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Troops and Kuwaitis gather for cultural shindig in desert

by SGT Vanessa Bagley, 377th PAO

The Arab musicians and dancers with swords might have been the first clue that it wouldn't be a typical Friday for a group of servicemembers deployed to Kuwait.

The Americans snapped pictures and joined the dancing as the performers greeted them at the entrance

to a recreational camp near Camp Arifjan March 19.

Sheik Fahad Al-Sabah and the Kuwait Scientific Center had invited the group for a Kuwaiti cultural event.

The event was conceived after Kuwaiti female students visited Camp Arifjan to meet female servicemembers January 28, according to Kuwaiti police Maj. Tareq Aldosari, Camp Arifjan's liaison officer.

Planners were just waiting for the right time to hold the event.

"We chose this time to celebrate two occasions - the liberation of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait," said Tareq.

The date was significant because March 19 marked one year since the United States began Operation Iraqi Freedom. Only a few weeks earlier marked the 13th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation from Iraqi occupation on February 26.

"We are deeply grateful to the United States for liberating Kuwait in 1991 and also ... for liberating Iraq and getting rid of the dictator and regime that posed the instability and threat ... to the region," said Sheik Fahad Al-Sabah at the event.

The Kuwaitis demonstrated their gratitude that evening by offering servicemembers a chance to experience Arab culture.

Guests rode camels, smoked shisha tobacco and viewed a display of old Kuwait.

"I was amazed by their culture," said Spc. Rachael Emond from the 50th Area Support Group. "They took such good care of us."

Breaded olives, honey-soaked pastries and shots of hot tea were served to guests between activities.

As the Al-Safi Band took a break between songs, Kuwaiti and American representatives took the stage to exchange gifts and certificates of appreciation.

"This is a historic moment. We are very lucky to be here representing the American armed forces," said

Brig. Gen.

Michael Diamond, commander of the 377th Theater Support Command, at the event.

The Kuwaitis handed out gifts to every servicemember as a line began to form for the Arabic buffet. Females received ornamental scarves, and males received traditional head-dresses and prayer beads.

Guests scattered to outdoor tables carrying plates piled high with different Arabic foods. The evening turned dark and cool as everyone finished dinner, and the Kuwaitis and Americans said their goodbyes.

"To compare this activity with a regular Friday at Arifjan is impossible," said Spc. Rosa Mori from the 50th Area Support Group, reflecting on the evening. "Having the opportunity to go there was awesome!"



Army Soldiers Pfc. Daisy Perez (blue jacket) and Spc. Rosa Mori (black shirt), both of the 50th Area Support Group, practice their swordsmanship with Kuwaitis at the start of a cultural exchange between American service members and civilians and their Kuwaiti hosts.



Unit Spotlight

3rd PERSCOM turns over authority for OIF operations to the 348th Personnel Group

By Staff Sgt. Nate Orme
3rd PERSCOM PAO

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait (March 24, 2004)-The 3rd Personnel Command passed responsibility for providing the military's personnel service support for operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom to the 348th Personnel Group in a cere-



Col. Donald Kennedy (facing) and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Jay Preston furl the colors of the 3rd PERSCOM after turning over authority for personnel services operations in the OIF theater to the 348th Per Gp during a ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

mony at the camp theater Tuesday.

Col. Donald Kennedy, commander of the 3rd PERSCOM, transferred theater-level personnel operations authority to Col. Brenda Smith, commander of the 348th Per Gp, based in New Orleans, La. During the ceremony, Kennedy was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his performance in leading the 3rd PERSCOM.

The transfer of authority came nearly a year after the main element of the 3rd PERSCOM arrived in theater to continue operations set up by its advance elements.

The year proved to be one continually hallmarked by swift and dramatic adaptation to war's

demands and its realities for the Jackson, Miss.-based unit. Many personnel operations were radically updated from doctrine or were totally new operations created while in theater, said a 3rd PERSCOM spokesman.

OIF was the largest mission the 3rd PERSCOM has tackled in its history, and it has set the standard for others to aspire to for some time to come, Kennedy said.

During the war on terror, the 3rd PERSCOM has had subordinate units scattered from Kuwait to Iraq to Djibouti, and technical oversight for units in Afghanistan.

"The 3rd PERSCOM truly added value to this theater," said Kennedy. "Our services touched every single Soldier in this theater. We delivered 100 million

pounds of mail; filed over 12,000 casualty reports; processed 50,000 soldiers for R&R

and processed more than 120,000 Soldiers through the DCS CONPLAN (a program to prepare redeploying soldiers to return home)."

Addressing the 348th Per Gp, Kennedy added, "The challenge I leave you with is to maintain your focus on the warrior. There are Soldiers fighting and dying everyday in the streets of Baghdad, Fallujah, and Tikrit. Keep them in mind, never forget that they depend on you. Good luck and Godspeed."

The main element of the 3rd PERSCOM is scheduled to redeploy home in the beginning of April but will continue to have an enduring presence in the OEF/OIF theater.

Soldier Talk

What person in history would you like to hang out and talk with?



Dr. King, for the things he went through to attain equal rights.

1st Sgt. Edd
During Jr.
A4-1 FA



John F. Kennedy. He knew when to fight and when to talk.

Spc. Michele
Rooker
740th Trans.Co.



Winston Churchill. He had a say in setting the borders for Iraq. I'd ask him his opinion of Iraq today.

Capt. Keith
Boring
4th I.D.



Jesus Christ, because it would be pretty cool to talk to him.

Capt. Gigi
DeGainé
104th M.I. Bn.



Pamela Anderson. She's got a great personality.

Spc. Darrell
Edwards
1168th Trans Co.



Michael Jordan, because he was one of the world's best basketball players.

Maj. Kenneth
Pittman
CFLCC Res. Aff.

OIF News

Let's roll—again: Equipment sees Iraq for second time during Operation Iraqi Freedom

By: Sgt. 1st Class Deborah Robichaux, CFLCC - PAO

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait - When 3rd Infantry Division troops and equipment rolled across the Kuwait border into Iraq last March, the division was one of the lead elements in Operation Iraqi Freedom. One year later, some of that same equipment is rolling across the border again.

It is common practice for military equipment to stay in a theater of operations after the unit it was initially issued to has completed its mission. The equipment undergoes extensive mechanical and cosmetic refurbishing and multiple safety checks before it is re-issued for use.

By chance, vehicles issued to A Company, 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry Regiment from Moses Lake, Wash., are returning to operations in Iraq one year after crossing the border the first time.

When A Company learned the Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles the unit would use for the next year were seasoned with combat, unit members were pleased.

"They are in great condition and I know they can take combat," said 2nd Lt. Drake L. Forrest from Missoula, Mont., during performance of preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) of the vehicles recently at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. "We're glad to have them."

"The real test will be when we move north, but I have confidence in them," Forrest said. As a 12-year Army veteran who has seen combat as an enlisted Soldier and now as A Company's executive officer, Forrest speaks with the voice of experience.



Navy combat cameraman Chief Petty Officer Daniel E. Smith from San Diego, Calif., assigned to Fleet Combat Camera Group Pacific, documents Sgt. 1st Class Joe I. Jones of the 1/7 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, out of Ft. Hood, Texas, providing security for a recent convoy operation in northern Kuwait. The footage is for an OIF deployment and redeployment familiarity video. (photo by Sgt. 1st Class Deborah Robichaux)



Pvt. Nicholas J. Bell, from Port Angeles, Wash., sits in the driver's hatch of a Bradley fighting vehicle after preventive maintenance checks and services recently at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Bell is a driver for A Company, 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry Regiment of Washington's National Guard.

"We have big shoes to fill," Forrest said of relieving an active Army unit. "But we have done some intense training, and I know we're prepared."

Sgt. Shawn D. Bentley, a veteran of Desert Storm and one of A Company's master gunners, said training at home station has prepared the unit for this mission.

"The vehicles are checked by our mechanics and they are prepared to fix any problems. This is exactly what we are trained to do," Bentley said. "But these are in great shape."

Ranging from defending settlers in the Territory of Washington to assisting in state emergencies such as the Mount Saint Helens eruption in 1980 and now serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 161st Infantry Regiment has a long-standing history of service. Now, with battle-tested equipment issued and preliminary training complete, A Company, 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry Regiment is ready to roll - again.



Sheik, rattle and roll: Kuwaitis and Americans gathered for an Arab feast March 19. Along with traditional regional music, Kuwaiti musicians showed their familiarity with current American tunes as well. In addition to music, appetizers, and dinner, there was a display of a typical Kuwaiti home from the colonial era, a chef cooking sweet bread using goose eggs, and a “hubbly-bubbly” pipe for the partaking, as well as a great chance to talk with Kuwaitis in a social setting.



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