

# DV

November 15, 2006

**Desert Voice Magazine**  
Serving U.S. and Coalition Forces in Kuwait



# Anchor Point

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**The U.S. Navy's hometown hospital in Kuwait**  
**Camp Arifjan facility provides care for troops**  
**in Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq**

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## On the cover

Navy corpsmen escort a patient to the hospital after arriving on a helicopter at Camp Arifjan's Expeditionary Medical Facility Kuwait. The Navy is responsible for running the EMF-K.

*Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Russell C. Tafuri*



*Photo by Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes*

Soldiers from Area Support Group - Kuwait salute as the flag is lowered during a retreat ceremony remembering Veteran's Day on Camp Arifjan Friday.

## Honoring those who serve

**Third Army/U.S. Army Central pauses to remember Veteran's Day**

**Sgt. Sarah Scully**

*Desert Voice Staff Writer*

**H**undreds of Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen paid their respects to veterans of the past and present during a Veteran's Day retreat ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Saturday.

Gathered in a formation, the servicemembers saluted the American flag and paused for a moment of silence to remember fallen comrades and the sacrifices made to ensure America's freedom.

"This is not a freedom without price," said Maj. Gen. Dennis Hardy, deputy commanding general of Third Army/U.S. Army Central. "It's a price that we acknowledge today."

Hardy told the servicemembers they are pioneers and patriots for freedom – honoring the thousands of men and women who have died

defending America for more than two centuries.

"You represent that legacy, that tradition," said Hardy. "The future of our nation lies directly on your shoulders – so this is a day to remember you."

Veterans received additional thanks at another ceremony held Nov. 10 at Area Support Group – Kuwait headquarters as servicemembers played "Taps" and gave a three-volley salute.

Soldiers and Sailors slowly lowered the flag and Sgt. 1st Class Jason Alexander, the Department of the Army's Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, carefully cradled the folded flag in his arms.

"Veterans are people who know the true meaning of courage," said Col. Jason Alexander, ASG-Kuwait commander. "God bless the nation's veterans all over the world."

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Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, the commanding general of the U.S. Army Reserve Command, administers the oath of reenlistment to seven Third Army/U.S. ARCENT Soldiers in front of the ASG-Kuwait headquarters at Camp Arifjan.

# Back for more **Seven Third Army/U.S. ARCENT troops reup in Kuwait**

Story and Photo by  
**Sgt. Sarah Scully**  
*Desert Voice Staff Writer*

Standing at attention in the setting sun beneath the American flag, the Soldiers repeated the words binding them to the Army and more years of service.

Seven Army Reserve Soldiers who chose to extend their commitment to the Army had the opportunity to hear words of encouragement from the Reserve commanding general as they raised their right hands and swore the oath of enlistment at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait Oct. 7.

“The willingness to come over here and defend America, sacrifice and be away from your families...your jobs, giving up all those good things to be over here in the hot sun and the heat defending your country – and now you’re willing to step up and say, ‘I want to stay with it. I want to re-enlist and be part of this organization for a long time,’” said Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, commanding general of U.S. Army Reserve Command.

“That makes me feel good and proud.”

## Taking an oath...

- Sgt. 1st Class Rhonda Venning-Vernon**, 1189th Transportation Terminal Battalion
- Staff Sgt. Victor Gunter**, CFLCC C6
- Sgt. Dennis Chapman**, 863rd Engineer Battalion, Detachment 2
- Sgt. William Colon**, 863rd En. Bn., Det. 2
- Sgt. Patrick Montgomery**, 863rd En. Bn., Det. 2
- Sgt. Darius Taylor**, 3rd PERSCOM
- Sgt. Manuel Villarreal**, 863rd En. Bn., Det. 2

in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“If it wasn’t for these young Soldiers, I wouldn’t do it,” said Venning-Vernon. “I’m just here because I want to mentor the next Soldier coming up the chain.”

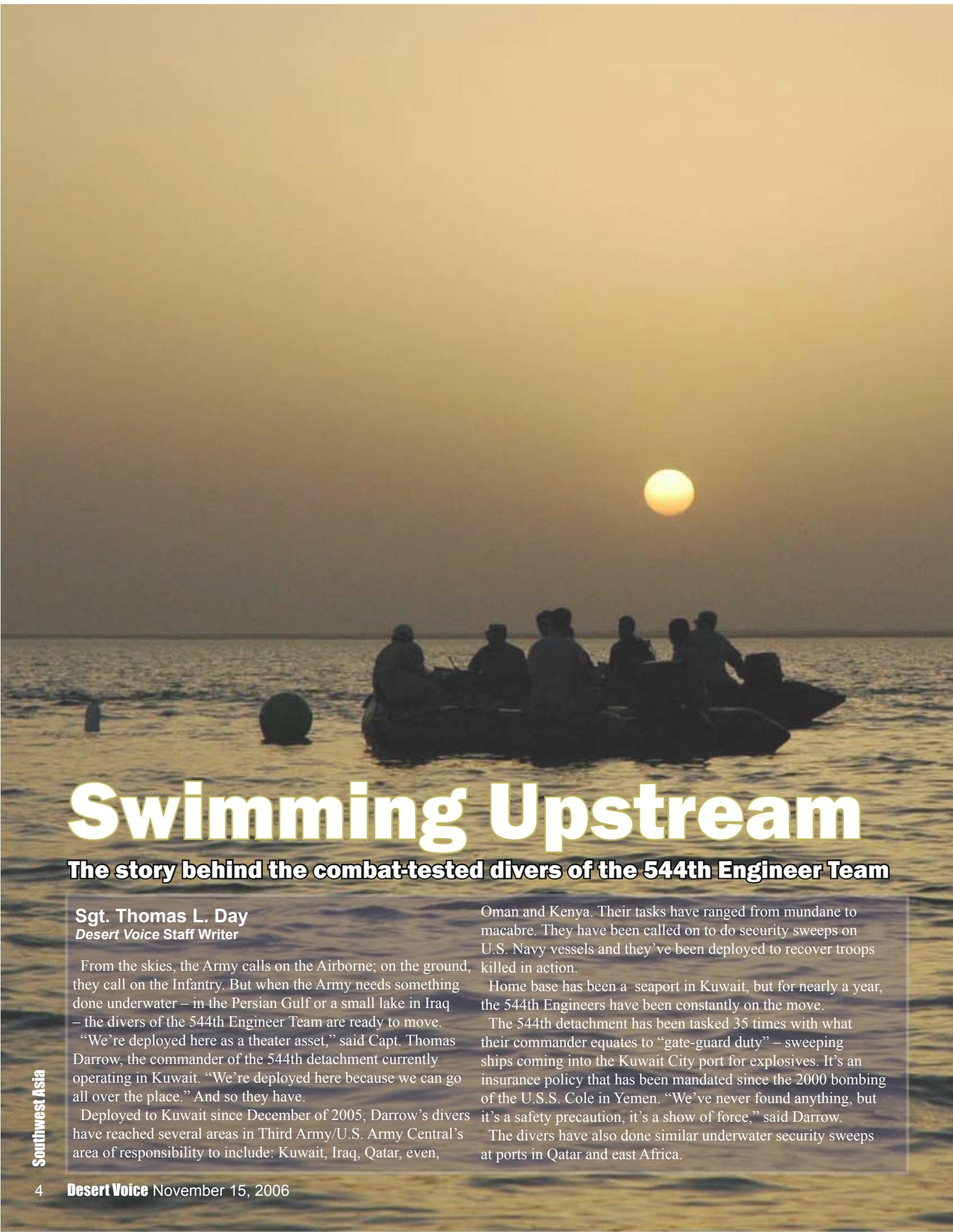
Giving each of the Soldiers his coin, Stultz shook their hands and congratulated them as Command Sgt. Maj. Leon Caffie, U.S. Army Reserve command sergeant major, gave the troops a hug.

“It meant a lot to me,” said Sgt. Darius Taylor, 3rd Personnel Command. “You don’t get the chance [to meet them] very often.”

For many of the Soldiers, this is their second or third tour combating terrorism in the Middle East.

“I was getting emotional,” said Sgt. 1st Class Rhonda Venning-Vernon, noncommissioned officer in charge of movement control with 1189th Transportation Terminal Battalion in support of Third Army/U.S. Army Central.

First serving in Desert Shield and Desert Storm back in 1991, she continued her more than 24 years in the Reserve by deploying again



# Swimming Upstream

**The story behind the combat-tested divers of the 544th Engineer Team**

**Sgt. Thomas L. Day**  
*Desert Voice Staff Writer*

From the skies, the Army calls on the Airborne; on the ground, they call on the Infantry. But when the Army needs something done underwater – in the Persian Gulf or a small lake in Iraq – the divers of the 544th Engineer Team are ready to move.

“We’re deployed here as a theater asset,” said Capt. Thomas Darrow, the commander of the 544th detachment currently operating in Kuwait. “We’re deployed here because we can go all over the place.” And so they have.

Deployed to Kuwait since December of 2005, Darrow’s divers have reached several areas in Third Army/U.S. Army Central’s area of responsibility to include: Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, even,

Oman and Kenya. Their tasks have ranged from mundane to macabre. They have been called on to do security sweeps on U.S. Navy vessels and they’ve been deployed to recover troops killed in action.

Home base has been a seaport in Kuwait, but for nearly a year, the 544th Engineers have been constantly on the move.

The 544th detachment has been tasked 35 times with what their commander equates to “gate-guard duty” – sweeping ships coming into the Kuwait City port for explosives. It’s an insurance policy that has been mandated since the 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen. “We’ve never found anything, but it’s a safety precaution, it’s a show of force,” said Darrow.

The divers have also done similar underwater security sweeps at ports in Qatar and east Africa.



(From left to right) Spc. Brian Myers, Staff Sgt. Kurt Langely, Staff Sgt. Eric Shultz and Sgt. David Gills do some heavy lifting.

Photos courtesy of the 544th Engineer Team

It is in Iraq, however, where the divers are told to leave their gate-guard duty for missions that are anything but routine.

In April of 2006, a Marine troop carrier flipped after attempting to traverse a flooded street. “They thought it was four inches when it was 25 feet of water,” said Darrow.

The water receded and they found all but two of the nine bodies. The water current fed into the Euphrates River, where it was suspected the bodies had drifted. For eight days, the dive company searched the 20 kilometers of the river.

On Easter Day, the search was over. A group of Iraqis had found the bodies more than 70 kilometers away from the crash site.

The next month, the divers were back in the Iraqi town of Al Taquaddum, west of Baghdad, after a Marine Cobra helicopter crashed into a nearby lake.

“There was an area where there were oil spots on the surface,” Staff Sgt. Joshua West recalled. He correctly aimed his efforts toward the oil spots. When they found the helicopter, the Cobra was on its back with its nose planted in the mud.

This fall, the divers were called into Iraq again, once more ordered to find Marines lost in an attack.

The Marines were hit by a roadside bomb on October 6 on a bridge outside of Fallujah. Four of the five passengers were confirmed dead; the fifth was unaccounted for. “At the time of the incident, the dam was open,” Staff Sgt. Kurt Langely recounted. The immediate and accurate assessment was that the fifth body had been vacuumed into the canal and floated upstream.

The body was found two days later by the team a kilometer from the site.

In an article Darrow wrote for *Engineer* magazine (a U.S. Army engineer trade publication), he called the recovery assignments “one of the more unfortunate, but honorable, missions an Army diver can accomplish.”

Darrow and Mendoza’s Soldiers are scheduled to return home to Fort Eustis, Va., in December, replaced by another of the five detachments of the 544th Engineer Team.

## Do you have what it takes to be an Army diver?

The 544th Engineer Team has trained for all of this.

The Soldiers are the best of the best, the few who make it through the mind-blowing training to become an Army diver.

It’s a six-month training cycle in which, according to Sgt. 1st Class Marlo Mendoza, “75 to 80 percent” do not make it past the first few weeks. Medoza, Capt. Thomas Darrow’s top enlisted Soldier, would know. He was an instructor at the school for five years. “The biggest reason (for signing up),” said Mendoza, “is, ‘because it sounds cool.’”

Trainees quickly learn the training is not like a trip to the local swimming pool. The idea of the training, according to Darrow, is to overload the students with problem solving scenarios. “It’s not just physical...you have to recompose yourself underwater,” the commander said.

Phase one culls the strong from the meek. The following weeks teach trainees underwater tricks only David Copperfield could equal: welding, laying concrete, “anything you can think of a construction worker doing on the street,” Darrow said.

Darrow and Mendoza had met before both were assigned to the 544th Engineers as commander and noncommissioned officer in charge. Mendoza, a 19-year veteran of the Army diving branch, was on a four-member board that admitted Darrow into dive school.

For more information on what it takes to become an Army diver, contact your local career counselor/reenlistment NCO or visit the Army diver Web site at [www.wood.army.mil/577th/diver/](http://www.wood.army.mil/577th/diver/).



The Expeditionary Medical Facility-Kuwait has a staff of about 200 troops with two fully equipped operating tables.

## A community hospital, deployed

### U.S. Navy hospital brings dependable health care to the desert

Story and photos by

**Petty Officer 1st Class Russell C. Tafuri**  
 Medical Task Force-Kuwait Public Affairs Office

The only military hospital serving the medical needs of the U.S. military, coalition forces and Department of Defense civilians is housed in tents in the Kuwaiti desert.

Located at Camp Arifjan, the Expeditionary Medical Facility- Kuwait is similar to any community hospital back in the states, said EMF-K Director of Professional Services, Navy Capt. David Llewellyn.

The hospital is manned by a staff of approximately 200 Navy medical professionals that includes, doctors, nurses and hospital corpsmen from 26 naval commands across the globe. EMF-K is the respite that serves the medical needs of our servicemembers.

The 44-bed Level III medical facility is accessible by ground ambulance and helicopter, and due to its location here in Kuwait, receives patients from Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan as well, said Llewellyn.

The levels of care services provided dictate the level



The hospital operates in a temporary tent at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom

assigned the facility. The level grades range from Level I to Level V. Level I is the care administered by the medic at the site. Level V is the big hospital back home like the Navy's Bethesda National Naval Medical Center or the Army's Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Llewellyn explained.

Although the EMF-K hospital is in a structure that can be relocated, it provides services ranging from inpatient care and critical care to internal medicine and mental health, as well as many others – much like a community hospital in the United States.

The hospital also houses two fully equipped operating rooms where operation procedures are performed regularly.

“On any given week we'll receive 20 to 40 patients in this hospital, and we'll perform 20 to 30 operational procedures a week,” said Llewellyn.

Aside from the unique semi-permanent structure of the hospital, Llewellyn said the staff boasts a patient return-to-duty rate of more than 75 percent.

The hospital maintains the capability to receive and care for patients for up to 30 days with the Theater Transient Hold Detachment. The detachment allows servicemembers to recover and receive additional care before being returned to their unit. Servicemembers

can remain there for up to 30 days and then be transported out to a higher level care facility if that is what they need, or returned to their unit, said Llewellyn.

According to EMF-K hospital Director of Education and Training Lt. Cdr. Mark Watson, “Compared to a level III hospital back in the states [the EMF-K hospital is] very similar. We offer a lot of the same services. And even though we are [working] in a tent hospital, you kind of get over that real quick and almost can forget about that. I guess you just get used to it, and plug along.”

When asked how a loved one in the United States can grasp that their Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine is in good hands in terms of receiving the medical care they need, Watson quickly said, “...the same people who are working in the hospitals in the states are working here, so we bring the same level of expertise, the same level of compassion, and the same level of care to the patients out here. Whether we're working in a tent or a (solid) structure, it doesn't matter.

“...the expertise, years of experience and the level of compassion and care is on par with anywhere I've ever been.”



With access to an airfield, the hospital has the capability to quickly treat patients medically evacuated into Camp Arifjan from locations in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

From the snowy hills of Alaska, the National Guard troops now operate in a country that regularly hits 130 degrees in the summer months. (Inset photo) The Soldiers leave Camp Shelby, Miss., for deployment.



Photo courtesy of the 297th Infantry Regiment

# Alaska arrival

## To Kuwait from “The Land of the Midnight Sun”

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

### Alaska National Guard troops reporting for duty

Instead of climbing aboard a snowmobile to track prey and patrol the vast wilderness, they now slide into military vehicles and police the sandy wasteland for suspicious activity.

Leaving behind frozen tundra to serve in a scorching desert, hundreds of Soldiers from the Alaska National Guard took over the quick reaction force and other security measures.

As the largest deployed unit of the Alaska National Guard since World War II, the 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment has important missions to accomplish during the next year in support of Third Army/U.S. Army Central in Kuwait.

And they have a diverse population of Soldiers with unique skills to succeed at those missions while stationed at camps Navistar, Buehring and Virginia.

The unit has a large segment of minorities – roughly



Photo by Sgt. Sarah Scully

From left: Pfc. Thomas Sledge and Sgt. Erwin Purano, both with 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment motorpool, replace a head gasket on a humvee.

a third of the Soldiers are of Eskimo or American Indian heritage.

“There’s nothing in this theater that’s going to put them out,” said Lt. Col. Duff Mitchell, 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment commander.

“Some guys have killed many bears – they’re not worried about insurgents.”

Each region of the “Land of the Midnight Sun” contributed Soldiers to travel halfway around the world to guard and defend fellow service-members.

Many of the Soldiers come from a military family, and Alaskans have a history of volunteering to serve

their country in times of war.

“It’s almost a way of life out there that’s been passed down from generation to generation,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Feaster, the battalion command sergeant major.

While most people might find native Alaskans and

the Kuwaiti desert contrasting and incompatible, these Soldiers look at it differently.

The flat and barren desert with occasional camps resembles the frozen tundra of northern Alaska, where remote villages dot the landscape.

And the hardships they may face in the desert, many have already confronted in the tundra.

“When you’re in Alaska, and it’s 10 degrees below zero, you have to trust yourself, have confidence in yourself,” said Mitchell. “And you just have to persevere.”

Some of the Soldiers are whaling captains, subsistence hunters and fishermen – all men used to dealing with hardship on a daily basis.

“They grew up with the warrior spirit,” said Mitchell. “The ‘Warrior Ethos’ is a natural part of their everyday life.”

With infantry Soldiers stationed

at Camp Navistar and regularly making trips into Iraq, they have many chances to display those warrior skills.

The Soldiers had an opportunity to bond and get used to warmer weather during a 90-day training session at hot and humid Camp Shelby in Mis-

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**“It’s almost a way of life out there that’s been passed down from generation to generation.”**

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**Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Feaster  
on the Alaska military tradition**

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issippi before the unit deployed to Kuwait.

“That was quite a shock to the system,” said Mitchell.

“One of the Soldiers came up to me and said, ‘Sir, this is just like being in a sweat lodge – but there’s no door.’”

There are other differences from home they must endure – culture,

food and language.

To combat the homesickness, the Soldiers have photos of their hometowns picturing tranquil lakes, soaring mountains and bald eagles.

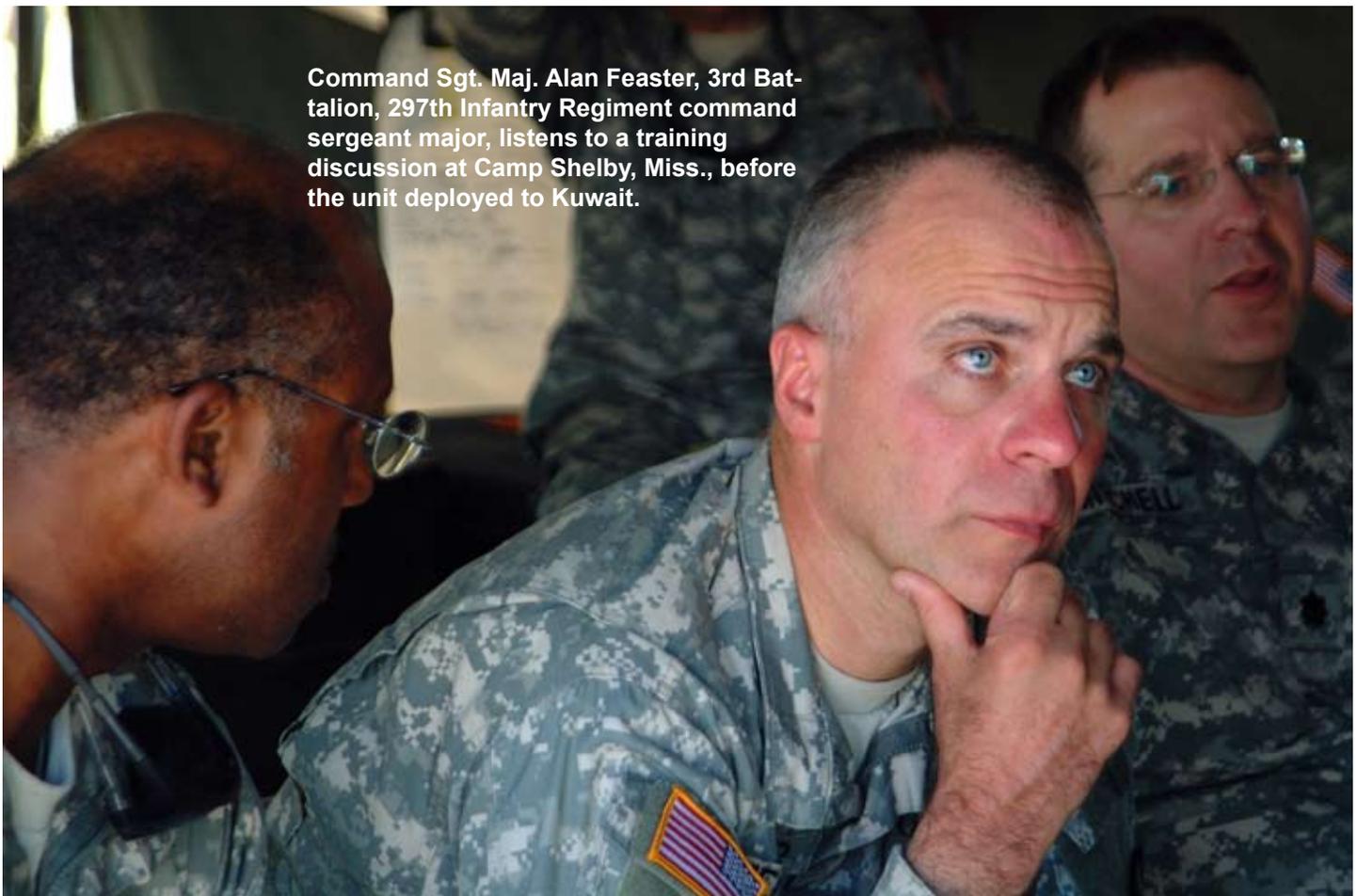
They also get care packages from family filled with dried caribou, smoked salmon, berry jellies and dried fish.

As a farewell gift, the governor of Alaska brought whale blubber to the Soldiers at their departure ceremony in October.

With these reminders of home, they look out at the desert and continue their service.

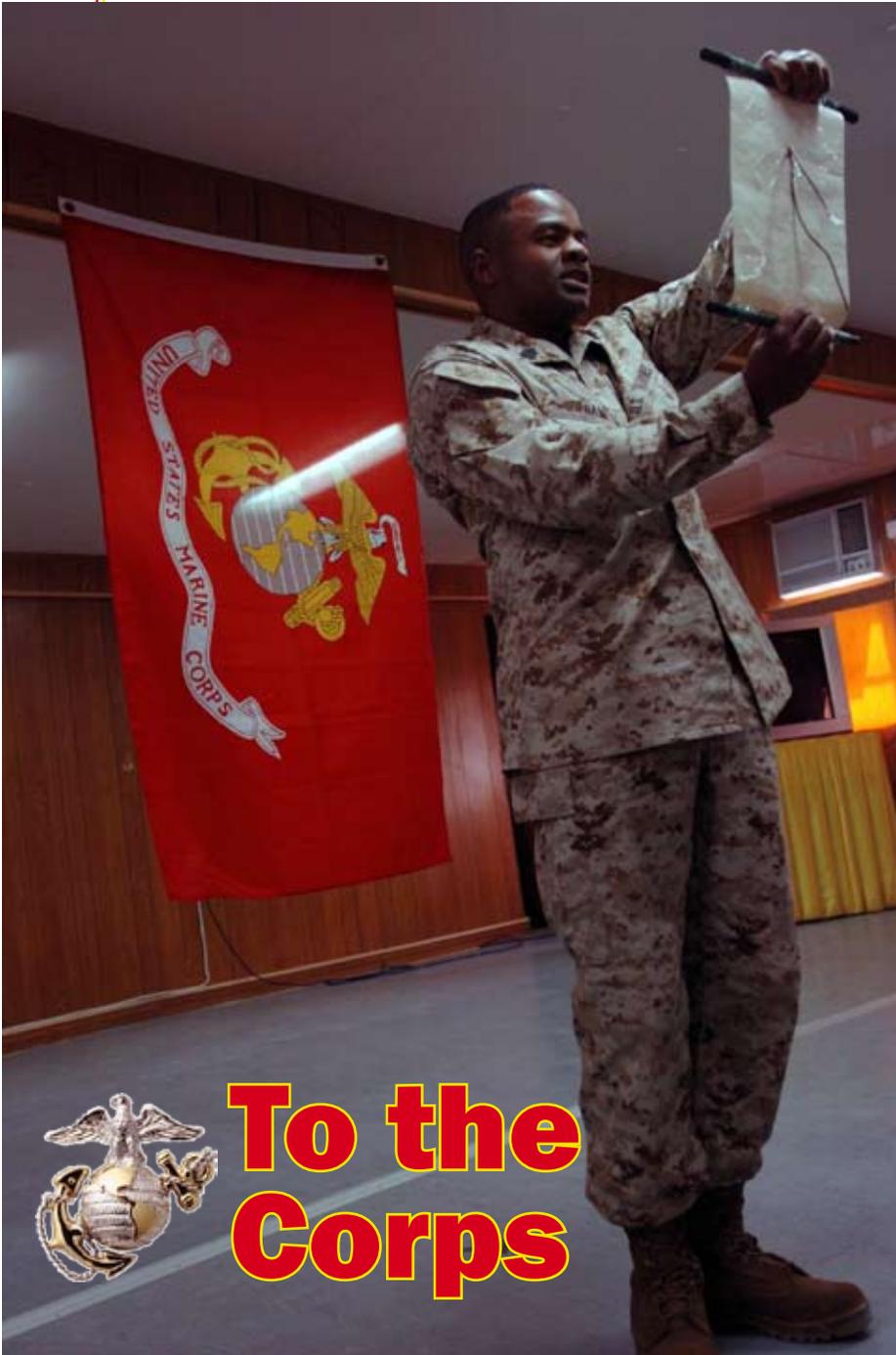
Guarding the camps with the Big Dipper constellation emblazoned on the unit’s patch, the Soldiers live up to the American Indian “Yuh Yek” motto meaning, “Be on watch – ready to fire.”

“They’ve already walked the walk in their own lives,” said Mitchell. “They’re solid Soldiers.”



**Command Sgt. Maj. Alan Feaster, 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment command sergeant major, listens to a training discussion at Camp Shelby, Miss., before the unit deployed to Kuwait.**

*Photo courtesy of the 297th Infantry Regiment*



**(Left) Master Gunnery Sgt. Anthony M. Sloane reads Gen. Lejeune's birthday message during the 231st Marine Corps birthday celebration Friday. (Above) 1st Sgt. Nathaniel Page and Lance Cpl. Luis Flores take the first bite of the Marine Corps birthday cake during a ceremony on post. Page and Flores represented the oldest and youngest Marines present at the ceremony.**

# To the Corps



## Marines celebrate the Corps' 231st birthday

Story and Photos by  
**Staff Sgt. Patrick N. Moes**  
Desert Voice Editor

Traditions are made from passing stories, ideas and beliefs down from one generation to the next.

For members of the U.S. Marine Corps, traditions reunite all those who have ever been able to call themselves a Marine. By continuing to pass the customs down from one Marine to another the spirit of the Marines lives on.

The spirit was alive and well Friday as more than 200 people gathered together to celebrate a birthday at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

It was a celebration to honor the Marine Corps which turned 231 years old. Marines past and present rejoiced upon its history and looked toward the future.

"The Marine Corps is always growing stronger, wiser and more knowledgeable," said Lance Cpl. Luis Flores, 20, the youngest Marine in attendance.

As the youngest Marine, Flores was a major part of the ceremony. He was a part of the time-honored tradition of having the oldest Marine pass the cake to the youngest Marine.

The ritual marks the symbolic passing of experience, traditions and expertise from old to new, said Maj. Andrew Thompson, a liaison officer with U.S. Marine Forces Central Command in Kuwait. The oldest Marine for the ceremony was 1st Sgt. Nathaniel Page of the Marine Expeditionary Unit Augmentation Program who transferred his ideas to Flores thus keeping the honor of the Marines alive for years to come.

The birthday represents one of many traditions the Marine Corps honors.

"It's always important to honor traditions while deployed," said Thompson. "It reinforces the esprit de corps and helps [the Marines] focus on what [the Marines] do."

"Whether there are two Marines in a [foxhole] or a large group together, Marines will celebrate our birthday," added Thompson.

Being deployed to the Middle East means the traditions and birthday signify a little more to our Marines, said Thompson. "Everyone takes things a little more serious here."

Although the ceremony was conducted far from the safety and security of American soil, the Marines in Kuwait carried on supporting the traditions of service.

"It feels good to be a part of something so big," said Flores, an El Paso, Texas, native. "They have been around for so long." Flores added "it's an honor to be a Marine, especially the youngest [at the birthday]."

## Become an Army public affairs broadcast specialist

The Army public affairs branch is increasing active-duty authorizations in the 46R (Broadcast Public Affairs Specialist) career field. Soldiers in the career field learn television, radio, announcing and writing skills. Fifty percent of the positions are with the Armed Forces Network. It's an extremely civilian-marketable job skill. Soldiers from any MOS are eligible.

There are several requirements for interested Soldiers:

1. Reserve/Guard Soldiers must go on active duty to qualify.
2. Must be of the E-1 to E-5 pay grade (E-5 must be non-promotable).
3. Have at least a 107 GT Score.
4. Must maintain a Secret clearance or an interim secret clearance.
5. Must be deployable (no non-deployable)
6. Most P2 profiles are OK, but check with the public affairs branch manager (see below).

**MOST IMPORTANTLY: YOU MUST TAKE A VOICE AUDITION.**

Interested? Please contact the public affairs branch manager, Sgt. 1st Class Jim Guzior at [goose.guzior@us.army.mil](mailto:goose.guzior@us.army.mil) for details. His phone number is (703) 325-2578 and his DSN line is (312) 221-2578.

## Just One Question...

**What would you do if you won the lottery?**



### 4th Brigade Combat Team 101st Airborne Division

The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, is currently in the process of redeploying back to Fort Campbell, Ky. They are the last remaining BCT from the division to redeploy. The 1st Infantry Battalion served under Multi-National Force- West in Ramadi.

*If your unit would like to be featured in this section call 430-6334 to schedule a time.*



**"I would buy houses in Detroit, Miami and Nicaragua, and I'd pay all my bills off and take my wife shopping along with the whole family."**

Spc. Cuvoscier Jones  
S-1 Pac Clerk  
Company A 1/506th, 4th BCT  
101st Airborne Division  
Detroit, Mich.



**"I'd pay off all my bills and retire."**

Maj. Gary Pina  
Battalion Fire Support Officer  
Company A, 1/506th, 4th BCT  
101st Airborne Division  
Lawton, Okla.



**"I'd buy everyone in the 101 Special Ops. weapons and brand new humvees and buy one of the cars from the 'Fast and the Furious.'"**

Spc. Juan Zapata  
Infantryman  
Company A, 1/506th, 4th BCT  
101st Airborne Division  
San Antonio, Texas



**"I would donate some of it to the children who lost a parent in combat for their college fund."**

Spc. Keith Iekar  
Infantryman  
Company A, 1/506th, 4th BCT  
101st Airborne Division  
Palau Island

## Hometown Hero



**Spc. Christian Cumberlander  
S-6 Communications, Company A,  
1/506th, 101st Airborne Division**

"I work on the radios," said Cumberlander. Collecting data and passing the information to his commander, Cumberlander is vital to his unit's mission.

**Talks about what he misses about his hometown,  
Columbus, Ohio**

**"I miss hanging out with family and friends and my mom's home cooking. There's something to do all the time."**



## **Holiday Greetings**

### **Holiday Greetings Recording Schedule**

**Nov. 15 Camp Arifjan, Zone 1 Community Center**

**Nov. 16 Camp Arifjan, Zone 6 Community Center**

**Nov. 21 Camp Patriot, Command Cell**

**Nov. 23 The Rock, Flex Recreation Center**

**Nov. 24 LSA, MWR Tent**

**Nov. 27 Camp Virginia, MWR Community Center**

**Nov. 28 Camp Virginia, MWR Community Center**

**Nov. 30 Camp Navistar, MWR Tent**

**Dec. 6 Camp Buehring, Oasis Rec Center**

**Dec. 7 Camp Buehring, Oasis Rec Center**

**Dec. 8 Camp Buehring, Oasis Rec Center**

**For more information contact Spc. Joseph Bicchieri or Pvt. Boris Shiloff at 430-6364  
or look for our cameras outside these locations on the above dates.**

**Units may call to schedule an alternate date.  
(Limited dates and times are available.)**

**The Holiday Greetings are being prepared by the Third Army/ U.S. Army Central Public Affairs Office  
and the 40th Public Affairs Detachment**