

Base Operations keeps Steel Falcon operating seamlessly

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"Leader's Rest" dedicated to fallen Iron Soldier

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Steel Sentinel

Issue 4 for, and about soldiers of Task Force Iron Steel Feb. 16, 2004 OLD IRONSIDES

On Point:

By Staff Sgt. Mark Bell
372nd MPAD

CAMP STEEL FALCON, Iraq -- From afar, it looks simple, uninhibited and safe. As the Soldiers tread through the wet earth slowly inching closer, their boots get heavier by each step from the mud-basin surrounding the base of the tower. Finally, they're there, almost breathless at sight. They look up as they have done dozens of times before - seemingly lifeless and cold. They firmly grasped the metal rail, banged their boots against the first step, instantaneously they're pounds lighter as globs of mud fall from their battle-worn desert boots.

With their weapons slung over their shoulders and their backpack canteens full of refreshing water for the long evening, they slowly begin the 30-foot climb to the pinnacle -- to a new world like a castle to its kingdom. Finally, they both are on top of one of the tallest guard towers in Baghdad.

Surrounded by steel, mortar and sandbags, they meet familiar faces, the guards who have spent the past two hours protecting their portion of Camp Steel Falcon.

The view from towers nine and 10 are inspiring overlooking the heart of the Al Rashid district in southern Baghdad.

They command attention as each tower overlooks Baghdad most dangerous roads - keeping the invisible safety shield between thousands of American Soldiers and the unknown outside world.

Armed with squad automatic weapons, their silhouettes disappear behind them through the thick camouflage netting breaking up any visual target of opportunity.

For young Soldiers barely out of their teens, knowing they are protecting the lives their friends, mentors and leaders below, brings complete satisfaction pulling what some consider just a "detail."

"It gives me a large amount responsible for protecting the FOB and the units here," said Pvt. Jenelle Bower, 19, from Pennsylvania. "It makes me feel good that I am doing something important. We have to protect everyone inside or the mission will fail."

For Spc. Antonia Mahoney, 20, from Washington, Ga., working on the towers has been a great experience. "It's something I never thought I would ever get to do," he said. "I feel important doing this job here because we're actually making it safer for the people in the fob while we are pulling guard in the tower."

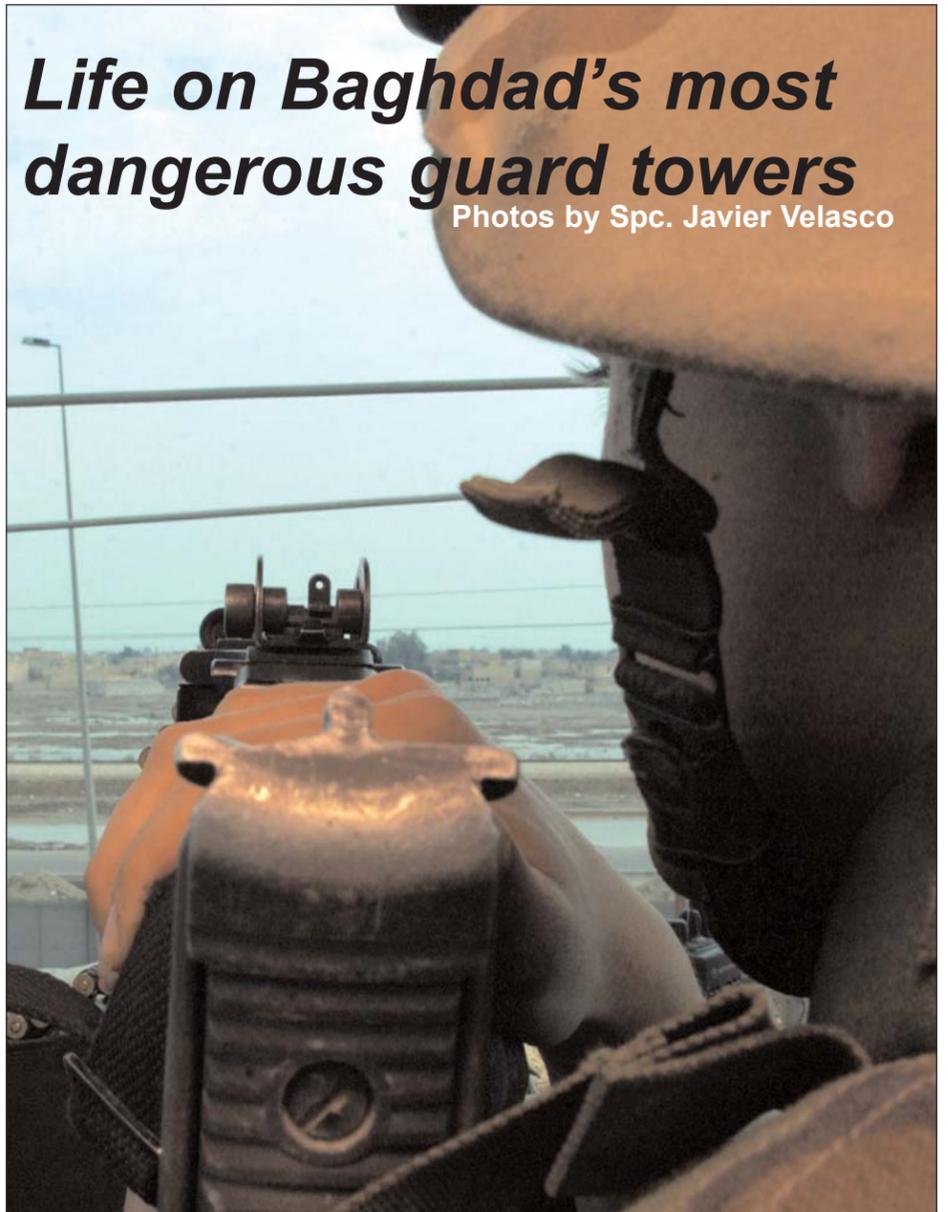
As the sun slowly inches toward the horizon, they know it is only minutes before everything changes. The rules change for the hostile Iraqi insurgents who collect intelligence about the operating base - hidden in the buildings dwarfed by the compound's nearby massive walls.

Everything changes as they flip down their night-vision goggles in front of his eyes. From black and gray to shades of light and dark greens, they now are able to watch the large sand-barrier wall separating the busy highway from the wall from any possible enemy challenging

see Towers, page 3

Life on Baghdad's most dangerous guard towers

Photos by Spc. Javier Velasco



Spc. Bill Dodson, 20, from Poquoson, Va., 20, keeps an eye on Highway 8 traffic during his recent guard-duty shift on Tower nine.

Enforcer Aid Station keeps Steel Falcon Soldiers healthy

Story and photos by Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson
372nd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq - As U.S. Army Soldiers in Baghdad continue operations to take out terrorists and eliminate insurgents, medical staff back at the forward operating bases across the city are working just as hard to fix broken bones and treat respiratory infections to keep those Soldiers healthy and mission-capable.

The 123rd Main Support Battalion, 1st Armored Division, is running the Enforcer Aid Station, providing medical support for Soldiers stationed at Forward Operating Base Steel Falcon.

Medical staff at Enforcer Aid Station provide normal military medical services, like sick call, but they do not stop there.

Enforcer Aid Station is an echelon-two care facility, which essentially means that Soldiers in the area have the very best medical care available to them short of going to an actual hospital.

"We can take care of any patient that is going to need care for less than 72 hours," said Capt. Amber Hughes, a division nurse with the 123rd. "We are responsible for the Soldiers of division artillery, military police, anyone on FOB Falcon."

Hughes said they also routinely treat Iraqi and civilian workers that call Falcon FOB their home. They have even treated some Iraqi Civil Defense Corps members who live on the FOB when their aid station could not provide the level of care needed.

Aside from the routine sick calls or emergency traumas the aid station takes care of, they also provide dental, optometry, mental health and x-ray capabilities, all exclusive to echelon-two care facilities, Hughes said.

"A standard, level-one facility cannot do pregnancy tests, urinalysis or examine an injury by x-ray," said

Hughes. "We can do all those things and more to make sure Soldiers leave here ready to go back out and return to duty healthy."

The location of FOB Falcon makes it a magnet for injured Soldiers in the area, Hughes said. The main highway that sits outside the FOB has become a strip known for the frequency of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks along it.

The high-risk highway, along with Steel Falcon's highly active combat elements, makes Enforcer Aid Station an essential part of the team there, providing essential medical care to injured Soldiers.

Hughes said she and the rest of the staff at Enforcer Aid Station have treated several gunshot wounds and shrapnel wounds from IED and grenade attacks in the area.

Sgt. Theresa Garriott, medical specialist with the 123rd, said she loves her job - helping people. Her responsibilities at the aid station include taking care of Soldiers held overnight, administering medication and IVs, and cleaning wounds.

Receiving trauma patients, however, is the real test of skill and training, said Garriot.

"When a trauma comes in, your training kicks in almost immediately," said Garriott. "The Soldiers who come in here get a little pampering and babying, but that is because we want them fully recovered and back to their unit, mission-capable, as soon as possible."

The Enforcer Aid Station's staff is a confident group of health care professionals, ready to meet the call whenever sick or injured Soldiers need them, said Hughes.

"You do not ever wish an injury to happen, but when it does I hope Soldiers know that we are here, ready to provide the best care possible for them," Hughes said.

see Photo Story, page 3

Do's and Don'ts of war souvenirs and trophies

As Soldiers prepare for redeployment it is important that all soldiers in TF 1AD understand the policies governing the shipping and carrying of war trophies and souvenirs out of theater. Sources such as U.S. Customs laws, U.S. Postal laws, criminal statutes, CENTCOM General Order #1A, and Military regulations limit the items that we bring home. The information in this article will give you specific guidance.

Below is a list of War trophies and Souvenirs that soldiers will be allowed to take home:

War Trophies - 1AD personnel may retain up to ten (10) of the war trophies listed below.

- helmets and head coverings;
- uniforms and uniform items such as patches and insignia;
- canteens, compasses, rucksacks, pouches, load bearing equipment;
- military training manuals, books, and pamphlets, flags;
- posters, placards, photographs;
- other items that clearly pose no safety or health risk and are not otherwise prohibited by law or regulation.

Souvenirs - are items lawfully acquired from authorized vendors (Bazaars, AAFES, etc.) for personal use that can be legally imported into CONUS or OCONUS. Soldiers are authorized to personally transport the following souvenirs, however souvenirs MAY NOT BE transported in government MILVANS:

- ghurka knives, scimitars, and swords (only in individual checked baggage - cannot send through the mail);
- up to \$100.00 US equivalent of Iraqi Dinar;
- gold, silver, and jewelry;
- wood products that are sealed properly;
- articles of clothing, handbags, and wallets;
- household goods (silverware, dishes, rugs, paintings, etc).

Below is a list of items that soldiers are prohibited from taking home. Brigadier General Dempsey, 1AD Commanding General, withholds criminal jurisdiction over individuals who possess or attempt to transport the following items:

see Trophies, page 3

Base Ops senior NCO keeps Camp Steel Falcon moving forward

By Staff Sgt. Mark Bell
372nd MPAD

CAMP STEEL FALCON, Iraq - Some say you'll have a better chance of spotting Elvis in Baghdad than seeing Sgt. Maj. Jeff Wells sitting in his office.

Although he has his own non-tactical vehicle for getting around one of the largest forward operating bases (FOBs) in Baghdad, the 44-year-old non-commissioned-officer-in-charge of base operations prefers walking the large walled-compound located on Highway 8 in southern Baghdad.

Armed with his most deadly weapon, his radio, Wells is able to track contractors and Soldiers working on more than 50 different projects at any given time - making a better life for the 1st Armored Division Artillery Combat Team.

"My number one focus is the quality of life for the tenants here," he said. "Secondly, we are trying to clean up the life supports elements of the FOB."

Ever since Camp Steel Falcon has been designated as an enduring FOB, Wells' primary focus has been ensuring the present and future life-support elements are built to last for the unit to finish the DCT's mission.

"We're trying to be an enduring FOB," he said after one long day overseeing a large project to replace the dirt roads with paved roads. "What I do is find myself working with a lot of different contractors. Sometimes it can be overwhelming, but it's work that needs to be done, and that work needs to be tracked."

One of Wells' biggest concerns is water. With more than 3,000 soldiers and contractors calling Camp Steel Falcon home, Wells said, making sure everyone has potable and non-potable water is very important to the maintaining the lifeline.

From the dining facility to soldiers brushing their teeth, Camp Steel Falcon using more than 400,000 gallons of water each day. He said, there is more to it than just turning on the faucet or shower.

"The reason we have a good supply of water is because of the enormous amount of coordination between KBR and the Iraqis to ensure we don't run out of water," he said.

"I have my hands in so many projects it's not even funny," he said laughing.

Using more than 70 Iraqi workers to put nails in walls, unplug toilets or just sweeping dirt off the roads, Wells said using local Al Rashid residents is a very important step to getting Iraq to an independent, democratic country.

"We want them to be able to take over their own country some day," he said. "By giving them jobs here on the FOB, maybe they'll pick up a new skill they will be able to use now or when we are long gone."

Besides labor skills, Wells is a big believer in education. Using his experience making deals with the Iraqis to bring a better life for Soldiers here, Wells also made one deal that was extra special.

"I remember one 16-year-old Iraqi girl who really wanted a job working at the Post Exchange," he said. "I wondered why she wasn't in school and why a job was more important than an education. I figured finishing high school would be important to someone here."

Because of the distance and location of the nearest primary school, the young lady was unable to attend school but still had a strong desire to learn the English language.

With his creative juices flowing, once again Wells made a deal. Not for a lower price or more workers, but something more valuable - an education for a young Iraqi mind.

Using his large pool of Iraqi workers, Wells would let her work at the Post Exchange if she would, in exchange, learn English from an Iraqi professor that worked on the FOB as a skilled laborer.

"Now, every Friday she is taking English lessons here on the FOB - it's a great thing to see her learning to speak English."

Whether it's calming tensions between Iraqi workers and tenants or making a young Iraqi's dream come true, Wells said to be able to run a small city boils down to one thing, "It's about being a soldier - nothing more or less," he said.



Sgt. Maj. Jeff Wells, 44, from Hopewell, Va., base operations non-commissioned-officer-in-charge of Camp Steel Falcon in southern Baghdad, uses the radio to keep up on the latest projects one of the largest forward operating base in Baghdad.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Bell



Iraqi workers mix gravel and sand to make cement during a road construction project on Camp Steel Falcon.

Photo by Spc. Javier Velasco

Commentary: Declaring 'war on accidents'

By Bob Van Elsberg

Life may be unfair but death isn't — a fatal accident is an "equal-opportunity" killer. It doesn't care whether you're behind the wheel of a Humvee or a Honda; it will take you wherever it can.

I know. I have seen death many times during my 33 years in and around the military. Back in 1974 I waved goodbye on a Friday afternoon to a couple of friends as they left to go canoeing in Washington state. Within 24 hours they were both dead — victims of alcohol and the "I-am-bulletproof" syndrome that led both of them to shun life jackets.

The year before, I saw a pretty young woman dying on the road next to her car. There was nothing I could do to help her. There's an old saying that goes, "Die young and leave a handsome corpse." But believe me, there is nothing attractive in watching someone die.

Early in 2002 I interviewed the widow of an Air Force sergeant who'd gotten on the road drunk and hit a concrete barrier at 79 mph. Unbelted, he'd gone into the windshield and was declared brain dead the following day. He had a lot of bravado in his attitude about life.

As I interviewed his widow, I sat there helplessly as she broke down in tears. They'd

gotten married and bought a house barely two months before he died. When he ignored years of warnings against drinking and driving, he never thought about what it would do to the person who loved him most.

The problem with accidental death is that there's no 20-20 hindsight for those involved. There's no going back and doing things differently because of lessons learned. There is only one destination—and death gives no paroles.

That's why declaring war on accidents is important, even as we fight this War on Terrorism. It hurts just as much to bury a loved one who died in an accident as one who died on the battlefield. Maybe, in reality, it hurts more. Death in combat is at least for a purpose. Death from an accident does little except to provide a sad example.

Boston, Baltimore, Baghdad—it doesn't matter where you are, you're on the front lines of this war. Your best piece of protective "armor" is risk management. Taking the time to identify risks, assess their severity, develop a plan to protect yourself, and then follow that plan can make you a victor in this war. Ignoring the risks and hoping in luck to get you through can quickly make you a victim.

Victor or victim — it's your choice.

What is one thing Camp Steel Falcon lacks and needs most?

Street Talk:



"We need a movie theater, so on the weekends we could go watch a movie."

Spc. Thomas A. Dunn III
HHB, DIVARTY



"I think it lacks activities like volleyball competitions. We could use them to interact with other units."

Pfc. Ulysses Rivera
1-94 FA



"We need a Taco Bell and cheaper phones."

Spc. Surafel Asinake
HHB, DIVARTY



"I'm tired of hot dogs and chicken wings. We need more variety of foods."

Spc. Giuliana Romero
69th Chemical Co.

"Steel Sentinel" is an authorized publication of DIVARTY Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. "Steel Sentinel" is prepared by the DIVARTY Public Affairs Office, for members of the U.S. military and civilians at Camp Falcon. Contents are not necessarily official views of, nor endorsed by U.S. government, Department of Defense or the U.S. Army. Military personnel wishing to have an article published in "Steel Sentinel" should email Staff Sgt. Mark Bell at mark.e.bell@us.army.mil or at the brigade headquarters building in the PAO office on the second floor.



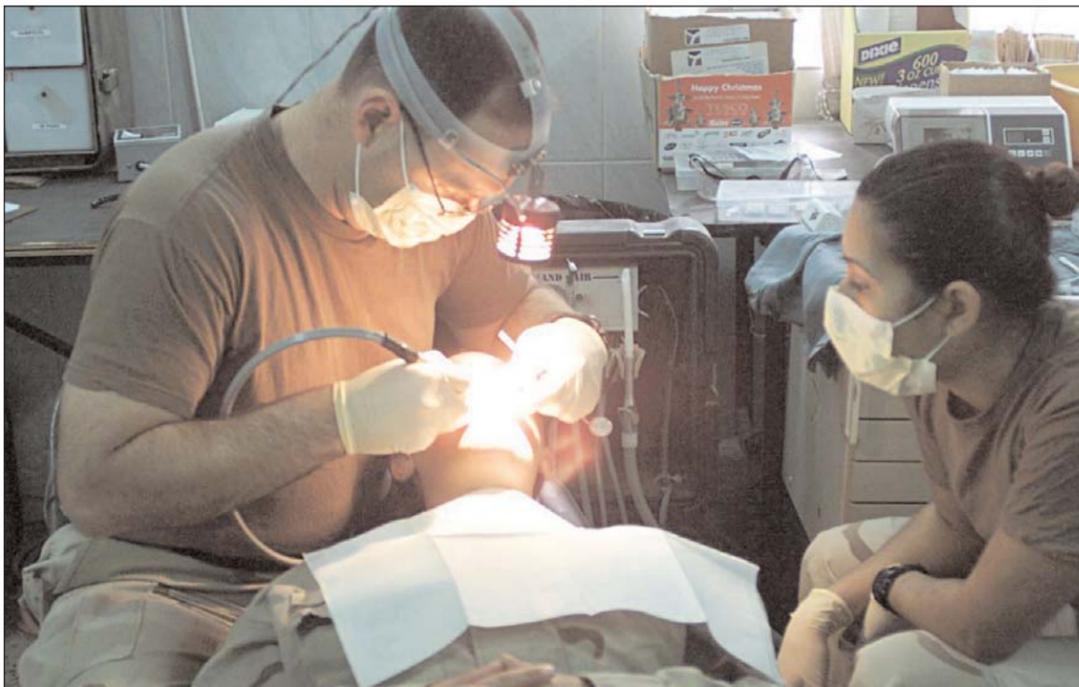
PAO/IO Officer
Maj. Rick Bower

Brigade Commander
Col. Jon Brockman

Editor
Staff Sgt. Mark Bell



(Left) Capt. Amber Hughes, a nurse, straightens up beds in the patient hold. (Above) Sgt. Theresa Garriott, a medical specialist, gives a Soldier his Anthrax vaccination.



Dental staff with the 123rd Main Support Battalion, 1st Armored Division, do a routine teeth cleaning for a Soldier at Enforcer Aid Station during dental sick call on Camp Steel Falcon.



all
in a
day's work

Photos by Spc. Chad Wilkerson

Spc. Daniel Wilcox, a medic, checks a Soldier's blood pressure during morning sick call at Enforcer Aid Station.

Trophies, from page 1

- Privately owned firearms, ammunition, or explosives;
 - Switchblades, butterfly knives, gravity blades, and spring blades;
 - Captured enemy weapons (e.g. firearms, bayonets, mortars, and RPG launchers), ammunition, explosives, or items of equipment (e.g. vehicles, trailers, generators, radios, communication devices, Iraqi pro-masks, and other NBC equipment) under any circumstances;
 - Former Iraqi regime or Iraqi privately owned articles of a household nature, including but not limited to, silverware, goldware, chinaware, linens, furniture, rugs, fixtures, and electrical appliances;
 - Any objects retained for a commercial or resale purpose;
 - Any sand, dirt, rocks, or gravel;
 - Any plant material, including but not limited to, live or dried plants, seeds, flowers, fruits, leaves, or bulbs;
 - Any animals or insects, or parts thereof;
 - Alcoholic beverages, controlled substances, or drug paraphernalia, to include hookahs/water pipes. The original prescription label of the prescribing medical facility or authority must accompany prescription drugs;
 - Pornographic or sexually explicit photographs, videotapes, movies, drawings, books, magazines, or similar representations;
 - Unapproved food products, especially local meat and produce;
 - Bayonets (regardless of whether you purchased them) will not be transported through Kuwait.
- If there are any questions on what is authorized - ask your postal clerk, chain of command, or your legal office in the FOB HUGGINS TOC.

LAUNDRY
INDIVIDUAL DROP-OFF ALLOWED
MAXIMUM DROPOFF OF LOAD: 20LBS
THREE DAY TURN-AROUND

HOURS FOR PICKUP AND OUTGOING LETTER MAIL 0900-1200 & 1800-2100
ROUTINE RECEIPT OF MAIL ON DAILY BASIS
DAILY OUTGOING LETTER MAIL
OUTGOING PACKAGE MAIL ON SELECT WEEKENDS
Feb 27-28 and March 12-13, 26-27

Worship Services

Sunday 1000	Chapel	Protestant
Sunday 1300	Chapel	Catholic Mass
Sunday 2000	Chapel	Gospel

weekday programs

Monday	Coffee & Donut Group	Thursday	Bible Study
Tuesday	Bible Study	Friday	Prasie Team Practice
Wednesday	Gospel Choir Practice	***all times at 2000***	

CHAPPY'S CULTURAL CORNER: Introduction to Islam

Shi'a vs Sunni Islam:

632 AD, after the death of Mohammed, the senior leaders of the Muslim community selected Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law, as the caliph, or leader of the Muslim community. Ali ibn Talib, Mohammed's son-in-law, was championed by some, but was deemed too young for the position.

The next two caliphs, Umar and Uthman, were selected in a similar manner. The appointment of Uthman was opposed by the supporters of Ali. Uthman was eventually murdered and Ali came to power. Uthman's kinsman, Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, rebelled against Ali.

After Ali's murder at AN NAJAF, Muawiyah claimed the Caliphate from his capital in Damascus. The supporters of Ali (Shi'at Ali) refused to recognize

Muawiyah's rule (Sunni). Shi'a insisted that the proper line of succession of the caliphate was the descendants of Mohammed through his son-in-law, Ali. Ali's second son, Al Husain, fought against overwhelming odds (70 to 5,000) at KARBALA – sacrificing all he had, for one goal, to protect and safeguard Islam, to, "let the truth triumph over falsehood". The tragic event at Karbala became the very beacon of light to always remind Muslims to practice Islam honestly and sincerely, to do what is right irrespective of consequences, and fear no one except Allah.

Hence the importance of Mecca, Medina, An Najaf and Karbala for the Muslim world.

Next week: Basic Cultural Arabian Attitude

Towers, from page 1

the guards.

"During the day it's easier because you can visually see of lot more things around than at night," said Mahoney. "You have to be more aware of your surroundings and things around you when pulling guard at night."

The air is silent, except for the sporadic honking of the awkward horns attached to makeshift vehicles as they pass by - seemingly taunting the Soldiers.

With the headlights and streetlights creating distractions, both Mahoney and Bower said the end result is coming down from the tower alive.

Scanning the ground below, the distinctive sounds of AK-47 rounds being fired are heard - just over the building tops, the sight of red tracers reaching the black skies above before they gracefully dis-

appear into the darkness. The soldiers don't flinch or even react - a sign of a veteran guard on the two forward towers.

"My thoughts are always 'how to react if we were to get shot at with small ammunition,'" he said. "I always wonder what my reaction is going to be like."

Both said fear is left at the base of the tower, but admit the excitement brings small adrenaline rushes throughout the night.

Whether the two Soldiers are in Towers nine or 10 or stopping and searching vehicles entering FOB Steel Falcon, positive and brave attitudes ensure each Soldier in their rooms can sleep comfortably knowing their lives are safe because of Soldiers on point.



Pvt. Jenelle R. Bower, 19, from Pennsylvania, and Spc. Antonio D. Mahoney, 20, from Washington, Ga., watch closely the Al Rashid district skyline.

Bulldog brigade officer epitomizes 'duty, honor, and country' values

By Sgt. Christopher Stanis,
1AD PAO

BAGHDAD, Iraq - "Duty, honor, country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be ... they build your basic character," said Gen. of the Army Douglas MacArthur in a 1962 speech given at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

First Armored Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team deputy operations officer, Capt. Eric Strong will represent the division as one of U.S. Army Europe's two officers and one warrant officer nominated for the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.

The award was established in 1987 by the Gen. Douglas MacArthur Foundation and the Army to recognize company - grade leaders who demonstrate the MacArthur's ideals of duty, honor and country.

"Selecting Capt. Eric Strong to represent the brigade was no easy task," said Col. Russ Gold, 3BCT commander. "As with so many others, Capt. Strong represents all that is good and he epitomizes the true meaning of what the MacArthur Leadership Award is supposed to symbolize."

Thirteen awards are given for the Army's active duty component and seven each for the Army Reserve and National Guard.

Hailing from Syracuse, N.Y., Strong described himself as a typical boy, growing up "playing Army."

"Making guns out of wood in your dad's work shed, playing with miniature Army men ... running around in the woods, playing hide and go seek, camping; I did all of that outdoor stuff (associated with the military,)" Strong said.

But it wasn't until his college years at Notre Dame that Strong was revisited from his childhood thoughts of the military.

"A friend from college invited me to check out the Reserve Officer's Training Corps," Strong said.

His reason for joining: "It just felt right."

Almost every man in the Strong family served in the military. Though they just did their time and got out, they nurtured a patriotic environment.

"I was brought up to love the values that America holds dear," Strong said, "an environment that embraced, and had pride and respect (for the military.)"

'Leaders' Rest' dedicated to fallen Soldier

By Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson
372nd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq - Freedom Rest, the U.S. Army's designated location for troop rest and recuperation in Baghdad, opened a new addition last month.

Several Task Force 1st Armored Division brigade and battalion command leadership teams joined Brig. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, 1st Armored Division commander, and Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, CJTF-7 commander, for the opening and dedication of the new facility.

The building was dedicated to the memory of Pvt. Jonathan Falaniko, son of Command Sgt. Maj. Ioakimo Falaniko, 1st Armored Division's engineer brigade command sergeant major.

Pvt. Falaniko was killed in Baghdad earlier this year during an improvised explosive device attack.

When Leaders' Rest was nearly ready for



Capt. Eric Strong, 3rd BCT Deputy operations officer

Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colo. - a good fist assignment, he said, because he received a lot of field training to practice his skills. He served as a tank platoon leader and scout platoon leader.

After attending the Aviation Captain's Career Course at Fort Rucker, Ala., in 2001, Strong arrived to Fort Riley to serve as the S-3 (operations) air officer for 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment.

In February 2002, Strong took command of Hawk Troop, the brigade's reconnaissance troop.

People who know Strong said his personal style and leadership techniques provide the needed direction, motivation and purpose for his unit to thrive in an uncertain and challenging environment.

Soon, Strong found his troop in Baghdad, delivering and distributing over 250,000 cylinders of propane gas - the primary cooking and heating oil in Iraq - to thousands of Iraqis.

Strong said deploying to combat is the most important thing he has done in the military.

"You can train and you can prepare for it, but until you do it, you don't know how you will be, you don't know how you will do," he said.

It was Strong's actions with Hawk Troop in combat and leading up to it that received him the recognition and nomination for the MacArthur Leadership Award.

Strong attended the basic airborne and air assault courses as a cadet. And it was at the air assault course that he received his first -- and possibly most impacting -- leadership experience.

If a student receives an unsatisfactory grade, or "no-go", on a tested event in the air assault course he is allowed a retake.

Strong was the class leader. He was receiving all "go's" on the tested events during a portion of the course, and then received a no-go. At the next test station an instructor asked how he was doing. With a bitter attitude, Strong said not well.

"The instructor pulled me aside and said, 'if you're going to be an officer you have to know your job and you have to know your soldiers' job. You can't afford to show a lack of confidence,'" Strong said. "That was my first true taste as a leader about what good trainers and leaders do. He took time to talk to me for 15 or 20 minutes."

After receiving his commission as an armor officer in 1997, Strong was assigned to the 3rd



Motivational speaker and Vietnam veteran Dave Roeber conveys his message of hope to with 3rd Brigade Combat Team.

Iraqi disabled vets say farewell

By Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson
372nd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq - Soldiers from the 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion, an Army Reserve unit from Greensboro, N.C., and the 354th Civil Affairs Brigade, an Army Reserve unit from Riverdale, Md., both part of Task Force 1st Armored Division, said their goodbyes to the Iraqi disabled veterans at the Al Shamookh Village for Disabled Veterans after the units' final mission there Jan 4.

Maj. Eric Murray, team chief for the 422nd, said the units built strong ties with the veterans after the veterans traveled across the city to visit them at the Al Karkh Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) for help.

After listening to their needs, Murray and his team took the project into their own hands.

"This is a mission that we took on voluntarily," Murray said. "They came asking about salaries and complaining about the condition of their rehab facilities after they had been looted."

The village is home to 150 veterans and their families. Every veteran is considered 100 percent disabled. Before the conflict, they received full support by the former regime. After the war, they had nothing, he said.

Murray's road to success with the Iraqi disabled veterans, however, was not an easy one. The rehabilitation center needed reconstruction and the veterans needed money to support themselves and their families. Murray and his team took the veteran's pleas for help to the Iraqi ministries and succeeded in gaining financial support.

"We did assessments, procured funds from the ministries, paid contractors, paid the veterans and their families and monitored the rehab facility reconstruction efforts," said Murray. "The work we have done is a small project that really sums up coalition involvement all over the country."

The civil affairs teams' involvement with the disabled veterans has gained them notoriety within the Al Shamookh community. After numerous visits to the Al Shamookh village, the teams have gained trust from the community.

Children ask for soldiers by name whenever the soldiers arrive in the neighborhood.

New law provides military more tax breaks

RICHMOND, Va. (Army News Service, Feb. 6, 2004) — The Internal Revenue Service is helping taxpayers use a new law that adds deductions for some reservists, expands the definition of combat zone, and provides income exclusions for military death-benefit payments and certain home sales.

President Bush signed into law the Military Family Tax Relief Act of 2003 on Nov. 11 with retroactive provisions making it beneficial for some Soldiers to file amended returns on form 1040X.

The new law doubled the benefit paid to survivors of deceased Armed Forces members to \$12,000, made the entire amount tax-free and made the changes effective for deaths occurring after Sept. 10, 2001. Previously, only \$3,000 was tax-free.

The new law allows persons on qualified extended duty in the U.S. Armed Services or the Foreign Service to suspend this five-year test period for up to 10 years of such duty time. A taxpayer is on qualified extended duty when at a duty station that is at least 50 miles from the residence sold, or when residing under orders in government housing, for more than 90 days or for an indefinite period.

Also under the new law, National Guard and Army Reserve members who stay overnight more than 100 miles away from home for a drill or meeting may deduct unreimbursed travel expenses (transportation, meals and lodging) as an above-the-line deduction. The deduction is limited to the rates for such expenses authorized for federal employees, including per diem in lieu of subsistence. This provision is effective for tax years after 2002.

In addition, the definition of "combat zone" was expanded under the new law to include contingency operations. The various extensions granted to combat-zone participants to hold off on filing returns or paying taxes until after they return will also apply to those serving in contingency operations, as designated by the Secretary of Defense, IRS officials said.

A message from home...



Daniel,
We love you and miss you and we think about you always!!!
Love, Tonya, Ryker, 2, and Somerset, 7.