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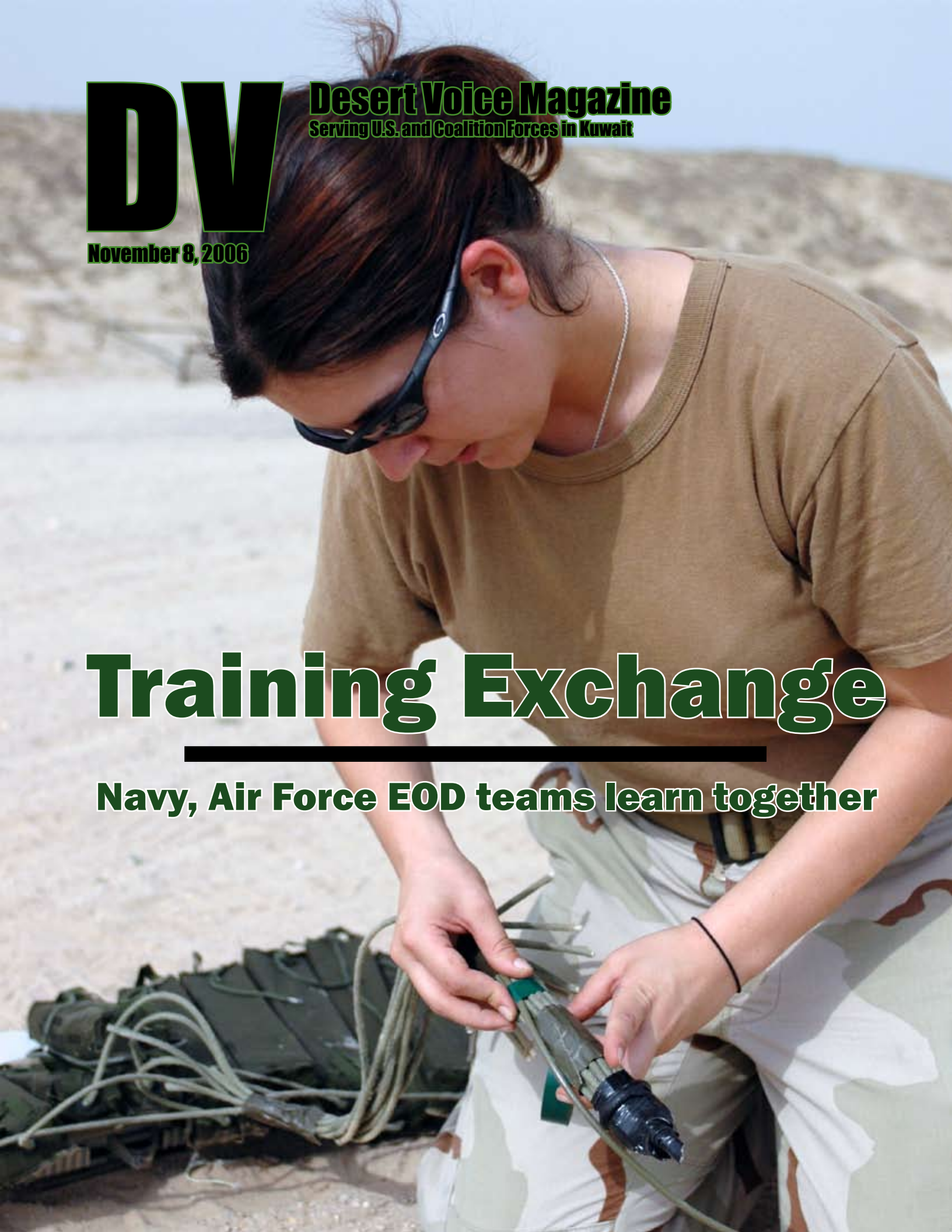
Desert Voice Magazine
Serving U.S. and Coalition Forces in Kuwait
November 8, 2006



Training Exchange

Navy, Air Force EOD teams learn together

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On the cover

Senior Airman Sarah Burill, an EOD technician with the 386th Expeditionary Civil Engineers Squadron, puts the final touches on the detonation cord shortly before the "fire in the hole" call.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin M. Buckley

FROM THE TOP

Veteran's Day
What does it represent to you?

A holiday. A speech. A parade. A day off work or "another day" in theater. That's what Veteran's Day, November 11th, may represent to some.

And yet for others, it is a chance to remember the sacrifices that have been made, so we can live as a free nation.

For those who have worn or are currently wearing the uniform of the United States of America, Veteran's Day represents the tremendous achievements made by men and women who have served.

Third Army Commanding General Lt. Gen. R. Steven Whitcomb

It represents the 19-year-old infantryman patrolling streets and villages in Ramadi, who wakes each day knowing it could be his last, but overcomes his fear and continues to do his best because he knows his squad is counting on him.

It represents a truck driver stationed at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, who re-enlisted in the Army after his first deployment because he wanted the camaraderie and sense of accomplishment and pride he felt being a Soldier.

It represents the 22-year-old Specialist who lies in a near-coma state in a Veterans' hospital in Tampa, Florida, as a result of a sniper's bullet in Iraq.

It represents a widow in Clarksville, Tennessee, whose husband was killed as he tried to quell a riot in Iraq in 2003. Although her parents asked, she refused to move back home because she wanted her two sons to stay in the close-knit Army community they had grown accustomed to.

It represents an aging World War II Veteran in Commerce, Georgia, who can barely remember a conversation last week, but can recall every detail of a B-17 bombing campaign 60 years ago.

Yes, for us and our families, November 11th represents something more.

Our Veterans represent the millions who have served around the world, preserving and ensuring democracy for the United States, and freedom for you and me.

November 11th represents the loved ones left behind, those struggling to live with disabilities, emotional scars and unforgettable memories of events far from home.

And it represents you and me today.

Each day we serve in places around the world you cannot spell or find on a map, simply because our Nation asks us to. You voluntarily forego fame, comfort and wealth. You face hardships and sacrifice. Sometimes you confront danger and face death in defending our Nation's security. By your actions, you live the Army's core values and represent the best our Nation has to offer.

To all of you who have ever served, are currently deployed, recently deployed or preparing to deploy again, I say 'thank you' for your contributions and your countless sacrifices. In our command, whether Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, Coast Guardsman or Soldier in Slacks, each of you is keeping America safe and America strong. I am honored to serve with you.

PATTON'S OWN!

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Turning old equipment into training aids

Photos and Story by
Spc. Debrah A. Robertson
***Desert Voice* Staff Writer**

Sgt. James Wright (photos 1,3,4 and 5), a HEAT instructor with the 377th Theater Support Command, and Sgt. 1st Class Kelly Comstock (photo 2), the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Camp Buehring HEAT, build dummy weapons for the HEAT participants.

The dummy weapons are constructed from recycled sleeping mats and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) tubing.

"We have [after-action reviews] at the end of every class and one big request we got was to have weapons inside the vehicle," said Wright. "We wanted the training aid we developed to have a real-world feel."

Using their personal weapons creates unnecessary risks to the Soldiers and the equipment, said Comstock.

The dummy weapon the team developed works well, said Sgt. 1st Class August Hernandez (photo 6), a clarinet player for the 1st Cavalry Division Band who recently went through the training on his way to Iraq.

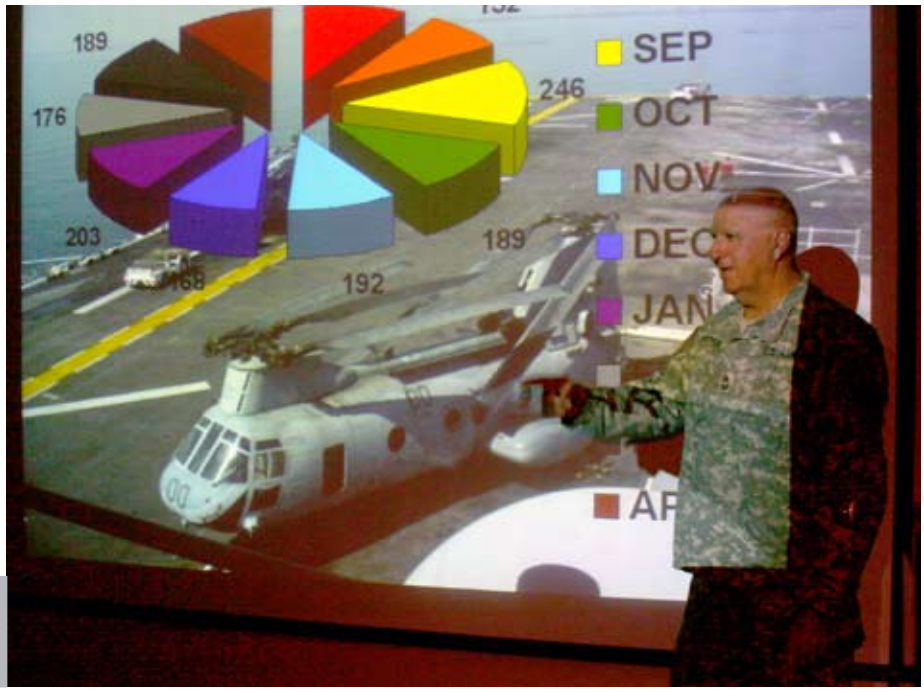
"[Using the dummy weapons] teaches them to keep their stuff secure. It teaches them not to flag their buddy while getting out of the vehicle," said Hernandez about his platoon.

Camp Buehring

Virtual Leaders Reconnaissance

Saving time, Saving money:

Providing leaders with eyes ahead



Master Sgt. Robert Bottom briefs training information.

Capt. Mike Wallace
377th TSC Public Affairs Officer

The Virtual Leaders Reconnaissance is no secret, but the money-saving program is unknown by military units that are deploying to Southwest Asia. This program can save military units money as they ready to deploy and train for their missions in theater.

The VLR, being conducted from Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, by the 377th Theater Support Command is a program designed for military units smaller than brigade size, or those units not authorized a leader's recon.

The purpose of the VLR is for those units to be able to inquire about their missions, their training, and their needs before they get into theater and need to do a leader's recon.

The 377th TSC is the "middle man" for the VLR, thereby optimizing informational exchanges between incoming/outgoing units.

"Units with a small population [below brigade level] that are not authorized a leader's recon to theater can and should utilize the VLR," said Lt. Col. Ralph Fehlberg, the plans officer for Deployment and Redeployment Operations.

"The VLR was initiated to give these incoming units an opportunity to meet and talk securely with their outgoing counterparts and find out what equipment, supplies, manning and training is required of them to be able to fulfill the mission," Fehlberg continued.

1st Lt. Andrew Tapley is the VLR officer in charge and is responsible for ensuring proper operational security is in place for the meetings to occur. "I set up the phones, the video teleconference and the Defense Collaborative Tools Suite so the units communicating can cover their after action reports and weekly briefings. The DCTS is basically a teleconference and chat room for incoming and outgoing units to communicate."

"This free-flow of information helps incoming units ward off potential major problems," Tapley said. "If there is some special training they need to complete, or some special equipment they need to bring before coming to theater, this is the time to find out about it. This way, a unit may find out early enough to include mandatory training the unit didn't expect at the mobilization station."

"Each communicating unit can then send any requirements on their Electronic Packet. The E-Packet consists of the Equipment Common Operations Picture which includes the statistics of the unit, such as slides, charts and completed information on the [secure Internet protocol router] net," Master Sgt. Robert Bottom said. Bottom is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the VLR, as well as the request for information manager.

"How this works," said Bottom, "is that when the incoming unit has any questions, they forward the requests for information to this office. We then coordinate with the liaison officers of the outgoing unit, who then answer straight to the incoming unit, by using the [E-Packet]."

"This optimizes each unit's time with the free flow of information," said Fehlberg. "It also ensures that the incoming unit can meet its training goals, though it is up to [Third Army/ U.S. Army Central] to verify the training."

The VLR is a promising program, though severely underused due to three issues. First, there is a limit to SIPR nets, training for the operators and the level of emphasis of the use of the VLR.

"SIPR capability is limited," said Tapley. "We can't go directly to the units; they have to contact us through FORSCOM. It's harder for Reserve units to get SIPR connection, as it's very regional for them, whereas Guard units have SIPR capability state by state."

"On training," said Bottom, "there has to be Soldiers trained how to work the nets and other equipment at their stations. Trainers will come out to the unit and train Soldiers on the perishable skill of how to use the Web site."

On the level of emphasis, the VLR team emphasizes the need for units and leaders to realize the great potential of this program.

"We are offering units a chance to save money," said Fehlberg. "Hopefully, places like the National Guard Bureau, the Reserve commands and other headquarters can be the broker and inform incoming units what we have to offer."

To contact the 377th TSC VLR, contact Tapley at andrew.tapley@swa.arcent.army.mil or call 430-5467.

"...the next thing we knew..."

Third Army/U.S. Army Central officer escapes war-torn Lebanon

Spc. Debrah Robertson
***Desert Voice* Staff Writer**

When Maj. Roderick Riley, a country desk officer for Civil International Military Affairs, arrived in Beirut, Lebanon, he would describe it as "a beautiful city that had just recovered from a perilous civil war."

"It's Eurocentric with beautiful pastel ," said Riley. "It's like Paris, but cleaner."

Then, three days into their mission in Lebanon, they received a call from the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon. "Two Israeli soldiers had been kidnapped. Return [to Kuwait] ASAP!"

"We didn't think anything of it, but then the next thing we knew, rounds were coming in on us," said Riley.

Sent to Lebanon to conduct an infantry seminar for the Lebanese army, the team of five was enthusiastic about their mission.

"Under the umbrella of the Theater Security Cooperation, we are tasked to conduct events with countries in the [area of operation]," said Riley, "and to foster better relationships."

"We made great strides while we were there," said Riley. "We were there to strengthen the Lebanese army so that the Lebanese people wouldn't have to depend on Hezbollah for protection."

The seminar focused on infantry tactics, techniques and procedures, said Col. Tom Crowder, the C9 forward for Third Army/ USARCENT. When the war began, the seminar had to be curtailed.

The seminar was about 80 percent finished when the group was gathered and locked in the U.S. Embassy for seven days before being evacuated to Cyprus, said Crowder.

Among the first flight of U.S. citizens to be evacuated, Riley and his team helped to load the Marine helicopter tasked with the duty.

"It was a very stressful time," said Riley. The civilians being loaded onto the helicopter were scared.

"One child became sick," said Riley. "Luckily, I had Pepto-Bismol in my bag."

Photo courtesy of Maj. Roderick Riley

Civilians load a helicopter during their evacuation from Lebanon during the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict this summer.

"Hundreds of people were lined up outside the embassy. Everyone wanted to get a visa or green card, but they couldn't get out," he added.

Marines were sent in to aid in the evacuation after the airport had been bombed.

"Israel suspected Hezbollah was being rearmed through the airport," said Riley.

The evacuation had to be conducted using military helicopters and boats.

"We made great strides while there. Now, after the war is over, we may have to start over [with our mission]," said Riley.

"When Lebanon 'opens up' again for security operations, we will reengage the program," said Crowder.

"The U.S. Embassy still has a relationship with Lebanon," said Riley. "The lines of communication are still open."

Maj. Roderick Riley, a country desk officer for Civil International Military Affairs, demonstrates on a world map the route of his evacuation from Lebanon.

Photo by Spc. Debrah A. Robertson

Former servicemembers continue sacrifice

Sgt. Sarah Scully
***Desert Voice* Staff Writer**

He only took a week off from the military.

The former Special Forces medic couldn't stand to be without Soldiers, mentoring and training them for surviving Iraq.

So seven days after starting his terminal leave, he headed to Kuwait with MPRI – a group of civilian contractors tasked with giving Third Army/U.S. Army Central troops one final readiness training before heading off to war.

Joe Jennings, a retired Army major, joined up with dozens of other former Soldiers and Marines dedicated to helping infantry and support Soldiers get that final boost of confidence in their abilities.

Stories like his mirror are common among the men who spend months or years in the desert patiently teaching the fundamentals of survival – and adapting the situations to the insurgents' tactics.

"I love the satisfaction that I get when I'm training troops," said Lou Palacios, a 61-year-old Vietnam veteran and MPRI observer controller.

"You still feel like you're putting your grain of salt in the war on terrorism."

Trading one uniform for another, this "quiet company" of professionals teaches three days of close quarter marksmanship skills, convoy security and countering improvised explosive devices.

The troops start out with classes and then rapidly move to dry runs before finishing with live-fire exercises.

"All of this grows to a crescendo and then everybody heads north" to Iraq, said Bill Kennedy, a retired Army colonel and MPRI program manager.

Standing in front of Soldiers and talking in Army lingo, these civilians look and act like they're still active-duty troops.

And those troops respond to them just like they're still NCOs and officers.

"I think the coolest thing is when they call you 'sarge' or 'sergeant,'" said Jason Algarin, a 27-year-old former Marine staff sergeant and MPRI observer controller.

Ranging in age and skill set, the observer controllers instruct and mentor the Soldiers – giving words of advice to help fix both training and emotional issues.

"They've got to get their head in the game," said Jennings, a 42-year-old combat veteran. It's rewarding "when you see the light come on and they start spitting the verbiage back at you."

With their combined experience they usually have a way to address any problems.

When cavalry Soldiers had difficulties reacting to an IED, observer controllers took them aside and gave them a pep

Bill Kennedy, the MPRI program manager, discusses how his organization helps train servicemembers in Kuwait before they leave for various locations in Iraq to support the Global War on Terrorism.

An observer

Photos by Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes

controller with MPRI teaches 4th Battalion, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers reflexive fire techniques at Udari Range.

talk with instruction on how to improve their performance.

"These guys go home at night and say, 'I hope we've saved some lives today,'" said Kennedy.

Many of the MPRI men come from a military tradition – Jennings' ancestor died defending the Alamo – and they're not ready to give up the military lifestyle.

"We're still doing it – we're just in a different uniform," said Jason Williams, a 26-year-old former Army sergeant who just finished a tour in Iraq and started at MPRI.

So how do troops feel about them?

"They're very good and very helpful," said Staff Sgt. Kyle Behr, a cavalry scout with 4th Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Hood, Texas. "They took the time to slow it down, step by step."

"I love the satisfaction I get when I'm training troops."

Lou Palacios
MPRI observer controller

By taking the time now, Soldiers have a better chance of survival when they head to Iraq.

"This is like your mid-term – your final is when you get to Iraq," said Jennings.

And they remember the skills MPRI professionals taught them.

When a unit Jennings taught came back from Iraq, they told him about the three IEDs that hit their unit during convoys.

"It brought it home," said Jennings. "We're putting out the right stuff – this is the last time they get to sharpen their swords."

Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin M. Buckley

Sharing knowledge

Navy, Air Force EOD training together to find common ideas, gain comfort with each other

Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes
***Desert Voice,* Editor**

"Fire in the hole, fire in the hole, fire in the hole." With these words still echoing across the desert, a large crack chased behind as shaped charges were ignited on a range in central Kuwait.

Members of the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 10 and EOD technicians from Air Force's 386th Expeditionary Civil Engineers Squadron worked in partnership to share techniques and knowledge during the range.

"The training gets [the servicemembers] comfortable working with other branches," said Navy Chief Petty Officer Kelley Davis, an EOD technician with

(Left) Chief Petty Officer Jeff Cooney and Petty Officer 1st Class Eric Biwer examine detonation cord during a joint training exercise with the Air Force. Biwer is currently working with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit.
(Right) Senior Airman Sherman Miller and Senior Airman Sarah Burrill collect detonation cord from several shaped charges to bring to the receiver for detonation during a recent joint training opportunity at a range in central Kuwait.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes

EODMU 10.

"We get the opportunity to train and learn from each other," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Damian Taylor. "You don't want to learn on the fly when you're on the scene."

The EOD technicians worked together to create several types of shaped charges and test them on various types of steel during the range. From charges designed to slice steel in half to precision charges aimed at creating the minimal amount of collateral damage, the overall theme remained constant – professionalism and training.

These types of training opportunities are not uncommon for the EOD technicians. Taylor said 60 percent of the ranges he's been a part of in his two months in Kuwait have been joint training.

With the ever present danger of improvised explosive devices in the Third Army/ U.S. Army Central area of operations, there remains a need for EOD to be trained and ready to go. These training events allow the various services to become more comfortable with each other. The bond among them is started with their initial training where all the services train together but is reinforced on ranges like this.

"You don't want to learn on the fly when you're at the scene"

- Air Force Staff Sgt. Damian Taylor

"If they know something, they're likely to share it," said Davis.

The sharing culminated as the smoke rose into the desert air with sounds of cheering and laughter coming from the technicians. Waiting the appropriate amount of time for the all clear, the technicians went back to the ignition point to examine the aftermath of the training.

Plotting distances and measuring the effects of the various charges, the technicians discussed what worked and didn't work. The range also gave the technicians the opportunity to destroy ammunition found in various amnesty boxes throughout Kuwait.

The Champion

The Army's top noncommissioned officer belongs to Third Army/U.S. ARCENT

Sgt. 1st Class Jason Alexander in and out of uniform

Photo by Sgt. Carlos M. Burger II

Sgt. Sarah Scully
***Desert Voice* Staff Writer**

As a child, he knew what kind of man he wanted to become. But at the age of 19, he woke up one morning and realized he had ventured down the wrong path.

So he left his belongings and his old life behind – and he joined the Army.

A decade later, Sgt. 1st Class Jason Alexander won recognition as the best noncommissioned officer in the Army, while supporting Third Army/U.S. Army Central in Kuwait.

The coveted title – Department of the Army's NCO of the Year – went to a man who had attained the standards and dreams set in place by a young boy growing up in a California gang-infested neighborhood.

"As a kid, you picture yourself as a man – good family, good job, good life," said Alexander, NCO in charge of the Troop Medical Clinic at Camp Arifjan. "From the day I was in basic [training], I knew I'd be a Soldier until the day I died."

So how did he find his way?

Alexander credits the strong foundation of values his parents and friends instilled and the flexibility to figure out what he wanted out of life as the main influences to his success.

Born December 1976, Alexander lived in Upper Darby, Penn., a suburb of Philadelphia.

After moving to Orange County, Calif., his parents divorced in 1983.

Shuffled between parents and living in poverty, Alexander still maintained an upbeat attitude.

"I think it made me a stronger person," said the 29-year-old Alexander. "When you've dealt with a lot of adversity, you learn to look at the positives."

Given an early nickname of "Smiley," he was a happy child who didn't really comprehend the threat of gang violence in his apartment complex – which left plenty of time for a carefree lifestyle of boogie boarding and baseball.

But when the 15-year-old moved back to Philadelphia to live with his father, Alexander went a little wild. As a teenager, he experimented with green and blue hair, put in a tongue ring and wore street clothes.

He learned leadership and responsibility early on by getting his first job soon after moving to the city – as cashier for a fast-food restaurant. They put him at the counter because of his smile and charm.

Quickly gaining another job as a concert promoter in disreputable areas of the city, Alexander graduated from high school and continued the same lifestyle.

Until he woke up July 1, 1996 and went to see the recruiter.

"I just knew that I needed to get out of there – things were just out of control," said Alexander. "I think God was like, 'Hey, Jason, you need to wake up and go join the Army.'"

He joined up as a combat medic and left for basic a few days after visiting the recruiter.

"I was shocked when he called to notify us that he joined the Army," said Mae Robertson, Alexander's mother. "Perhaps he was looking for an adventure or just saw an opportunity in the crossroads to become more than he dreamed of in life."

Going in with no rank, he quickly got promoted at the end of basic to private. A few months after arriving at his first duty station, he got promoted again.

But he really started on the fast track when he earned the Expert Field Medical Badge as a private first class. Promoted within a few years to specialist, sergeant and staff sergeant, he pinned on sergeant first class at the age of 26.

"He's a leader," said Robertson. "Jason sets his goals high and knows how to follow the smaller goals to reach his potential."

Now the proud father of a 4-year-old little girl named Kaityln, Alexander plans to relax for a while and focus on his family.

But he still has Army goals.

Whether a future sergeant major of the Army or command sergeant major, "I just feel like I was born to be a Soldier – I just feel like I fit in the Army.

"My goal is really never-ending," said Alexander. "The day I don't have the goal of helping Soldiers out is the day I'd get out, because there'd be no point in staying in."

Photo by Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes

Spc. Jennifer Przytula, an Army Reserve Soldier, shakes Command Sgt. Maj. Leon Caffie's hand during a visit to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Caffie, the U.S. Army Reserve command sergeant major, is touring the theater with Lt. Gen Jack C. Stultz, the commanding general of the U.S. Army Reserve Command.

Hometown Hero

1st Lt. Michael Graham
Platoon Leader
50th Engineer Company
(Multi-Role Bridge)

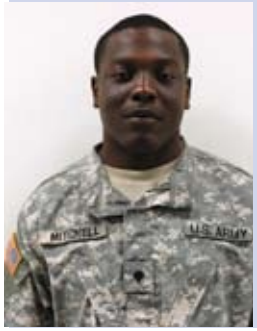
Graham's job is important because he plans and executes missions for his company and takes care of Soldiers.

Talks about what he misses about his hometown, Biggsville, Ill.

"I miss the small town atmosphere. There's no traffic and I miss seeing my friends and neighbors."

Just One Question...

Who do you think is going to win the NBA Championship?



"The Heat because they have team cohesion"

Spc. Marcus Mitchell
Management Officer
Third Army/USARCENT C6
Waycross, Ga.

"I wish the Celtics would, but definitely the Cavs because of one man and that's Lebron James."

Seaman Apprentice Peter Murphy
Builder
Naval Mobile Const. Batt.
Middlesboro, Mass.

"The Phoenix Suns because they have the baddest trio in the league. Amare, Matrix, and Steve Nash is all you need."

Spc. Shatrice Blue
Third Army/USARCENT C6
Telephone Control Officer
Harlem, N.Y.

"The Heat because they have Shaq."

Staff Sgt. Telly Duhart
Administrative NCO
Third Army/USARCENT C7
Unadilla, Ga.

"Definitely the Cavs because Cleveland rocks."

Seaman Apprentice Adam Schaack
Builder
Naval Mobile Const. Batt.
Cleveland, Ohio

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

To be a veteran
one must know and
determine one's price
for freedom.

VETERANS DAY
November 11, 2006