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## 171st ASG helps rebuild communities in southern Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Ward Gros

Rebuilding Iraq and helping the Iraqis reestablish normalcy in cities that have survived two wars in 12 years isn't something that happens overnight, and Col. Lawrence Larsen, the commander of the 171st Area Support Group (ASG) in Southern Iraq, says he is beginning to see gradual improvements in the neighboring town of An Nasiriyah.

There have been some improvements like restoring electrical power for six hours a day has helped the entire city, Larsen said. Other improvements like providing a water treatment plant and sewage system, both on Larsen's wish list would cost millions of dollars that are currently unavailable. Even so setting goals and taking things one step at a time has become a little bit easier thanks to the funds available from the Commander's Emergency Response Program.

Larsen and other commanders can now request up to \$50,000 per project that would help stabilize Iraq through a program formerly titled the Commander's Discretionary Fund.

"We go through a grant-writing type of process where we identify the projects we could work on, the impact that these projects would have on the community and cost," said Larsen, a reservist who is also a biology professor at Campbell Community College, North Carolina.

One of the areas that Larsen has designated for the Emergency Response Program is assistance to three orphanages in An Nasiriyah. The 402nd Civil Affairs sponsored the boys' and girls' orphanages for ages six to 16, and babies' orphanage from birth to age six in April. Before most of the civil affairs team left the area, the 171st ASG command sergeant major took up the sponsorship for his unit.

"When the 402nd Civil Affairs asked for someone to take up the orphanages, I raised my hand," said Command Sgt. Maj. Bob Szakal of the 171st ASG. "It's something that really tugs at my heartstrings."

Szakal, who is a strict no-nonsense sergeant major and Vietnam combat veteran, said that he saw helping the children was something he should do. During the early stages of sponsor-

ship, Szakal collected funds from soldiers and bought stoves, refrigerators, fans, televisions and bed frames all on the local economy.

"First, I passed it out to the enlisted and then the officers," Szakal said.

These out of pocket donations were a start for the soldiers from the 171st ASG. During his first visits, Szakal also brought a doctor to provide medical assistance and engineers to assess facility improvement projects.

Szakal also wrote letters home to family, friends, coworkers at a Rowan-Cabarrus Community College in Salsisbury, North Carolina where he works as a dean when not deployed, as well as to his church.

"People back home want to donate clothes and food," Szakal said. "They really want to help."

In addition to the grassroots support, Szakal said the engineers' appraisals for structural repairs will be submitted through the Emergency Response Program in the same way that a grant proposal is submitted before funding. The scope of work, impact and funding needed are included in the proposal.

One of the first things, Szakal said he would like to see would be cupboards in the kitchens. Each orphanage has a threadbare kitchen without shelves or storage area for food or cooking utensils. Kitchen chairs and tables were recently bought with out of pocket donations

by soldiers; although, some of the cooks continue to sit on the floor as they have done throughout their lives.

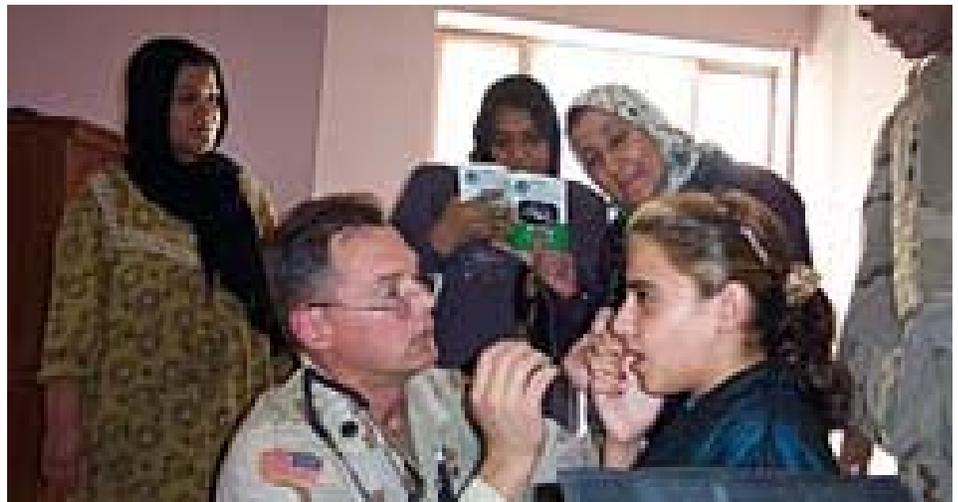
The frustrations and hardships of every day life in An Nasiriyah, a town where the Marines encountered some of the fiercest fighting during the initial combat of Operation Iraqi Freedom, have had an affect on the ASG's support program for the orphanages. Donated food that was placed in an outside storage room was stolen. Bars have since been placed on the windows, and a lock has been placed on the door. Fans were also installed to keep the room as cool as possible in 140 degree heat.

The Americans have helped, said the Director of the Orphanages who simply gave her name as Amira.

Szakal has been very good for the children, she said.

The 171st ASG has supported the orphanages for the past month, and even though significant progress has been made through initial purchases and a request for Emergency Response Funds, Szakal said he would like to provide more.

"Right now I see a lot of trying," Szakal said. "Our biggest success is letting them know that somebody cares. We want people to know that we are here to help and not fight. In a way seeing the children smile helps me explain why I'm here."



A doctor from the 804th Medical Brigade treats a local girl in the An Nasiriyah area. (photo by Staff Sgt. Ward Gros, 143rd TRANSCOM)



## Spotlight

### On redeployment tips for commanders

*From Hot Topics: Current Issues for Army Leaders (Part 2 of a 3-part series)*  
 Deployments are difficult. They bring change, separation and loneliness. But when the anticipated reunion finally arrives, many people find themselves overwhelmed with a rush of emotions--relief, hope, anxiety and even resentment.

*Here are some tips for commanders to help their soldiers make the return to their families the exciting and happy event it should be:*

*Be familiar with the Deployment Cycle Concept Plan. ([www.army1.army.mil/default.asp?pageid+101f](http://www.army1.army.mil/default.asp?pageid+101f))*

*Psychologically prepare soldiers for redeployment. Reunion briefings are mandatory--they can lessen the shock and stress of reunion.*

*Keep unit and family readiness program personnel continually informed of the redeployment schedule, especially since delays are common in redeployment.*

*Ensure soldiers complete Deployment Cycle Support tasks prior to taking leave. These include mandatory health screenings, stress counseling, critical incident sessions, sensitive items check, etc.*

*Allow leisure time. Publish a schedule for family interaction with sufficient time for soldiers and families to make plans.*

*Make sure soldiers has easy access to support services from unit chaplains throughout deployment, redeployment and reunion.*

*Identify single soldiers without support systems.*

*Know your people and watch their behavior carefully. Encourage those who usually don't participate in support groups to seek help and comfort from others.*

*Make soldiers and family members aware of support services as mental-health professionals and chaplains.*

*Identify financial concerns and provide financial training as required.*

*Incidents of spouse and child abuse increase immediately before and after deployments. Monitor soldiers' behavior for signs of anxiety or tension that might lead to the physical, emotional or sexual abuse of family members. Also be open to signs that soldiers themselves are being abused.*

*For active duty, don't expect soldiers to return to duty as though nothing has changed. Until they talk to nondeploying personnel, soldiers may not recognize how much things have changed. Other non-deploying soldiers may not understand how deploying soldiers feel upon returning. This can leave gaps of isolation and misunderstanding. Encourage unity and esprit de corps among unit members.*

*Deployments may have been hard on soldiers, but families also pay a huge price. A little understanding and leniency from commanders can ensure soldiers and their families have a happy reunion.*



## Soldier Talk

What are you most thankful for this year?



*I'm thankful that I'm alive, have good health and a great, supportive family.*

Sgt. Caroline  
Zaversnik  
3rd PERSCOM



*I'm thankful for a family that loves me.*

Lt. Col. Fredrick  
Davis  
3rd PERSCOM



*I'm thankful to know my children are being well taken care of while I'm away.*

Sgt. Tonya  
Graddick  
461st Postal Bn.



*I'm thankful that my family is doing well and in good health.*

Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Jay  
Preston  
3rd PERSCOM



*For the people I deployed with. This would have been worse without them.*

Spc. Michelle  
Merten  
419th Trans. Bn.



*Everyone is in good spirits. It could be a lot worse if they weren't.*

1st Lt. Richard  
Flores  
478th Trans.Co.

## News Briefs



**Clear ALL weapons?**--Supporting the idea that one can never be too careful, these military policemen use the buddy system to clear a cannon at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The antique weapon was found at an amnesty box, apparently dropped off by someone who either wised up about getting it through customs or just got tired of hauling it around. The MPs shown here are all members the 438th Military Police Detachment, an Army Reserve unit out of Salt Lake City, Utah. They are (left to right) Spc. Timothy Houston, Spc. Kenneth Labrum, Spc. Robert Hansen and Pfc. Jason Sills. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Maj. Larry Stevens, CFLCC PAO)

### Federal workers to get extended leave

(From Defendamerica.mil) WASHINGTON--Federal employees returning from Guard and Reserve duty in the war on terror are receiving an extra five days of "uncharged" civilian leave.

President Bush directed the move in a Nov. 14 memorandum issued to the heads of all executive departments and agencies. "As we welcome home returning federal civil servants who were called to active duty in the continuing global war on terrorism," the president wrote, "we recognize the contributions they have made in the defense of freedom.

"Whether they served with the Reserve forces or the Air and Army National Guard," he continued, "each of them has my personal gratitude and the respect and admiration of a grateful nation.

### Uncle Sam wants your war stories

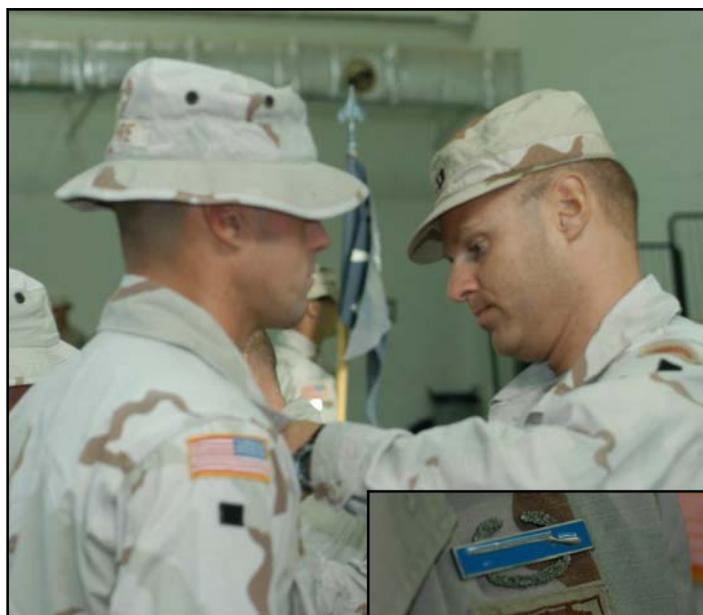
(From Defendamerica.mil) WASHINGTON--Veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as well as any other combat operations, can share accounts of their experiences for posterity through the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/folk-life/vets/>), an effort by Congress two years ago to preserve the stories and memories of America's war veterans.

Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, project director, said the project's letters, memoirs, audiotapes and photographs speak of combat and what war was like, or of pranks and funny misfortunes that occurred while veterans were on leave. But most stories, she said, speak of the closeness and camaraderie within the military - "my buddies, my unit, and loyalty" - adding, "Loyalty is a very big theme." Another theme often written about is love and "longing for the folks back home," she said.

McCulloch-Lovell said the project is stepping up efforts to ensure the words of thousands of veterans are told to an even greater audience. She said this month the Veterans History Project began airing a radio series called "Coming Home," which features the oral biographies of 18 war veterans who tell of their war experiences and life in the military. It's being aired via Public Radio International, which develops and supplies non-commercial programming to affiliate stations throughout the country.

The Veterans History Project also has expanded features on its Web site, to include more digitized letters, photos and individual stories, she said.

Site visitors can now "see and listen" to the stories of 23 veterans. And there is no shortage of stories to tell. In the two years since the project began, McCulloch-Lovell said, interest by veterans wanting to share their stories has increased immensely.



**BRAVO!**--Capt. Edwin Winkler, commander of the Bravo Co. 162nd Infantry Bn., pins a Combat Infantryman's Badge on one of his soldiers. The 162nd was the first Oregon National Guard unit to receive the award since the Korean War. (photos by Maj. Robert Hart)



A Filipino wedding ceremony reenactment.

**International Cultural Night--Camp Arifjan** hosted a cornucopia of colorful, creative and talented artistic troupes from around the world Nov. 22. Along with the show, soldiers dined on a buffet of foods, including the Arabic salads hommous, fattoush, tabouleh; main courses of lamb kebab, potato and carrot ragout (Arabic), beef adobo (Filipino) vegetable pulao, chicken tikka (Indian); and desserts of kunafa (Arabic) and cream carmel. (photos by Staff Sgt. Nate Orme)



Troops and civilians load up on cultural food.



One of three Indian dancers.



A Kuwaiti musical group.



An Egyptian bellydancer was very popular with G.I.s.

## Bon Temps

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