



The Old Ironsides Report

Friday, October 31, 2003

Lawmakers want tougher armor for Iraq troops

By Lisa Burgess, Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — As the \$87 billion defense supplemental requests heads into the home stretch on Capitol Hill, lawmakers in the House continued to express concerns that deployed servicemembers don't have the necessary supplies to do their jobs.

On Wednesday, 33 House members, led by Rep. Corrine Brown, D-Fla., sent House appropriators a letter that emphasized the need to supply all deployed troops with the Defense Department's new Interceptor flak vests, as well as provide adequate immunizations, drinking water and even sundries such as toothpaste.

"It is an outrage that servicemembers, deployed in the Global War on Terrorism, do not receive adequate personal hygiene products and drinking water," the letter said. "Servicemembers have told us they lack personal items like razors, shaving cream, toothpaste, etc. Congress needs to provide these items to America's soldiers and not rely on families to continually send their loved ones these necessities."

Brown sent the letter, which includes the signatures of 32 other representatives, all Democrats, "to emphasize the importance of supplying the troops with all they need," Dahlia Melendrez, a veteran's affairs staff member for Brown, said in a Thursday interview.

Melendrez said that the letter was based on "lots of newspaper articles" about reported shortages and letters that Brown has received from her constituents.

Many members of Congress have expressed anger over Defense Department estimates that more than 40,000 troops, most notably Reserve and National Guard combat support units, were not outfitted with the new "Interceptor" body armor before deploying to Iraq.

Instead, the troops are wearing Vietnam-era "flak jackets," designed to stop fragmentation but not larger caliber rifle rounds, or Kevlar vests without the ceramic inserts that prevent high-caliber ammunition from penetrating.

Some soldiers told members of the House Appropriations Committee that they were spending as much as \$650 out of pocket to buy their own Interceptor Body Armor vests and protective insert plates.

DOD officials have said that the manufacturer of the new vests is producing the armor as rapidly as possible, and that the new vests are priority shipped to the Middle East.

But members of Congress and their staffs are not satisfied with that explanation.

"The concern is that [deployed troops] should have [Interceptor vests] now," Dahlia Melendrez, a veteran's affairs staff member for Brown, said in a Thursday interview. If there are production issues preventing that, "these obstacles really need to be overcome. Whatever it takes to get the vests there should be done, now."

House appropriators sent a blistering rebuke concerning the reported vest shortage to Pentagon officials in their Oct. 9 report concerning the supplemental. The members also added about \$50 million to the Bush administration's supplemental request, specifically to outfit every servicemember in Iraq with the new vests.

As for Brown's assertion that drinking water is in short supply in Iraq, the Defense Department has repeatedly asserted that while bottled water, which is expensive to transport, may be rationed in Iraq, there has never been a shortage of potable, purified water for troops.

Melendrez said she was not aware of that explanation, but noted that two of her family members are deployed to Iraq have repeatedly asked for supplies of powdered drink mix. Neither family member has complained of lacking access to water, Melendrez said.

Passage of the supplemental request has been slowed by disagreements in Congress over the remaining \$20 billion in the request, which is supposed to be used for civilian reconstruction and revitalization projects in Iraq.

House and Senate members broke a crucial logjam in passing the supplemental on Wednesday, when negotiators for each side agreed to provide more than \$18 billion in aid to Iraq as grants, rather than loans.

The House was expected to approve the supplemental as early as Thursday evening, with a Senate vote expected to follow either Friday or early next week.

SAFETY TIP

THE RAINY SEASON IS FINALLY UPON US. YOU CAN EXPECT THUNDERSTORMS AND HIGH WINDS ACCOMPANIED BY SAND STORMS. ALL PERSONNEL SHOULD TAKE THE FOLLOWING PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID ACCIDENTS AND PERSONAL INJURY:

- ENSURE THAT TENTS ARE PROPERLY TIED DOWN AND SANDBAGGED.
- DRIVE ACCORDING TO THE CONDITIONS. IF THE VISIBILITY BECOMES ZERO THEN STOP AND WAIT IT OUT.
- CARRY YOUR EYE PROTECTION AND FIELD SCARVES WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES. THESE WILL HELP PREVENT EYE INJURY AND REDUCE SAND INGESTION DURING A SAND STORM.
- THUNDERSTORMS WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY LIGHTNING. TAKE THE APPROPRIATE PROTECTIVE MEASURES.
- FIGHTING POSITIONS SHOULD BE CHECKED FOR APPROPRIATE DRAINAGE AND, WHEN COVERED WITH SANDBAGS, SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE SANDBAGS ARE COVERED WITH WATER PROOF MATERIAL (TARP/PLASTIC) TO PREVENT THE SANDBAGS FROM ABSORBING WATER AND THEREBY INCREASING THEIR WEIGHT WHICH CAN LEAD TO STRUCTURAL FAILURE.

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NEWS

California fires destroy 2,600 homes

From The Scotsman

WITH towering blazes bearing down on mountain towns in Southern California, firefighters yesterday dug in to protect hundreds of homes and prayed for lower temperatures.

In the San Bernardino mountains to the east of Los Angeles, relentless flames engulfed hundreds of homes on a wind-driven march towards the resort towns of Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead. Thousands of homeowners were evacuated.

To the south, in San Diego County, the state's largest fire claimed the life of a firefighter when a crew was overcome by flames. Three other crew members were critically injured.

Steve Rucker, 38, died while battling the Cedar Fire, which has burned more than 250,000 acres and destroyed 1,400 homes.

He was the first firefighter among 20 people who have died in a week of wildfires that have devastated the region.

The fires have destroyed more than 2,600 homes and blackened more than 660,000 acres.

"It's like trying to control chaos," said Brian Janey, of the Camp Pendleton Fire Department, as he battled the Old Fire, which has claimed more than 350 homes.

In all, almost 12,000 firefighters and support personnel were fighting what Gray Davis, the state governor, said might be the costliest disaster California has faced.

The United States severed talks with Iran after a series of bombings in Saudi Arabia in May which the United States said were linked to groups based in Iran. Iran has denied the assertion.

Halloween gun scare spooks Capitol Hill

From The Scotsman

TWO women carrying Halloween costumes and a plastic gun triggered a major alert at the heart of the US government last night.

Armed guards searched the Cannon House Office Building on Capitol Hill room by room after security guards said they spotted a handgun in the backpack of a man as he passed through a metal detector. Police later said a woman had also entered the building.

Scores of members of congress were evacuated while the Capitol Hill police service carried out a sweep. Tunnels linking various Capitol Hill buildings were sealed.

Descriptions were urgently circulated: The woman was a brunette with shoulder-length hair. The man was described as a white male, 5ft 3in tall with brown hair, wearing a black suit.

A Florida congressman, Jeff Miller, said: "The Capitol police are doing their full sweep, searching this entire structure which is a very large building." There are numerous places within the Cannon Building that someone could go."

But two hours later it was ascertained two women carrying a Halloween costume and a plastic revolver were to blame.

The US Capitol police chief, Terence Gainer, said the incident resulted from "two staff members bringing in Halloween costumes ... I don't think they had any ill intent."

Oddly Enough

Police Undress to Bust Beach Crime

By stripping down to swim trunks or bikinis and mixing with bathers, a special 50-member Rio de Janeiro police unit will combat rampant beach crime in Brazil's tourist mecca from next weekend, state security officials said on Wednesday. As part of a wider plan for beach security in Rio, men and women from the special undercover unit will "infiltrate among bathers. They will be in swimwear, unarmed, monitoring eventual formations of drug traders, beach robbers or any kind of disturbances, and inform uniformed beach police," a state security spokesman said. Police had to deploy the wider security plan several weeks early this year after a wave of robberies at and near the famed beaches of Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon last weekend brought fears of mass robberies by slum gangs along the beach, as happened on Ipanema in 1992. In all, 1,000 police will be involved in the scheme, to run during all the Southern Hemisphere's summer. Violence in and around Rio's many teeming shantytowns makes the city one of the world's most violent, although crime levels are much lower in the posh South Zone and its beaches.

SPORTS

Tennis: Roddick replaces Ferrero at No. 1

PARIS (AP) — Andy Roddick will move up to No. 1 after reaching the Masters Series — Paris quarterfinals while top-ranked Juan Carlos Ferrero lost Thursday.

Roddick, who beat Ferrero in the U.S. Open final last month, beat 16th-seeded Tommy Robredo 6-3, 6-4 to assure that he will move up from his current career-best ranking of No. 2. Ferrero was upset by Jiri Novak 7-5, 7-5.

Roddick, 21, is the fourth-youngest player atop the computer rankings since the ATP Tour introduced them in 1973. He became the sixth American, and youngest since John McEnroe, to hold the No. 1 ranking.

This Day in History

31 October

1517 Luther posts 95 theses on Wittenberg church-Protestant Reformation

1815 Sir Humphrey Davy of London patents miner's safety lamp

1864 Nevada admitted as 36th state

1922 Benito Mussolini (Il Duce) becomes premier of Italy

1940 Deadline for Warsaw Jews to move into the Warsaw Ghetto

1950 Collazo & Torresola attempt to kill Truman in Washington, DC

1952 1st thermonuclear bomb detonated-Marshall Islands

1956 Britain & France begin to bomb Egypt to reopen the Suez Canal

1956 Brooklyn, NY, ends streetcar service

1959 Lee Harvey Oswald announces in Moscow he will never return to US

1963 Ed Sullivan witnesses the Beatles & their fans at London Airport

1964 Barbra Streisand's "People," album goes #1 for 5 weeks

1968 President Johnson orders a halt to all bombing of North Vietnam

