troops for one of the most dangerous cities in the world," he said.

The training sessions also afforded the Georgian army insights into how the U.S. military works, said Rodefer.

U.S. troops, in turn, got a chance to study their Georgian counterparts. "U.S. forces always train with other U.S. forces," said York. "Working with coalition troops is a unique opportunity to learn something new every day."

While this wasn't the first time the U.S. military has trained foreign troops, it was somewhat of sync with the usual protocol for interacting with coalition units coming into theater, according to Maj. Juan Colon, 377th Operations officer.

"It's a little bit different for us," said Colon. "We normally don't do this for coalition forces."

Udairi tests Marines' urban combat skills

Story and photo by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

Sgt. Armando Quiroz, a squad leader with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit from Camp Pendleton, Calif., exits a Close Quarters Battle training exercise at Udairi Range by walking past a wooden mannequin covered with pink dots, residue left over from his squad's rifle and shotgun rounds, which contained tips made from a compound similar to hardened lipstick.

Quiroz is grim-faced and unhappy. What he has to remind his fellow Marines is the notion of teamwork, which might one day save their lives. "You can't separate the squad," he said. "I'm not going to clear two rooms at the same time. I don't agree with splitting the team up."

Close Quarters Battle, or CQB, has become the new battlefield environment in the post-9/11 world. Urban operational training fields, like the one at Udairi Range, have prepared troops on their way to Iraq for the changing tactics of an enemy who attacks from rooftops, not foxholes.

Military Operations in Urbanized Terrain, or MOUT, let troops hone their street fighting skills as they prepare to patrol Iraq's hostile cities.

"This CQB training is their last opportunity to ensure that Soldiers and Marines exercise and validate their urban [operations] skills prior to heading north," said Master Sgt. Michael Jones of Udairi Range Control. "It's a chance for a last-minute fine tuning prior to the big game."

The CQB drills are done in building mock-ups awash in pop-up targets, smoke machines, the sounds of close combat, and voices screaming in Arabic.

While dealing with all of this, the leaders have to give their troops commands at the same time, Jones said.

The single and double story houses on the CQB range challenge the Marines' tactics as they navigate the various rooms, hallways, stairways and balconies.

"There are so many different entries," said Jones. "You have to know where the doors are located, how to come in, and you have to be aware of your surroundings."

False walls and holes in the floor keep the Marines guessing as to where the next attack might come from. Props such as couches and refrigerators help in adding to the range's realism.

"A normal house doesn't have four bare walls," he said. "The furniture makes it so that the Soldiers and Marines have to move around things."

While the buildings can be dangerous, the street is often even more perilous. Anytime troops enter a building, they're going across courtyards or streets, which makes them vulnerable to snipers, mortars and other indirect fire, Jones said.

"It's a good refresher to get us in the mind frame for the potential enemy ahead," said Sgt. John Collins, a 15th MEU squad leader.

Lance Cpl. Franky Blackwell agreed.

"The training gives us pointers about what we're doing wrong," he said. "We learn better ways to enter the house, to look for booby traps, and to sight in on your target without delay."

"This training facility allows us to see how the real thing gets played out," said Pfc. John Wright.



Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit practice a room-clearing stance during a training exercise March 9.

"You don't really know what the building looks like until you get in there," said Lance Cpl. Brent Miller. "You have to make snap judgments."

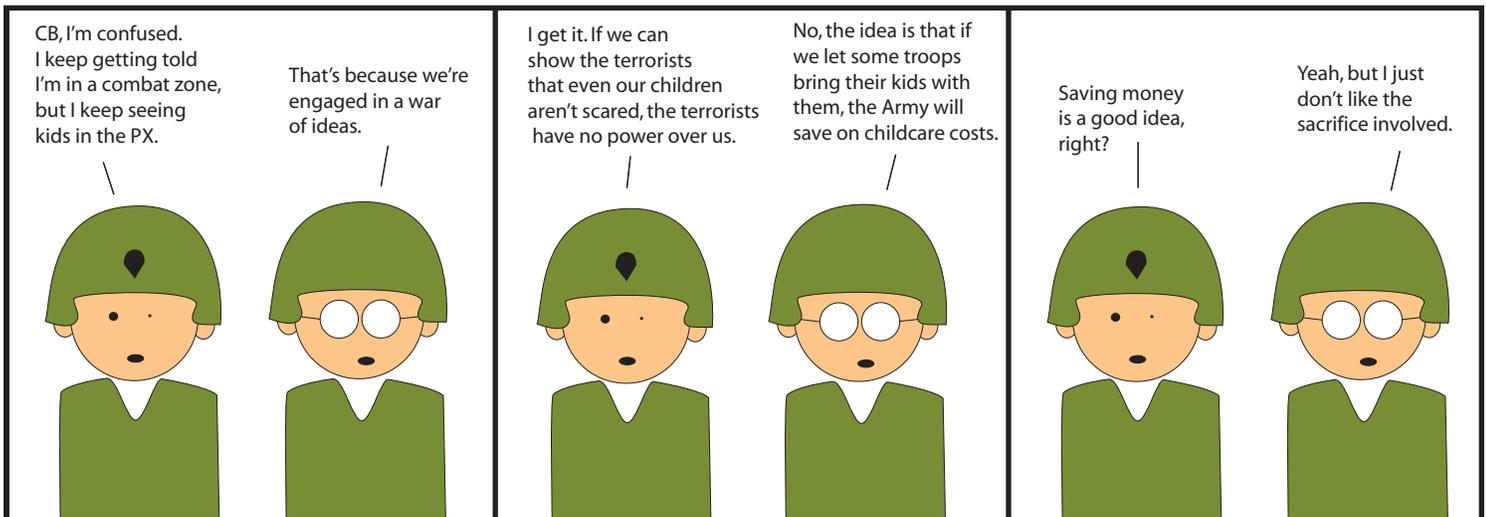
2nd Lt. Neal Simpson, a 15th MEU platoon commander, had advice for his Marines and Navy Corpsmen as they were practicing a "glass house" exercise where the perimeter of a room was simulated with sandbags and engineer tape.

"Never enter a room by yourself. Never walk past a room that hasn't already been cleared," he said. "When preparing to clear a room, everyone who goes in has a sector of fire. Hand and arm signals help preserve noise discipline."

The Udairi Range CQB training site has a lessons learned theater to present the After Action Review with video and audio from the exercise. The entire AAR process is also recorded, and all videos are given to the troops who go through the range so they can continue to review their tactics.

"Today's close quarters battles occur at 150 meters or less," said Simpson. "You can never have too much live fire training."

behooverly



Community

happenings for March 16 through 23

Arifjan

Wednesday

Table Tennis 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
 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

Salsa Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
 Indoor theater, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area
 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

Checkers Tournament, 7 p.m., Community Center
 80s Music Night, 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., 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

Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 2 stage
 Bingo Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
 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

R&B 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

For more information call 430-1202

Buehring

Wednesday

Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., Tent 4

Thursday

St. Patrick's Day Run 10K, 9 p.m., Bunker
 Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 p.m., MWR tent

Saturday

Spa Day 10 a.m - 5p.m.
 Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 p.m., MWR tent

Sunday

Spa Day 10 a.m - 5p.m.

Monday

Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., MWR tent 4

Tuesday

Tae-Kwon-Do Class, 7 - 8:30 p.m., MWR tent 1

Wednesday

Aerobics, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m., MWR tent 4

For more information call 828-1340

Doha

Wednesday

St. Patrick's Bingo and Game Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Friday

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

Saturday

Salsa, Latin Dance Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Monday

Dart Championship, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Wednesday

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

For more information call 438-5637

Kuwaiti Naval Base

For more information call 839-1063

Navistar

Wednesday

Female Self Defense class, 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., basketball court
 Aerobics Class, 6 p.m., Game tent
 Poker Tournament practice, 8 - 10 a.m. and 6 - 10 p.m., MWR Rec tent

Thursday

Soldier's Flea Market, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. MWR Mall
 Karate Class, 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., basketball court
 Poker Tournament practice, 8 - 10 a.m. and 6 - 10 p.m., MWR Rec tent

Friday

Aerobics Class, 6 p.m., Game tent
 Poker Tournament practice, 8 - 10 a.m. and 6 - 10 p.m., MWR Rec tent

Saturday

Poker Tournament, 8 - 10 a.m. and 6 - 10 p.m., MWR Rec tent

Sunday

Poker Tournament, 8 - 10 a.m. and 6 - 10 p.m., MWR Rec tent

Monday

Softball Tournament Practice, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m., softball field
 Aerobics Class, 6 p.m., Game tent
 Female Self Defense class, 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., basketball court

Tuesday

Softball Tournament Practice, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m., softball field
 Karate Class, 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., basketball court

Wednesday

Softball Tournament Practice, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m., softball field
 Female Self Defense class, 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., basketball court
 Aerobics Class, 6 p.m., Game tent

For more information call 844-1137

Spearhead/SPOD

Thursday

St. Patrick's Day Fun Run, 7 a.m., PT area

Friday

80's Music night, south side of DFAC

Saturday

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

For more information call 825-1302

Victory

Wednesday

Bazaar, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., behind PX
 Hip Hop Night, 8 p.m., MWR tent

Thursday

Ceaser, Latin Band, time to be announced MWR stage

Friday

10K race

Monday

Tug O War

Tuesday

Dominoes Tournament

Wednesday

Skti and Open Mic Night

For more information call 823-1033

Virginia

Wednesday

Chess Tournament, 3 p.m., MWR tent

Thursday

St. Patrick's Day 5 K run, 3 p.m., Dusty Room

Friday

Checkers Tournament, 3 p.m., MWR tent

Saturday

Spa Day 10 a.m.-6 p.m., MWR tent

Sunday

Horseshoe Tournament 3 p.m.

Monday

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

Tuesday

Bingo Night, 7 p.m., Dusty Room

Wednesday

Country Western Night, 7 p.m. - 12 a.m., Dusty Room

For more information call 832-1045

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 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		

Destiny, Destiny

By Sgt. 1st Class Phyllis M. Brown

I believe that God created woman and man.
I believe we each have a specific purpose and plan.

My husband and I make a whole.
What a great feeling down in my soul.

Man and woman together are the vessels to reproduce.
What a remarkable blessing and a great use.

Women are the vessels to give birth.
So all of God's children can roam the earth.

Woman was designed to bear the pain.
Man was designed to endure suffering and sustain.

Thank God for men, we can't do it alone.
Even though some need to be reborn.

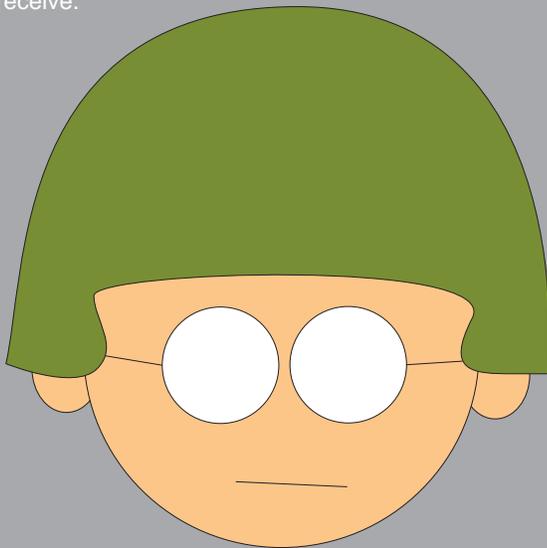
God allows us to have free will.
But we refuse to fit the bill.

The selfless deeds that you achieve.
The more blessing you will receive.
If you truly, truly believe.

Destiny, Destiny

Hear my cry.
Why are you running wild?

What is your destiny?



Send your
submissions to:
**DESERT
VOICE**

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Safety Corner

Pool safety

From the 377th Theater Support Command
Safety Office

As warmer weather approaches, many people will head to the pool. Whether in Kuwait or on rest and recuperation leave, safety is important. Here are some basic swimming safety rules.

- Swim only in supervised areas.
- Know your limitations, and don't overestimate your ability
- Always swim with a buddy who has the ability to help you in an emergency
- Check water depth before diving into the water
- Keep a safe distance from diving boards and diving platforms
- If on R&R, avoid drinking alcohol while swimming.

To register for upcoming safety classes or for questions or comments on this segment, please refer to the 377th safety office's Maj. Nathan Phelps or 1st Lt. Rene Surgi.

By Capt. Paul Nichols,
377th Theater Support Command



By Lt. Col. Michael Verrett,
CFLCC C4

