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

October 24, 2007



Rakkasan Ruckus

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On the cover

With a deafening blast, Rakkas-an mortarmen from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, fire a 120 mm mortar system during brigade level training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September. For the full story, turn to page 6.

Photo by Pfc. Mary Gurnee

Contact us

Comments, questions, suggestions story ideas? Call the Desert Voice editor at 430-6334 or e-mail at desertvoice@arifjan.arcent.army.mil.

Farewell warriors, I am proud of you

One thing that is certain in both the military and in life is that there will be change.

Third Army/U.S. Army Central is no exception to this maxim. After three years as the Commanding General of Third Army/ARCENT/CFLCC, this is my last article.



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

If you've been around any military unit long enough, you've seen your share of changes, and if you've only recently arrived, you are sure to see changes in the future: Adjustments to the mission, modifications to the structure and organization, changes in personnel and leadership, and changes to the environment or conditions we operate in are all factors. Change is a part of the nature of our business, just as it is part of life.

While change is a certainty, what the future holds, at least in terms of all the details, is always uncertain. But even amid the constancy of change and the uncertainty of the future, some things are more sure than others.

Among those things, I will tell you, is this: If the war in Iraq were to end tomorrow—and no one thinks that it actually will—there will still be a

need and a mission for Third Army/U.S. Army Central here in Kuwait, in addition to our continuing missions throughout the Central Command area of responsibility. While that mission may look somewhat different here in Kuwait, it

will be no less important.

Whatever the changes and

whatever the certainty, I know that you will continue to demonstrate the same flexibility and dedication to the mission that you always do. And that is cause for me to be certain that I'll remain proud of you.

The backbone of an Army may be its noncommissioned officer corps, but its lifeblood is undeniably its Soldiers.

Still, on the Third Army team, it takes all of us—Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians—to complete the team. And this team continues to perform marvelously.

I am both proud and honored for the privilege to have served as the Commanding General of Third Army/U.S. Army Central for the last three years. I wish you all Godspeed and hope to see you again on the high ground.

Patton's Own!

DV
Desert Voice
Magazine

Volume 29, Issue 21

The Desert Voice is an authorized publication for members of the Department of Defense. Contents of the Desert Voice are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government or Department of the Army. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the Third Army Public Affairs Office. This newspaper is published by Al-Qabandi United, a private firm, which is not affiliated with Third U.S. Army. All copy will be edited. The Desert Voice is produced weekly by the 50th Public Affairs Detachment.

Find us online at www.arcent.army.mil.

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The overlooked **danger**: driving on the roads

Story by
Staff Sgt. Carlos M. Burger II
Third Army public affairs

It was an image I'd care not to see in Kuwait.

On a past mission, our trip down the highway was slightly delayed by a tow truck and the flashing lights of the Kuwaiti police. As the truck pulled by, I saw the sport utility vehicle as it was dragged to the side of the road.

As we were waived through, I could see the debris, glass, blood and other items on the road, indicating that this crash was most likely a fatal one. I was immediately chilled at my next thought: if I wasn't careful, that could be me or one of my fellow Third Army/U.S. Army Central Soldiers.

One of the most important, but often overlooked, safety issues in the area of responsibility is vehicle safety.

Fortunately, no servicemembers or Department of Defense personnel have been killed here, however, the number of accidents occurring is staggering.

Servicemembers and DoD personnel are feeling too comfortable on the roads and are crashing into walls, barriers and each other, said Sgt. 1st Class Eva



Courtesy photos

M. Roberts, Third Army/U.S. Army Central policy and programs. Although it's impossible to predict the erratic behavior of the average local driver, our drivers are making errors on the road that, if left unchecked, could cause serious injury. Our drivers need to remember they are in an unfamiliar area and not back home, Roberts said.

Speeding and not paying attention to detail are the main contributing factors to most of these accidents, said Roberts. Regardless of whoever is to blame, Uncle Sam ends up stuck with the bill.

"Every accident costs the Army a lot of money in repairs, insurance costs and sometimes new vehicles," she said.

In addition to being more aware on the roads, there is help to improve driving skills here in Kuwait.

"Area Support Group – Kuwait offers an excellent advance accident course every week that helps with anticipating local driver habits and improving defensive driving techniques," Roberts said.

Safely operating vehicles in Kuwait is just as important as any other safety procedure that is in place in the AOR, she said. Road awareness is critical and the small amount of time it takes to pay attention to detail could save the Army money, she said.

Most importantly, it could save your life.

For more information on the ASG-Kuwait Advance Accident Course, please contact Felina A. Nicolau, ESD Training and Development Branch at felina.nicolau@arifjan.arcent.army.mil. 



Planning for your future



Army reserve provides viable retention options for some

Story by
Spc. Giancarlo Casem
Desert Voice editor

Active duty Third Army/U.S. Army Central Soldiers seeking information about re-enlistment options can turn to their retention office for questions. However, Reserve Soldiers may go to the Army Reserve Theater Retention Team for more Reserve-specific topics.

“The Army Reserve Theater Retention Team’s primary mission is to facilitate the re-enlistment of Army Reserve Soldiers deployed in the Central Command area of responsibility,” said Sgt. 1st Class Duane Held, a Reserve Retention Team NCO from Cottage Grove, Wis.

However, the Army Reserve Career Counselors, located at Camps Buehring and Arifjan, Kuwait, also provide assistance with reserve to active component transfer requests, Active Guard Reserve applications, Officer Direct Commissions and Warrant Officer Applications.

The career counselors can also provide unit and command briefings, and briefing of active component Soldiers about Army Reserve opportunities and benefits. They also help provide Duty Appointed Re-enlistment NCO training and Individual Ready Reserve and Selected Reserve transfers.

“Theater wide, we receive approximately 10 inquiries per week from active Soldiers about the Army Reserve,” said Master Sgt. John Dunlap, Army Reserve Theater Retention Manager, from Greenville, S.C. “We provide briefings to AC units and leadership as often as possible to educate AC Soldiers about the benefits of service in the U.S. Army Reserve.”

Held said some Soldiers choose to transfer to the Reserves during their deployment.

“The team expects to transfer between 45 and 50 IRR Soldiers mobilized to the CENTCOM AOR from the IRR to Troop Program Units this fiscal year,” Held said. “Former active component Soldiers may be eligible for a bonus of either \$10,000 or \$20,000 for affiliating with and serving in the Army Reserve for either three years or six years. Soldiers not entitled to the Affiliation Bonus may be transferred and then, if eligible, re-enlist for the \$7,500 or \$15,000 re-enlistment bonus. Others are able to transfer into a new (Military Occupational Specialty).”

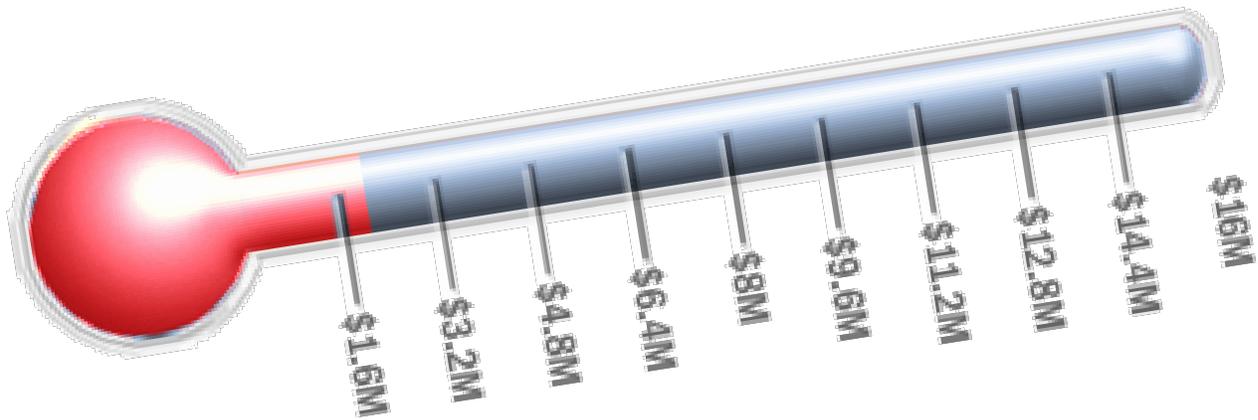
Another option that Soldiers look at is becoming an officer.

“The current team has been very proactive in assisting with Warrant Officer and Officer Direct Commission applications,” Held said. “In July,

the first ever ODC local interview board was conducted at Camp Arifjan consisting of three applicants. Local boards are being expanded to Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The Officer Direct Commission Program is designed to identify TPU Soldiers that demonstrate the potential to serve as commissioned officers in most areas of concentration/branches. “Our ARCCs are actively involved in assisting enlisted Soldiers with officer accessions. The ODC program is designed to produce officers to fill second lieutenant to captain vacancies in Army Reserve units in all areas of concentration except for JAG, Medical and Chaplain Corps,” Dunlap said. “Two applicants appeared before the initial board and approximately 10 are expected to appear before the October board. ARCCs also assist Soldiers who are interested in the Warrant Officer Program and every ARCC can provide counseling and assistance on eligibility criteria and benefits as well as application preparation.”

Whether an enlisted Soldier decides to become an officer or a Soldier decides to switch between active and reserve components, they have viable options for their career. Retention counselors provide Soldiers with the arsenal of knowledge they need to make educated decisions. **A**



Servicemembers give what they get

Story by
Pfc. Christopher T. Grammer
Desert Voice staff writer

In 2006 federal employees and military members gave pledges to the Combined Federal Campaign totaling 271.6 million dollars topping 2005's total of 268.5 million dollars.

As the world's largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaign, the CFC provides Third Army/U.S. Army servicemembers with an easy way to make a difference.

Using the new 5-digit code servicemembers can identify the specific charity or various charities that they would like to support. This system helps the servicemembers give to causes that support their own special interests and that they believe are important.

"It's always important for those who can give, to give," said Sgt. Maj. Edgar K. Boney, 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) G1 sergeant major.

Some would believe that one who has joined the military and pledged their loyalty, and several years of their lives to their country has already given enough.

This however hasn't stopped America's uniformed services from giving again and again. With increased participation and larger donations the servicemembers at home and overseas set the bar higher every year.

"For me (the CFC) is a reminder that many others have allowed us the opportunity to get where we are," said Brig. Gen. Luis R. Visot, the deputy commanding general for 1st TSC.

Since its founding in 1961 the CFC has collected more than 5.75 billion dollars worth of donations from the federal community.

The campaign season that started Sep. 1 and continues until Dec. 15 is in full swing and troops in the Third Army/U.S. Army Central area of responsibility are encouraged to give to the charity of their choice.

Active duty military have the option of payroll deduction that enables the contribution to be spread throughout the year. More than 90 percent of all CFC funds raised last year were payroll deduction.

During this years campaign servicemembers have the option to submit their pledges online and with credit cards. To give online, visit www.cfcoverseas.org and select the Search & Pledge option. 



ALL GOOD AMERICANS GIVE THEIR 'FARE' SHARE

Rakkasans let it all go



A Rakkasan mortarman from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, applies pressure on the base of a 120 mm mortar system to help the base sink further into the ground for better stabilization before the team launches a mortar round at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September.



Mortarmen conduct artillery skills fine-tuning before Iraq

Story and photos by
Pvt. Mary Gurnee
3rd BCT, 101st AA public affairs

Mortar men from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, trekked to Camp Buehring ranges to assemble and fire their mortar systems in their first brigade-wide mortar systems training in Kuwait in September.

The training at the Third Army/U.S. Army Central range afforded the Rakkasan's some fine tuning before heading north to Iraq.

"The training was a chance to get out and make sure that the mortar systems were all functioning properly," said Sgt. 1st Class Eric J. Ebeling, a mortar platoon sergeant in 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment. "It also gave us a chance to get together as a brigade mortar element and do what it is that we do best – blow stuff up."

Specialist Frank Gray, a four-gun squad leader in 3-187's mortar

platoon, said he liked the brigade-level training for several reasons.

"It's always good to go shoot because of what we are going to go do," he said. "We are getting ready to set up our mortars on a forward operating base and do it for real. We got to cross train, where I had my younger Soldiers doing jobs that they don't normally do."

"The combat arms community is a close-knit family," Ebeling explained. "One of the things that the (combat arms) Soldiers have to do is trust each other completely. Out there on patrol, when rounds start coming in, be it direct or indirect fire, all you have to count on is the Soldier to your left and right."

That is where the brotherhood really kicks in, he said.

The Soldiers had fun and joked with each other before the training, but when the range went hot, they knew it was now time to be serious.

Three mortar systems were fired

during the training: the 60 mm, the 81mm and the 120 mm.

The 60 mm mortar is a company-level system, Ebeling explained. It is used primarily in support of maneuver elements conducting dismounted patrols. It gives the ground force commander a ready, and responsive indirect fire asset.

The 81 mm and 120 mm mortar systems are battalion-level systems, Ebeling said. They provide mass-casualty producing effects on targets. They also provide the commander a ready source of lighting and screening effects on command. The major difference between the 81mm and the 120 mm mortar systems is that the 81 mm can be made portable for dismounted operations.

"Being a mortar man is a very unique job, and one that is not for everyone," Ebeling said. "We are here to support all maneuver elements in the completion of their mission, and are no more than a radio call away. **A**

A Rakkasan mortarman from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, applies pressure on the base of a 120 mm mortar system to help the base sink further into the ground for better stabilization before the team launches a mortar round at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September.

A flame bursts out of the barrel as the mortar round goes airborne during the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, mortarmen's brigade-level training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September.



Rakkasan mortarmen from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, "hangs" a round on a 120 mm mortar system during training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September.



With a deafening blast, Rakkasan mortarmen from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division fire a 120 mm mortar system during brigade-level training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, in September. The targets were far behind the hills in the distance.

Civil Affairs units get dose of

Story and photos by
Spc. Wes Landrum
Desert Voice staff writer

Silently, five warriors watch as the crowd of people move toward them. Some shout at them for answers. Some pick up rocks and hurl them at the warriors standing guard at the checkpoint. Others simply watch harmlessly from their homes. From a building behind the group of protestors, a figure flashes by a window. Then, the day falls apart. Gunshots ring out from the window and the team opens fire. After minutes, the skirmish is over and the lights come on.

Servicemembers from four civil affairs teams went through the Engagement Skills Trainer 2000 at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Oct. 16. The training was a necessary part in getting ready for their next mission in Iraq. The EST 2000 provides vital training to units going through the Third Army/U.S. Army Central area of operations in Kuwait training prior to movement to theaters in Iraq or Afghanistan

Capt. Raquel Rangel, team leader for A Company, 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, said going through the EST has many benefits for those who prepare for combat zones. First, it, gives servicemembers scenarios that they might eventually face during their tour. Secondly, force protection is a main priority.

"I am a team leader of four and we will be going out to villages to conduct meetings and negotiations," Rangel said. "What we went through in there are things that are real and could possibly happen."

Jeff Cornelius, trainer facilitator of the EST 2000, said the training provides servicemembers marksmanship, collective and judgemental training. A big part of the training is making decisions such as the decision to shoot or don't shoot. Cornelius said it may look tough, but the EST is not.

"It's about Soldiers knowing their escalation of force procedures and their unit's rules of engagement," Cornelius said "If they know them, and make the call, then they'll know whether or not to pull the trigger.

"The EST is very important be-

cause it presents shoot-don't shoot situations to the servicemembers that they might encounter up north," Cornelius added. "It gives them the ability to make that call in their escalation of force procedures."

Back in the EST, the team is now on patrol when they are engaged in a marketplace by insurgents. The team successfully repels the first attack. The civilians then come out of their houses to check the bodies on the street. The people look to the team, all of a sudden several insurgents come out from behind a corner and commence firing upon the team. The team must decide what to do next—quickly. Return fire with the civilians caught in the middle or wait for the team to be picked off one-by-one.

Sergeant Joel Castillo, A Co., 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, said the training is a lot different compared to his previous deployment during Operation Iraqi Freedom I with the 204th Military Police Company. Now on his second OIF tour, his first in civil affairs, he said the training is just what is needed to get servicemembers ready for what lies ahead in Iraq.

"It actually puts you in a scenario-based situation with real-looking role players," Castillo said. "With things blowing up around you, you have to make a decision whether to shoot or not."

Although Col. Mark McLaughlin, 360th Civil Affairs Brigade deputy commanding officer, has gone through an EST for the purpose of preparing for weapons qualification, this was the first time he had gone through an EST to train for real-world scenarios.

"This was very interactive and it's very, very valuable because it presents you with a number of scenarios that hit you from more than one source," he said. "You have to practice your sectors of fire, listening to your team leader and communicate amongst yourselves to ensure that you defend yourself and don't accidentally kill



Jeff Cornelius, training facilitator for the EST, conducts an after action review with a fire team during EST training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Oct. 16.

reality through virtual reality



Capt. Raquel Rangel (right) and Sgt. Joel Castillo, both of A Company, 448th Civil Affairs Team, take aim at insurgents during training at the Engagement Skills Trainer at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Oct. 16.

innocent civilians.”

McLaughlin said the role of civil affairs teams is not to inflict damage. He said they are a “non-lethal weapons system.” After the aggressing force has been pushed out of a town, civil affairs teams go to work.

“We go back and negotiate, issue payments or work with the local leadership, town council and mayors in Iraq to help legitimize them in the eyes of their people,” McLaughlin said.

Castillo said once initial contact has been made the real work begins. The teams work to reconstruct the town and rebuild the infrastructure. Over the course of time, the Iraqis are able to stand and function on their own.

“Doing that means we can get out of there quicker. Once they build their own, secure their own, take care of their own, I work myself out of a job,”

Castillo said with a smile.

Castillo said while working on their civil affairs mission, the teams may come in contact with insurgent activity. Then, they stop being civil affairs personnel.

“Every Soldier has to understand that no matter if you’re civil affairs, a mechanic, or such, you might find yourself out on the street and you have to have those basic Soldier skills,” Castillo said. “You can always be a person on the FOB (Forward Operating Base). Then, the next minute, you find yourself on a gate or a guard tower and get lit up. You have to know those basic Soldier skills.”

The team now stands watch at a checkpoint when an IED goes off. Another team comes running by carrying wounded. An insurgent comes around a corner with a weapon spraying bullets.

He is quickly dealt with, but then

another man with a weapon charges the group. As the team focuses on him, a third man comes around the corner, hoists a weapon on his shoulder and prepares to fire. A team member sees him and unleashes a flurry of rounds into the insurgent, but he is too late. The rocket-propelled grenade has been fired. The simulation ends.

McLaughlin said the goal of the training is to make sure this does not happen in real life.

“There’s two ways to learn things. There’s the easy way and the hard way. I’ve always preferred the easy way. The fewer things you have to learn downrange or in the box, the safer you will be,” he said. “(Soldiers) understand that if something like this happens, I’ve already been through something like this. I know what to do and where I’m supposed to be and how to fire my weapon to defend myself.” 

Soldier overcomes hardships to become positive role-model

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Anishka Fulton
1st TSC public affairs

Life can be challenging for children growing up in an environment without the love and care of their biological parents. Choosing to overcome challenges can mean the difference between whether children fall by the wayside, or become productive citizens.

For Staff Sgt. Kimberly Ferguson, a supply sergeant from 1st Sustainment Command (Theater), the choice was clear. She did not allow the circumstances under which she grew up determine her life's path.

Ferguson is deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, in the Third Army/U.S. Army Central area of responsibility.

On Sept. 29, Ferguson took a chance to re-engage with her past and possibly affect the lives of children who are in the same place and same situation she was in years ago. She spoke with a group of children from Children's Homes, Inc., out of Paragould, Ark. Ferguson was a part of the home's family for some time.

The Children's Home, Inc., provides a stable home for children who are without parents because of abandonment, death or illness. The home is a charitable, non-profit organization that has provided care for over 2,400 children since it's inception in 1955, Ferguson said.

Ferguson was asked a variety of questions from a group of children at the home. Questions ranged from her life before the home to how life at the home influenced her in making the positive decisions in life that led to her successes.

"It's great to be able to talk to kids who are in the same place that I was 21 years ago," Ferguson said. "I just want them to know that they can do anything they want to, they just have to put their mind to it, and then go for it. You have to talk to them and show them all that life has to offer and that no dream is too big to achieve."

Ferguson grew up in the small town of Corning, Ark. Abandoned by her mother at an early age, she was left with her father and had to live under deplorable



Staff Sgt. Kimberly Ferguson, a supply sergeant from 1st TSC, is all smiles while talking to children at a group home.

conditions, as well as become a pseudo-mother to her younger sister. She was occasionally dropped off at a neighbor's house, where she found comfort around the harsh environment that surrounded her, she said.

"We were living at a place that my father built himself, it was like a shack. We didn't have indoor plumbing, so I had to go next door and beg our neighbors to take a shower. We had wood heat, so I had to chop wood. I had to clean the whole house plus baby sit my sister," Ferguson said. "On top of that, my dad drank excessively. For the most part, I spent the majority of my time at the neighbor's house and would go home on weekends, or when my dad got out of jail and decided to come and get us."

Ferguson was sent to live at the children's home by the authorities because the living conditions at her father's house were not conducive to raising children.

Life at the home was challenging for the then 15-year-old. The children were not allowed outdoors without an escort and phone calls were monitored. Even so, she was thankful for the change that came into her life and took full advantage of the opportunity.

"I didn't view living there as a punishment. Even though we didn't have much freedom, we still had a nice place to go home to after school," Ferguson said. "Most of the kids who came to the home didn't care about going outside. They weren't being beaten, they had everything

they needed. When I was with my father, I didn't have time to do my schoolwork. When I went to the home, that all changed."

Now 39, Ferguson's drive to succeed has been passed on to her kids. She made a promise to herself that they would not have to endure all the pain and suffering she went through while growing up. The mother of three children, she credits the love and support of her "foster family" and her children, as her driving force.

Ferguson's drive and determination is seen by her co-workers and is an inspiration to those around her.

"She has an excellent work ethic, and she does it so naturally. She is really, really good at her job," Sgt. Sarah Garland, a supply sergeant from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Theater Signal Command. "People always go to her for advice. I definitely look up to her."

Ferguson has high praises for the people who influenced her during her time at the children's home.

"My kids are now on their way. I have disciplined well-behaved young people who know how to act in public. They know what the value of a dollar is and where stuff comes from, and I'm satisfied they'll be productive members of society because I've taught them that," said Ferguson. "That what I got from children's home, somebody showed me what it means to be part of society, and I'm forever grateful." 

Haunted House and Halloween Spooktacular Carnival

Wed. Oct. 31 7 p.m.
Zone 1 Community Center

*Do you need a good scare?
Can you handle it?
Prizes, games and food.
Show up if you dare!*

*For more information call:
430-7482 or 1205*

Just One Question...

“What charities do you give to or would like to give to, and why?”



“Usually I donate to organizations who do research for cancer patients because my father passed away from cancer when I was 13.”

Staff Sgt. Jeterria Thompson
Sumter, S.C.
NCOIC for badging office
586th AG Detachment 1



“I contribute to a diabetes organization. My grandma passed away from diabetes and now my mom has diabetes.”

Staff Sgt. Maria Barnett
Mt. Pleasant, Texas
Superintendent of mission support flights
586th AG Detachment 1



“I give to breast cancer foundations because my mother died of breast cancer.”

Australian Army Cpl. Joshua Wilder
Sydney
Air dispatcher
Force Level Logistics Asset



“I usually give to the animal ones. I love animals.”

Sgt. 1st Class Esther Burchell
Albuquerque, N.M.
Warehouse, Medical Retrograde NCOIC
Area Support Group - Kuwait



“Children’s charities. If we can contribute to them when they’re young, we will have a better chance of making an impact in their lives.”

Spc. Armando Montalvo
San Antonio, Tx
Chaplain’s Assistant
Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 40

Why I serve: Petty Officer 2nd Class Taci Toves
Armorer
Navy ESLG-Foxtrot



The Seattle native explains why he chose to join the military.

“I joined when I was 17. My whole family served in the military so I carried on the tradition.”

What's happening around Kuwait ...

An Army tradition



Photo by Pfc. Christopher T. Grammer

Brig. Gen. Luis R. Visot, 1st TSC deputy commanding general, cuts the cake at the Combined Federal Campaign kickoff breakfast at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 15.

A special visit

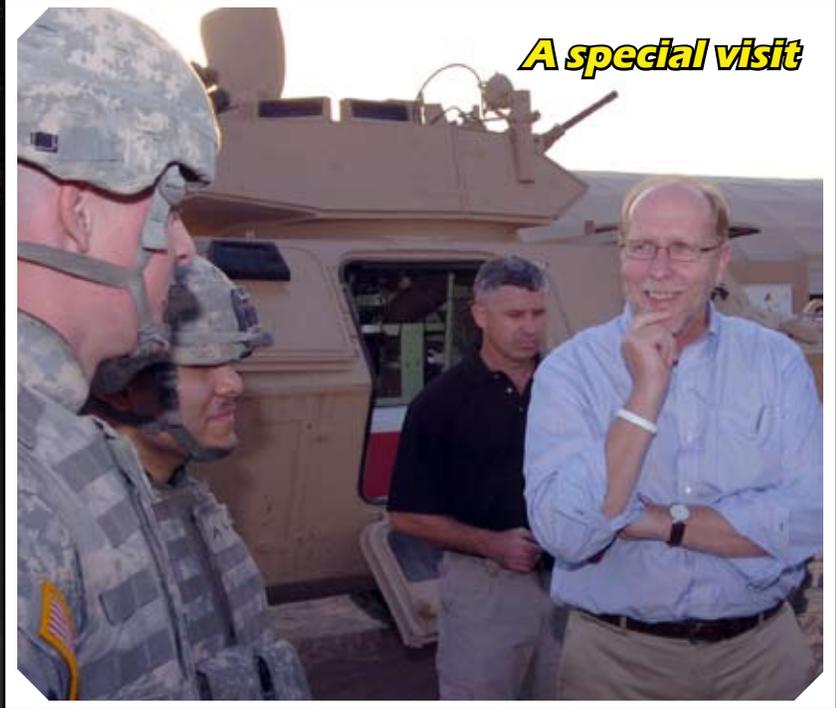


Photo by Master Sgt. Michele Hammonds

U.S. Representative Dave Loebsack (D-IA 2nd) smiles as he talks with Soldiers of the 1175th Transportation Company, Logistics Task Force 10 during a tour at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 19. Loebsack and other congressmen took time out to meet with their stateside Soldiers while touring the Middle East. The Soldiers are a part of the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) which supports Third Army/U.S. Army Central in its logistics mission to support Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

Down 'n' dirty



Photo by Pfc. Christopher T. Grammer

An M-1114 Humvee tears up the trails of Training Area Papa at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Oct. 18. The Humvee Familiarization Driver Program is a training program set up to give troops more experience behind the wheel of an up-armored Humvee.

Spread the word



Photo by Spc. Wes Landrum

Members of the Emergency Medical Facility-Kuwait pass out brochures to servicemembers during the Breast and Sexual Education Fair at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 20. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month as well as Sexual Awareness Month.