

SEPTEMBER 15, 2004

DESERT VOICE



HEY-
SARGE-
I'M ON

ESPN!

Sometimes you find your friends in the strangest places

commentary by Sgt. Matt Millham



It seems like it has been a while since American troops have been in the mainstream news for something other than scandal, combat or death. The lighter side of life in the military has, over the years since Sept. 11, been overshadowed by the grim images of war on the other side of the globe - this side.

But as of a few days ago, sports news leader ESPN made Camp Arifjan its SportsCenter headquarters and invaded other American military camps in Kuwait with roving news crews. They're here to highlight, unlike some of their more mainstream news counterparts, the everyday life of the American trooper overseas.

For a week, ESPN will feature troops doing what troops do. The mundane act of conducting early-morning PT will, for a moment, be more than PT; it will be a sports feature. Coverage of flag football, a perennial staple on just about every military installation stateside and otherwise, will make fleeting stars out of its recreational competitors. The ranges where the 2nd Infantry Division trained just weeks ago for its move to Iraq will become, through the lens of the sportscaster's camera, not just a training ground, but a practice field for a game of life or death. This may help to remind us that what

we do every day, what we sometimes look at as this ho-hum life, is not so ho-hum. It's part of the art of preparing for war, and it's part of maintaining sanity while thousands of miles away from family and friends. Spotting troops in this way, giving them the momentary stardom they get from the majority of news media only when something happens to them – when they are killed or injured but not when they save a buddy from death – succeeds in giving credit where credit is due.

What ESPN is doing to elevate the troops' morale here is well beyond what any normal MWR event can do. Nobody seems willing to toss up any hard numbers for the cost to the network, but figures around \$1 million have been heard mentioned amid the construction in Building 511 where the set for SportsCenter has been constructed – mostly by troops. The cost to the military hasn't been mentioned at all, but one would have to guess it's more than the standard cost of MWR.

Justifying these costs is easy for the military, and it's easy for ESPN. For the Pentagon, it's good news in the midst of grim times for America's plans for Iraq. For ESPN, it's a chance to give back to the troops and a chance to get in, in a way that no other network has done, on the passion surrounding

the war on terrorism.

But even as the ESPN spotlight rests for a week on America's military men and women, much of the credit for this event falls back to the troops themselves. The stage for ESPN was built not by ESPN, but by Army engineers. The set was decked out not by television crewmembers at the direction of producers; Soldiers beefed it up. As much as ESPN is giving to the troops in the way of a morale boost, the troops are giving back to the network in the way of muscle, ingenuity and military expertise. The show may belong to ESPN, but for a week it will be about troops. The show can't go on without its stars, and for a short time, America's deployed troops are the stars.

The opportunity, both for troops to be featured on ESPN and for ESPN to feature troops, is a mutually rewarding venture that both participants will likely remember for a long time. It's more than just a story to send back home to the family, it's a story the family can watch and, as Americans often do with television, interact with. Finding their Soldier, Airman, Marine, Sailor or Coastguardsman on television engaged in sport rather than combat, exerting themselves for fun rather than necessity, has to be a comforting image for America.

DESERT VOICE

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On the Cover Miami natives Sgt. Winfield Techeira and Spc. Pedro Dominguez, both of the 50th Area Support Group, argue the play of the Miami Hurricanes at the SportsCenter sports desk.

Graphic illustration by Sgt. Matt Millham

Take a picture; it'll last longer

story by Sgt. Matt Millham

Though thousands of miles from home, Troops serving in support of overseas operations are, in the 21st century, able to maintain closer ties to family and friends than at any other time in the history of warfare.

Technology is the tool that makes this possible, but sometimes it's the extra work of just one person that makes the real difference.

For the technologically un-savvy, Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Evans has provided a solution for families and troops to share with each other one of the best protectors of sanity in this environment – pictures.

Taking advantage of a relatively new trend in photography called digital photo sharing, Evans' Web site www.cproof.com gives troops and families a tool to share short videos and digital pictures over the Internet. The site is free to troops because Evans has already paid the fees associated with the service, which is hosted by the relatively new but quickly growing company Smugmug.

There are three ways to post pictures to the site. The first is to e-mail them to Evans at cproof@gmail.com. The second is to



Snapshots like this get to friends faster through Smugmug than through the mail.

arrange with him to post pictures to the site through use of a password. The third is to arrange with Evans over e-mail to hand off a computer disk or compact disc with the images.

The pictures will be put into a gallery all your own, and it can be open for all to see or, said Evans, "Say if they wanted it to be private, just between two people, I could have that gallery password protected." Users can share the password with whomever they want to have access to a particular gallery or picture.

Although visitors to the site can see files that aren't password protected for free, some

files can't be downloaded for printing by anyone other than the person who posted them without paying a small fee, usually 29 cents. "I will make them available for download for free at the person submitting the photos request," said Evans. Visitors can also purchase high-quality prints of the pictures they want through Smugmug.

Pictures submitted to Evans and to the site have to fit within criteria designated by Smugmug. The host says, in its terms of use, that it "must remain a safe site for families with children." In keeping with this requirement, users are prohibited from uploading nude photos or anything else that might be considered "R-rated." Smugmug reserves the right to delete any photographs it considers to violate this policy and to cancel the account of any subscriber who posts photos or other media violating this policy, so users are urged by Evans not to abuse his service.

The service doesn't get around all the problems associated with sending large picture files through e-mail, but it does get around some of them and enables users to post their pictures pretty much indefinitely, or at least as long as the site remains up, for friends and family to see.

More than 60 Corpsmen pinned

story by Spc. Brian Trapp

Working with the coalition forces and inter-services can be a difficult switch for some people serving their country, but for one Navy unit and it's Sailors, it's a way of life. They serve with Marine units as medical support every day as Fleet Marine Force Hospital Corpsmen.

These Corpsmen eat, train, work and live with the Marines. The Marines consider them as one of their own, and with some work, a number of Corpsmen with A Surgical Company, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Force Services Support Group came even closer when they earned the Fleet Marine Force Warfare Device.

During their deployment, they accomplished more than just their mission; more than 60 Corpsmen also earned their Fleet Marine Force Warfare Device, according to Brig. Gen. Michael Walter, commander of the 8th Medical Brigade.

"The device ... is a rite of passage for them. It takes months of studying and testing. It's a big deal to them," said Navy Lt. John Meeting, commander of A Surgical Company, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Force Services Support Group, working under the 8th Medical Brigade. "This is the Corpsmen

showing they have the skill set to work with the Marines. It helps them do their job better to help them understand and know how things work (in the Marines)."

Only the Corpsmen who are assigned to Marine units on the ground are eligible to even earn the device. The device, similar to an Army badge, shows that Sailors are proficient in their unique warfare skills and in their knowledge of Marine skills.

The Corpsmen had to go through months of studying a myriad of basic Marine skills like land navigation, first aid, weapons qualification, Marine rank structure and Marine history to help better understand their counterparts.

There's a lot of memorization for the corpsmen to tackle as well as a hands on portions of the test. Then they have to go through two tests and an oral board before finally being certified for the device.

To prepare for all the requirements, it took about three months of studying every day for Petty Officer David Shultz, company administration tech, and Combat Life Saver instructor. "It makes you look good; makes you look dedicated and motivated to succeed. The whole attitude is different; the Marines are stricter and more motivated."

The Corpsmen had to find time to study



Courtesy photo

Petty Officer 1st Class Lance Chennault, lead petty officer, pins Petty Officer 3rd Class Danny Smith, field medical technician, with his Fleet Marine Force Warfare Device.

and prepare for this all while giving medical support to nearly all of Kuwait. The unit arrived Feb. 23 and took the mission over March 9. During that time, they treated 21,633 out patients, gave 6,504 immunizations, took 1320 x-rays, had 266 admissions to their clinics across the theater and called in 250 medical evacuations - a third of them airlift - and they still found time to excel. "I'm proud of them. They showed a lot of initiative. I just facilitated the environment for them to study," Meeting said.



After a year up north, 1st ID Soldiers unload their vehicles. After all vehicles are unloaded, their next stop is the washrack.

Their tour finished, 1st ID heads for home

After a rough start, Big Red One picked up their spirits and their shovels, building a camp from the ground up

story and photos by Spc. Aimee Felix

After a warning order gave them 30 days to prepare for a year away from home, a quiet, unassuming staff sergeant prepared for that final kiss goodbye to his three children and wife of 12 years; a young private first class squeezed in a month of married life after making the love of his life his bride; a spirited sergeant mourned the loss of his dynamic life, and a first lieutenant, having joined the Army right after four years of college away from his family, was ready and unfazed.

Thirty days later, it was go time, and having no idea what their mission was, morale was low. After several days of travel and processing through Kuwait, they convoyed

out to Rhamadi finally arriving at their base camp. And there was their mission – to build this desolate open sandpit called Camp Junction City from the ground up. Morale wasn't getting any better.

After a year in Rhamadi, these 1st Infantry Division Soldiers with 1st platoon, A Company, 1st Engineer Battalion are on their way home. The entire division will be redeploying with stories to tell and memories to keep, but these four Soldiers share their stories here.

When Platoon Leader 1st Lt. Rich Bedelewski, Platoon Sergeant Sgt. 1st Class Frank Salajctik, Sgt. Thomas Blue and Pfc. Douglas Brown arrived at Rhamadi, the only

signs of former life were a few buildings once used as barracks by the Iraqi Republican National Guard.

Soon enough, the 1st Engineers made these into air-conditioned barracks for American troops. "Everything we had, we built up ourselves," said Blue.

As engineers, their first priority was force protection, said Beledewski. Until then, a single berm was the only thing that provided protection and distinguished the entrance of the camp from the rest of the desert.

The engineers broadened the perimeter of the camp, surrounding it with 17 kilometers of concertina wire. They also built a gate and raised the berms. They took over the gate and wrote the standard operating procedures for the camp's force protection.

Things started looking up when, after three months of MREs and MKTs, the Thanksgiving gods sent them a dining facility, which opened on Thanksgiving Day. "Once you get a DFAC up and running, everything's good," said Blue. An Internet Café, a PX and many other amenities soon followed.

There were definitely other lighter notes, the lightest of which came at the cost of a very scared Geraldo Rivera. Bedelewski stops laughing long enough to tell the story.

"We were providing support after a fire-fight, policing up the damage. Geraldo pulls up with his little entourage as I'm pulling out a bunch of artillery rounds from the ground. He was asking questions about what we were finding. And I started telling him about it and how when pulling the rounds out of the ground you have to be very careful because some of it could be an (improvised



1st Infantry Division Soldier Sgt. 1st Class George Parker guides Spc. Derrick Draeger, also with the 1st ID, off a flatbed, keeping the vehicle aligned.

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This unassuming setup holds the Mobile Parts Hospital.



This M-249 SAW pintle with a weldable weapon mount is one of the most popular items units ask for.

Metal MacGyvers make anything

Fabricating solutions – one part at a time

story and photos by Spc. Brian Trapp

Hidden among lines of warehouses on Camp Arifjan may be the answer to a commander's maintenance problems. It's the Mobile Parts Hospital of the Forward Repair Activity.

When a unit is in a pinch before moving forward to Iraq, the hospital can make just about any needed part. Weldable weapon mount adapters including improved M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon and .50 Caliber pintle mounts, the newest in battlefield-chic, give Soldiers a wider field of fire than the stock mounts.

Tucked away between Buildings 504 and 505, an unassuming shipping container houses a high-tech computerized metal lathe named the Mazak Integrex 100-IISY and two machinists who know how to use it well. Together, they can fabricate parts as well as Paul Jr. from Orange County Choppers.

Some equipment requests have been

solved with a same-day turn around.

"We can do anything. We've even taken Soldiers' ideas and turned them into realities," said Tim Ponzi, senior position machinist project engineer with the Mobile Parts Hospital.

One of those ideas is the improved weapons mounting pintle that Ponzi helped develop with other engineer teams. It features taller tabs and raised points that enable Soldiers to aim at elevated targets that they may not have been able to hit in the past due to the original pintle's movement restrictions.

Most of the orders to the shop have been for weapons mounts, but they've also fabricated old, hard to find truck parts and specialty tools.

"The Soldiers come to us with a problem, and the team here put their heads together and come up with the solution," said Matt Middleton, Mobile Parts Hospital administrator. The team has also developed a sightpost adjustment tool for the M-16 and the M-249 SAW. Their services are already paid for with a contract through U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, so the



Matt Middleton, Mobile Parts Hospital administrator, takes measurements on a new part while entering them into a computer. The whole process took less than a half hour.



Tim Ponzi, senior position machinist project engineer with the Mobile Parts Hospital, recalibrates the Mazak Integrex 100-IISY for bit changes.

units aren't charged for their orders.

"We just want more people to know we're here," Middleton said. "We thought we'd be swamped when 2nd (Infantry Division) came through, but only one unit made an order.

"We see hundreds of people walk by each day, but no one knows what this place is."

There are plans to set up two more Mobile Parts Hospitals, one in Balad and one in Afghanistan.

"We've even taken Soldiers' ideas and turned them into realities."

"It's by far the best job I've ever had," Middleton said. "The parts actually have a meaning, and we're here helping someone out."

The Mobile Parts Hospital is located between buildings 504 and 505. The hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. For more information contact at DSN 430-7010.



ESPN employee Jamie Faust operates a live slow motion system. Affectionately referred to as Elvis by the ESPN crew, the system allows Faust to simultaneously replay, edit and record live broadcasts.

Calling all sports fans

story and photos by Spc. Curt Cashour

It was a flurry of activity. Soldiers hurriedly added sandbags to a bunker, while several others made last-minute adjustments to the camouflage netting covering a nearby tent. As the project neared completion, a sergeant major and a few officers stood in the middle of it all plotting the next move.

"It looks like a movie set," said an observer with an awe-struck look on his face. He wasn't that far off.

A week earlier, the building housing the tent and bunker was a half-empty warehouse containing nothing but a few hundred vacant bunk beds. Now it's the provisional home to one of cable television's most popular shows.

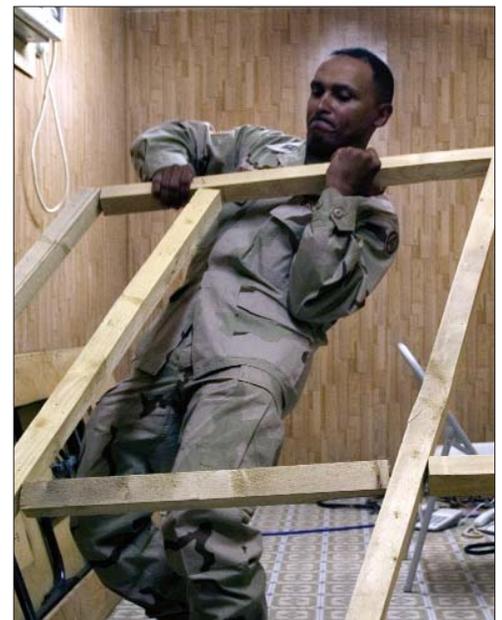
ESPN has brought SportsCenter to Camp

Arifjan, Kuwait for a week of live broadcasts and story segments. While the purpose of the visit is to chronicle the lives of American troops deployed to the Middle East, the tale behind what it took to bring the show to Kuwait is an interesting story in and of itself.

The announcement in late August by ESPN officials to bring SportsCenter to Kuwait put network employees in a crunch for time, shortening a shipping process that usually takes a couple months into only two-and-a-half weeks, Mike Armatta, ESPN technical manager, said.

The first pieces of equipment began arriving at the show's temporary studio at Camp Arifjan's Building 511 Sept. 4, with the setup process scheduled to begin the following day. The arrivals, however, merely marked the start of a days-long waiting game with Kuwaiti customs.

Getting through customs can be a pain for the average person, but it's nothing compared to the debacle ESPN faced. The network had to clear a collection of cameras, monitors, lights and other equipment brought



Capt. John Sensley, Camp Arifjan's housing/environmental officer rips down a wall frame in preparation for ESPN.

in from several countries in more than 800 boxes with a combined weight of nearly 26 tons.

Making matters even more difficult were Kuwaiti customs officials. Many Kuwaitis have a less work-centric attitude than Americans or other westerners. The cultural clash left the ESPN crew at the mercy of a Kuwaiti customs employee who only worked three to four hours a day.

Little by little, equipment trickled in, but construction on the set could not begin until an instrumental piece—the truss system—arrived. The system is basically the infrastructure of the set. It hangs from the ceiling and holds the combination of lights, cables and projectors needed to put on a live show. Without it, the set would have to wait.

As crew members waited, servicemembers and civilians from various units and organizations sprung into action, helping transform the sprawling warehouse into something a little more broadcast friendly. The work was a lesson in military ingenuity, with troops and civilians using a mix of elbow grease and creativity to meet ESPN's needs and solve problems on the spot.

"To save money, we tried to utilize as many military resources and supplies as we had," said Army Maj. Larry Crowl, operations and plans officer for the Coalition Forces Land Component Command Public Affairs Office.

The work varied in scale and scope and included everything from arranging for high-speed Internet and phone service, to making sure ESPN would have enough electricity to power its army of equipment.

Using items from closed-down camps and patriot missile sites around Kuwait, workers with Arifjan's Directorate of Public Works out-



Blitz Lighting, Sound and Video employee Ross Baker, a New Zealand native, rigs cables for a projector ESPN will use for its live SportsCenter broadcasts.

Want to know how to get in on the action? While the studio audiences have already been picked by the senior noncommissioned officer leadership from different units around Kuwait, you can still view all of ESPN's Salute the Troops broadcasts in real time on Armed Forces Network Sports. The live shows will air in Kuwait 8 to 9 a.m. today through Saturday. That translates to 1 to 2 a.m., according to US Eastern Standard Time.

fitted the building with a completely new electrical system, said Al Cottone, DPW's electrical engineering technician.

"It's basically like building a power cell to run the equivalent of a city block in a week's time," said Army Sgt. Stephen Miller, DPW's lead electrician.

In case of a power outage, Cottone and Miller have two massive 400 kilowatt generators on standby. According to Miller's estimates, the two generators are capable of providing enough electricity to power approximately 26 large Army tents.

Meanwhile, members of the Army's 854th

Engineer Detachment worked to customize four modified shipping containers into rooms for tasks such as editing and applying graphics. The Soldiers even outfitted the containers with air conditioners to cool those working in them and their equipment.

At about 9 p.m. Sept. 7, the truss system finally arrived. Crew members from ESPN and three companies the network hired to assist with technical operations, Vertigo Rigging, Charter Broadcast and Blitz Lighting, Sound and Video, worked until about 2 a.m. the next morning mounting the system and rigging it with the four projectors and 140 different lights that will be used during the broadcasts.

The arrival of the system put an end to the waiting game many crew members described as a logistical nightmare, and paved the way for the final set preparations and satellite tests that took place Sept. 9 and 10.

By the time network satellites beamed the first live images of Camp Arifjan back to the United States Sept. 11, more than 250 servicemembers and civilian employees from various units and organizations had assisted ESPN and its crew with nearly every aspect of the visit.

The cooperation of the troops seemed to impress many among the ESPN crew, including Mike McQuade, SportsCenter's senior coordinating producer.

"In many instances we pay to broadcast from places and don't get the kind of cooperation we've gotten here," he said.

Crowl cites a simple reason for all the activity and support.

"Why are we putting in all this work? Because we're not only Soldiers, we're sports fans," he said.



Pete Edwards, lighting crew chief and electrician for Blitz Lighting, Sound and Video, adjusts light levels. Blitz and its sister company, Charter Broadcast, provided ESPN with technical equipment and crew members for the network's activities in Kuwait.



Bunker up

story by Spc. Aimee Felix

photo by Sgt. Matt Millham

Turning the ESPN set green

It took 500 sandbags, 20 bags worth of camouflage netting, a tent and two bunkers to set up this mock battleground.

In a show that for one week will honor the dedication of deployed troops, all of this equipment, plus an Abrams tank and a camera stand disguised as a guard tower was just right.

With a cascade of camouflage netting for a backdrop, the stage of ESPN's flagship program, SportsCenter, was set to fit this week's theme, "Salute the Troops."

We want to say thank you to the Soldiers, honor them and honor those who lost their

lives in 9/11, said ESPN executives.

Stage director Dave Weiler wanted the works as far as tactical equipment goes in order to create a military motif that truly represented the troops and their environment. "I want it to look as Hooah as possible."

Army Master Sgt. Brian T. Washington, who organized the military work and supplies and provided the military insight needed for the stage-setting, met with Weiler to help carry out his vision. Born of their meeting was the tactical scene now assembled in Camp Arifjan's Building 511.

Camouflage netting and an American flag on the back of the stage fill in the gaps between two bunkers and a tent, which serves as the centerpiece of the back of the stage. It also covers the disaster zone of electrical cords and wires behind the stage.

With bunkers flanking both sides of the stage and walls of sandbags, the ESPN sportscasters occupy one of the most heavily-fortified spaces on Camp Arifjan.

It took four Soldiers from the 114th Area Support Group out of Haddysburg, Miss., five hours to build the bunkers, but they didn't mind.

"It breaks the monotony, plus I hear the Soldiers involved in the detail get front row seats," said Army Cpl. David Nelson.

The extra weight of all of the combat emplacements, sports desks, monitors and cameras forced the troops to reinforce the stage from underneath with extra lumber.

The stage is split into two areas. One is for interviewing and sports talk and debate with individual troops. The other is for the main part of the show, which faces and addresses the audience of about 500 troops



photo by Spc. Curt Cashour

Sgt. Marcus Johnson of the 80th Ordnance Battalion spreads sand around the set of ESPN's "Salute the Troops" edition of SportsCenter Thursday. Johnson was part of a group of 18 Soldiers deployed to Camp Arifjan who helped militarize the set.

seated on a set of bleachers, 50 cots, an Abrams tank and a small set of bleachers. The back of the bleachers are also covered in camouflage netting.

Between the bleachers and vehicles there is a camera stand, which has also been militarized – disguised to look like a guard tower. The camera is set as high as possible on a platform, and camouflage netting covers the entire "tower," except for the view of the camera.

In three days the entire set was militarized by 18 Soldiers from the 809th Quarter Master's Battalion, 80th Ordnance and the 114th ASG., meeting Weiler's vision to a tee. For all their hard work they will be rewarded with front row seats, just as Nelson said.

It'll be a nice sight for family members watching at home to see – their guys having fun in their environment, said Washington.

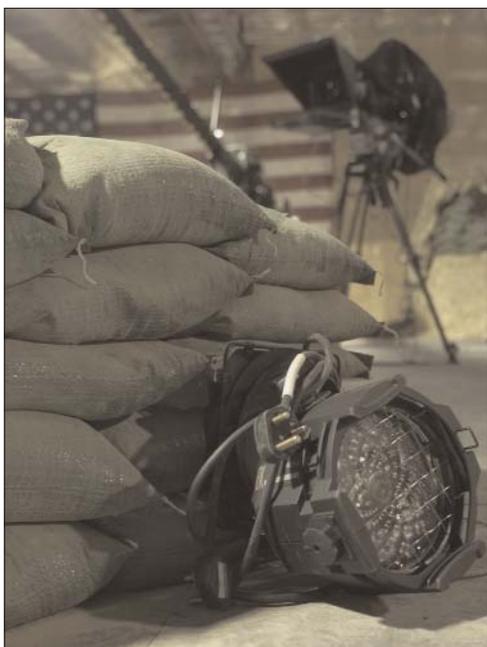


photo by Sgt. Matt Millham

Lights, camera, sandbag – all part of the ESPN stage at Camp Arifjan's Building 511.

Tourney starts with 26-0 blowout

The ESPN flag football tournament kicked off with a shutout match between two Arifjan transportation companies

story and photos by Spc. Brian Trapp

The ESPN flag football tournament started off with a blowout when the 175th Transportation Company walked off the field with a 26-0 victory over the 2123rd Transportation Company Heavy Equipment Transport.

"We executed well," said Calvin Hart, coach for the 175th. "This is our first game playing together playing as a company."

Despite the fact the team was only recently assembled, the 175th worked together with the efficiency of a well-oiled machine.

The game started off with both teams in a defensive grudge match, neither able to make it to the end zone. Even after the 175th pulled down a potentially momentum-halting interception from the 2123rd, they failed to capitalize on the turnover.

"We started out slow, but we finally got settled," said 175th quarterback Dwayne Watson. When all the pieces finally fell into place late in the first half, the 2123rd could do little to stop the onslaught of the 175th offense.

The 2123rd made a slow drive out of their territory near the end of the first half, but at



Michael Mayes with the 175th walks out of the endzone after scoring a 2-point conversion.



Dwayne Watson of the 175th Transportation Company is snagged just feet from the endzone during a pivotal drive that ended with a touchdown for the 175th.

the 50-yard line, their hopes were shot down like a skinny kid asking out the prom queen when the 175th defense stopped the drive in its tracks.

"Our defense was dynamic, everything (just) came together," Hart said.

From there, the 175th started off at mid-field, and after a couple east-west plays, they completed a Hail Mary pass when it counted, putting them within 5 yards of the end zone. Watson stepped up to the challenge when he scrambled the ball over the line to get the first touchdown with less than 10 seconds left in the half.

"I wasn't keeping count of the scores," said Watson, who was responsible for the majority of the game's points. With his head so deep into playing, he didn't even know the final score.

The 175th racked up two more touchdowns, one by Anthony McDonald and another by Watson after the 2-minute warning. After working their way down the field with a quick drive into the red zone, Watson scrambled wide taking the ball over the goal line and put the last nail in the coffin for the 2123rd with 26 unanswered points.

The 2123rd made several attempts for the long pass, but they couldn't complete it. On the final play of the game, the 175th intercepted a deep pass attempt and ran back to within 5 yards of another touchdown.

The win was both sweet and easy for the 175th, but this early in the tournament, they



David Taylor, quarterback for the 2123rd Transportation Company (HET), lobs a pass over the head of rusher Lee Wilson of the 175th Transportation Company.

aren't resting on any laurels.

"We'll just come out and start fresh [next time]," said Watson. "Every game we'll have to play like our last."

A look back and a hopeful forward

short story submitted by Maj. Yvette Rose, 379th Chemical Company

The sand grains beat on the sides of the tent, playing an off-key musical. I sat up straight on my cot when I heard the crashing of what sounded like uncoordinated gunfire. I braced my weapon, checking the grooves of the magazine. I settled with myself that tonight would be another one eye open, one eye closed restless night.

I got used to it over the course of a day. I had to. Time was not my ally. My body and mind became conditioned to five hours of sporadic catnaps. The nights the sand storms played opossum were the good nights but they were still filled with sweaty anticipation. I couldn't tell if I was wet from the heat or wet from the sweat of fear.

God decided to bless us with another breath. The dawning of a new day energized me. His grace and mercy hid my trauma of nightfall when rest was much needed but unattainable.

Life has never been so good. When your closeness is having your left hand near the trigger housing and your right hand holding steady your weapon. Life has never been so good. I've seen the vapor floating about the desert. Although the camp is "safe" for the moment, the threat of mass destruction is present daily. It's been over one hundred days and the vapor still floats about the

desert making all attempts possible to dodge God's grace and avoid His mercy.

I ask myself; Can you say a prayer just for today? Our Father which art in heaven. Thank you for the smallest thing yet the greatest need. Breath. The night stars illuminate the desert. The moon shakes hands with the unbearable temperatures. I go about my day thanking God, trying not to worry and praying for my family.

Hallowed be thy name...Lord You have to take care of us. Our family needs us. I hold tight my weapon wondering if it's enough to protect me, my spirit, my soul. I check again for the magazine. It's still in the well of the weapon. I shift my shoulders to let them rest from the weight of the body armor. I am reluctant to take it off. Life's a vapor. You just never know when...

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done. One night I slept. I mean really closed both eyes. I woke the morning refreshed. In earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day. He did. It has been four years and another day. Four years is a long time of praising God. Singing glory unto Him. Fighting for freedom for my children and loved ones. But one minute in a hostile environment is pure acceleration of a four-year miracle. One more day in the hostility of the war zone is an eternity anywhere else. Thy daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. To my family, to your family, to our soldiers, to my daughter who will grace the grounds in a few months, to those whose lives were the threshold of terrorism's unveiling, to fear, to agony, to defeat, to victory, to

a first tour of a twenty year old and a fifth tour of a fifty year old, to good times over seas and hope for America and to decades of God's continued blessing, I have a dream that one day world peace will become reality. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

I am calling God's name for I enjoy living in America and I love life no matter how much turmoil we go through, no matter how big a mess man has made for us and because someone isn't here so that I can enjoy another breath. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory...Continue to pray and believe. It's not the ground on which one stands; it's what you have to work with while you're standing there.

And for now... I GOT GOD

My weapon fully loaded to warn my enemies. My body armor heavy and sturdy to physically protect me. My kevlar to prevent a shot of sniper fire. My goggles to keep the dust out of my eyes. My desert dressed uniform to keep me camouflaged and blends me with the sand. But even with all that gear I carry, the ultimate protection is carried in my right hand.

All my life I have been blessed and so has my entire family. We carry our love for each other's protection and trust God's Word that we will forever be free. Another year and growing though from where I stay it's all smashed into one day. But I know in four years since tragedy struck our beautiful country God has been there and today marks the promise that He will ALWAYS make a way.

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explosive device). No sooner did I say that when one of my sergeants starts yelling that he found a live wire, but he immediately realized it was a root, but by then Geraldo had already sprinted half way to his vehicle."

Being around the locals was at times also fun for them. When they weren't getting shot at, the engineers were well-received. Many of the Iraqis understood that searching their homes was just part of their job, not a direct violation of their privacy. "Sometimes they'd offer us tea, food and even to kill a lamb for us," said Bedelewski. Many times the guys played soccer with the locals too. "It's funny because none of us knew how to speak each other's language, but we'd sit there and somehow have hour-long conversations."

Their mission changed on a daily basis. When they weren't building something they were conducting weapons searches and raids downtown, said Beledewski.

After a few weapons searches, they started developing a reputation for being the "bloodhounds of weapons caches" and the

"cache kings."

On one occasion, Blue spotted a rocket launcher hidden in some weeds while driving 30 mph in downtown Rhamadi.

"It's great when you find this stuff because that means the enemy has one less weapon to use to kill one of your own," said Bedelewski.

Their skills shined again when a National Guard unit called for A Company's support in a raid the Guard unit was leading. In this search, the engineers found the largest weapons cache found in Rhamadi at the time.

And right before leaving, A Company found the top regime leader in Rhamadi. He was on the division level most-wanted list and had an excess amount of mortars on his property, said Blue.

The 1st Engineers also supported other units conducting firefights downtown. "Basically, we'd get a call requesting support to pull out their wounded and help them stop the fight," said Bedelewski.

These missions were the scariest for Bedelewski – "not knowing what to expect when we'd go in," he said.

Even scarier yet was the drive there and back, said Blue. "You never knew when there'd be an IED waiting for your vehicle to cross its path. When someone's shooting RPGs at you, the initial blast is scary, but at least you know where it's coming from."

For Brown, the stories told by others were enough to keep him wary and respectful of the terror either one of them could face.

A long year of raids on duty and DVDs during off-time is now over, and the bunch agrees they are more than ready for their freedom. Living under another culture's rules and the stringent rules that come with a deployment was quite an eye opener to the great freedom we Americans have, said Bedelewski.

"It was hard to leave the U.S., but you get past it – it's your job," said Salajctik. A year later, they're past it and ready to go home to their families and a regular life.

In & Around Our Community

Special and weekly events around Kuwait's U.S. military community for Sept. 15-22, 2004

Special Events: Arifjan

Wednesday

Jazz Night, 7 p.m. at the Community Center

Thursday

Movies under the stars, 7 p.m. at the MWR stage

Friday

Hispanic Heritage Month Music Night, 7 p.m. at the Community Center

Troop Idol Contest, week 2, 7:30 p.m. at the MWR stage

Saturday

Unit Board Art Contest, 7 p.m. at the Community Center

Hispanic Heritage Month 5K Run, 6 a.m. at the Zone 1 gym

Sunday

Uno Tournament, 7 p.m. at the Community Center

Wednesday

Bingo Night, 7 p.m. at the Community Center

Weekly Events: Arifjan

Wednesday

Arabic Language Classes, 6 p.m. at the MWR library

Aero Step 6 a.m., Ab Floor Workout 8 a.m., Aero Step 10 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 1 p.m. at Zone 1 gym tent

High Impact Aerobics, 7 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

Thursday

Martial Arts, 7 p.m. Spinning Class, 6 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

Friday

High Impact Aerobics, 7 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

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

Saturday

Aero Step 6 a.m., Ab Floor Workout 8 a.m., Aero Step 10 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 1 p.m., Aero Step 3 p.m. at Zone 1 gym tent

Martial Arts, 7 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

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

Sunday

Arabic Language Classes, 6 p.m. at the MWR library

Cardio Pump Kick Boxing 6 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 8 a.m., Ab Floor Workout 10 a.m.,

Upper and Lower Body Workout 1 p.m., Cardio Pump Kick Boxing 3 p.m. at Zone 1 gym tent

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

Monday

Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m. at the MWR stage

Aero Step 6 a.m., Ab Floor Exercise 8 a.m., Aero Step 10 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 1 p.m., Aero Step 3 p.m. at Zone 1 gym tent

High Impact Aerobics, 7 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

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

Tuesday

Beginning Arabic Language Class, 7 p.m. at Bldg. 508

Spa Day, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

Cardio Pump Kick Boxing 6 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 8 a.m., Ab Floor Exercise 10 a.m., Upper and Lower Body Workout 1 p.m., Cardio Pump Kick Boxing 3 p.m. at Zone 1 gym tent

Martial Arts, 7 p.m. Spinning Class, 6 p.m. at Zone 2 gym tent

Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m.

Religious Services: Arifjan

Catholic Mass

Sunday, noon at the Zone 1 Chapel

Saturday, 5:30 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

Contemporary Christian Services

Sunday, 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

Traditional Christian Services

Sunday, 9 a.m. at the Zone 2 Chapel and 7 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

General Protestant Services

Sunday, 8 a.m. at the Arlington Chapel and 10:30 a.m. at the Bldg. 6 Conf. Room

Gospel Worship

Sunday, 2:15 at the Post Theater

Saturday, 7 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

Friday, 7 p.m. at the Camden DFAC

Episcopal/Lutheran

Saturday, 3 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

Seventh Day Adventist

Saturday, 10 a.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel

Spanish Protestant Worship and Studies

Sunday, 11 a.m. at the Zone 2 Chapel and 2 p.m. at Arlington Chapel

Latter Day Saints

Sunday, 5:30 p.m. at the Zone 2 Chapel

POC Randall Palmar, 920-7328

Islam Jumu'ah

Friday, noon at the Zone 1 Chapel

Bible Studies

Sunday, 9 p.m. at the Zone 2 DFAC

Monday, 7 p.m. at Arlington Chapel

Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel, Room 13

Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the Zone 2 Chapel

Wednesday, 7 p.m. at Arlington Chapel

Wednesday, 8 p.m. at the Camden DFAC

Thursday, 7 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel, Rooms 9 and 13

Saturday, 6 p.m. at the Zone 1 Chapel, Rm. 13

For more information call Zone 1 Chapel at DSN 430-1387

If in urgent need of a chaplain call cell# 754-3803

If you have an event you want listed in this section of the Desert Voice or that you think might make a good story, please contact the Desert Voice editor at: matthew.millham@arifjan.arcent.army.mil

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Send your event to us at
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Special Events: Doha

Wednesday

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

Saturday

Hip Hop Dance Night, 7 p.m. at Frosty's

Tuesday

Amateur Darts Tournament, 7 p.m. at Frosty's

Wednesday

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

Weekly Events: Doha

Friday

Country Dance Night, 7 p.m. at Frosty's

Sunday

Spa Day, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Marble Palace

Unit Feud, 7 p.m. at Frosty's

Monday

Unit Feud, 7 p.m. at Frosty's

New shuttle bus schedule

Departs Doha Stop 1 (Behind Bldg. 6 PAX tent)	Arrives Doha Stop 2 (Between Bldg. 28&31)	Departs Doha Stop 2	Arrives Arifjan	Departs Arifjan	Arrives Doha Stop 1
				0545	
		0545	0700	0715	0830
	0700	0715	0830	0845	1000
0845	0900	0915	1030	1045	1200
1015	1025	1040	1200	1300	1430
1300	1310	1325	1430	1445	1600
1445	1450	1505	1615	1630	1745
1615	1625	1640	1800	1900	2015
1900	1910	1925	2045	2100	2215
2030	2040	2055	2215	2230	2345
2230	2240	2300	0030		

Freedom Fighter

by Private 1st Class Michael E. Mack, 1st Maintenance Company

As now I'm here, hours away from me being six feet under
Look at these people I don't even know cry
Why cry for an unknown soldier?
I did my job and it was a job I was proud to do
With my job came a feeling of honor and respect that
couldn't come with any other job.

As now I lay here with the United States' flag draped over my little box
A mother of two weeps even harder
"Momma, momma don't you cry, your little boy ain't gonna die"
Oh how I wished that song I once sang was true
I did my job mom, I did it well
I'm sorry mom for coming home like this
But there's no need to cry mom, everything will work out for the best
I did my job well, very damn well!

This nation bleeds a tear for the fallen soldier
But do not sit there and cry for me
Help out those I left behind
For I am a father, a mother, a son or daughter
I'm someone's best friend or just that someone who just says "hi"

Yes its true I'm gone but like I asked before, help out those I've left behind
Although I did my job well, my job is far from over
Freedom is what we fight for and freedom isn't cheap
We are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters
We mean something to someone in our lives
And that, my friend, is worth fighting for

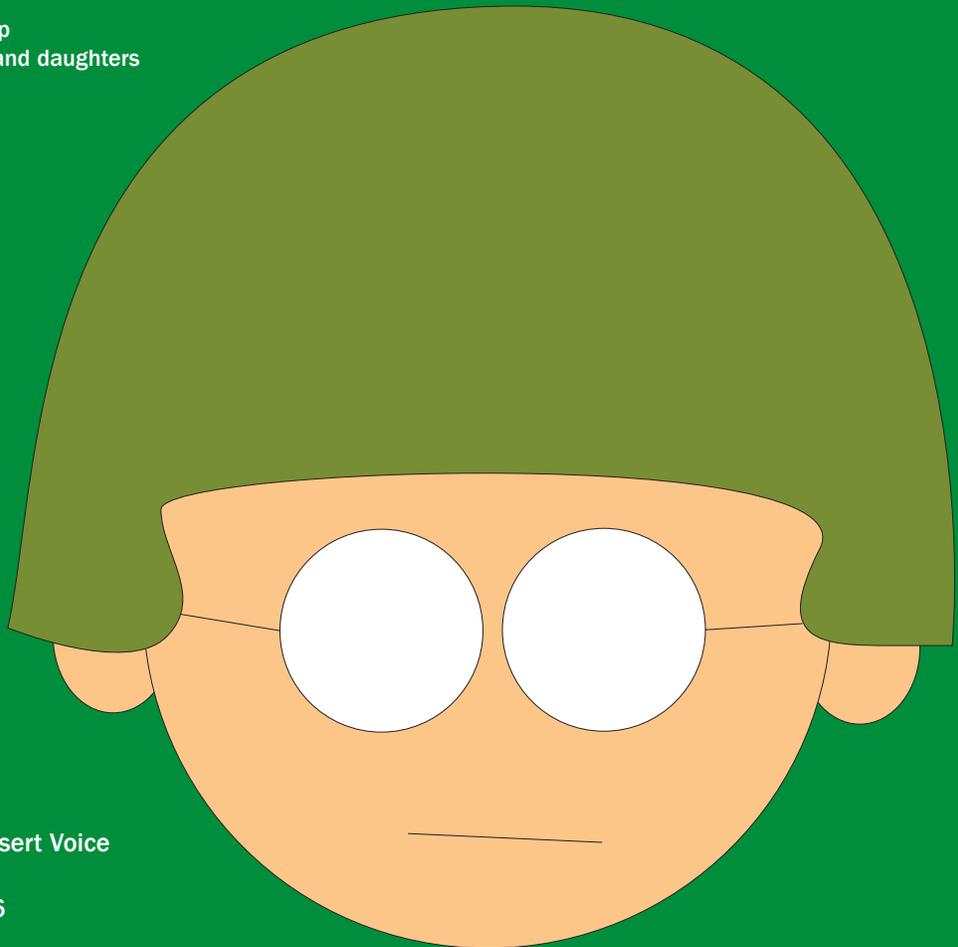
Guard and Reserve Troops!

Do you have an employer issue?

For help e-mail: ESGR@arifjan.arcent.army.mil

Do you have a supportive employer?

Recommend your employer for the Patriot Award at www.ESGR.com or ESGR@arifjan.arcent.army.mil



**DESERT
VOICE**

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