



*UK Troops in South Iraq Down to
2,500 from Next Spring*

Coalition Bulletin

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Cover photo: Prime Minister Gordon Brown met British servicemen at Basra Air Station on 2 October 2007. Photo by: Cpl Steve Follows
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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Whatever disagreements there have been about our decision to go to war, there can be little disagreement about the unanimous UN position affirming the right of the Iraqi people freely to determine their own political future, calling upon “the International Community, particularly countries in the region and Iraq’s neighbours, to support the Iraqi people in their pursuit of peace, stability, security, democracy and prosperity”

**Gordon Brown,
U.K. Prime Minister**

Editorial

The Coalition consisting of more than 60 nations continues to support and conduct operations throughout CENTCOM's AOR including forces from all services. Acknowledging that military forces alone cannot bring lasting peace, we are witnessing progress in important areas – thanks to the daily efforts made by the Coalition women and men in uniform.



There is still a long way to go in Iraq but the positive signs are clear. There were also the main issues during Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker's report to the US Congress in September. The recent developments in Iraq, particular in the Anbar Province, have shown the revised strategy to be right focused. This will not only allow a timely coordinated reduction of forces as Iraqi security forces assume more responsibility and improve their capability, but also make way for all the other important non-military elements of the process. When Gen Petraeus reports to the US Congress again in March we will see if the present development prevails.

ISAF is continuing operations on a broad spectrum in Afghanistan. The overall picture is mixed; there is clear progress in many provinces at the same time as we are facing heavy opposition in other areas. The constant lack of available forces within ISAF is not only complicating the operations but will also stretch the timelines. It is hoped that nations will react on the strong requests from NATO's SEC Gen and COMISAF for more force contributions. At the same time it is relevant to look at the overall strategy for Afghanistan – there might be a need for adjustments, not only in the counter narcotic area which poses a serious challenge to the whole reconstruction of Afghanistan.

CDR CENTCOM, Admiral William Fallon, has over the last months spent much time travelling in his AOR ranging from the Egypt-Libyan border in the west to the Pakistani-Indian border in the east and at the same time focused upon CENTCOM AOR strategy. CENTCOM AOR is more than Coalition operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Horn of Africa. It includes not only states with new conflict potential but also important Coalition members.

The Muslim part of the world has just celebrated the end of one of its holiest periods, the Ramadan. On behalf of the Coalition Bulletin, I extend our greetings and respect to all Muslims in the recognition of your contribution in the fight against terror and extremism.

This Bulletin will, like always show you a broad spectrum of AOR activities, focusing upon all the men and women and their efforts to fulfill our common obligations.

Brigadier General Ahsan Mahmood, Pakistani SNR and Chairman, Public Awareness Working Group has ended his tour to CENTCOM. Being promoted to Major General he will have new challenging tasks back home in Pakistan. Gen Mahmood has not only been an outstanding representative of his Armed Forces and country, he has also been a good leader and source of inspiration in the Public Awareness Working Group. On behalf of the Coalition I extend my appreciation to Gen Mahmood for his services to the Coalition and wish him all the best in his new position.

Arne Skjaerpe

*Senior National Representative Norway
Chairman of the Coalition*



Iraqis Help Their Own with Humanitarian Aid



*Story and photos by U.S. Army Pfc. Erik Burmeister
Combined Press Information Center*

BAGHDAD — Iraqi Army (IA) Soldiers and a Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) group brought much needed aid to nearly 500 families in the small town of Hawr-Rajab, Oct. 13.

While U.S. forces provided security, the humanitarian aid operation offered medicine along with school and household supplies to the town's residents. The event was made possible only after the Hawr-Rajab CLC group reached out to the IA to remove the insurgent threat from the area. Hawr-Rajab was considered a tier one IED site only three months ago, meaning it received five or more IED attacks a week.

The leader of the CLC group, Sheik Ali, credits the town's positive reversal to the willingness of the IA and U.S. forces to accompany the CLC on joint patrols. The reversal is also due to the daily security the Coalition forces provide, Ali said.



An Iraqi Army Soldier hands a toy to a local girl during a humanitarian aid operation in the small town of Hawr-Rajab.

After receiving household, school, and medical supplies from members of the IA, any citizen could request to have a free medical screening performed by the Iraqi medical staff on hand. Patients received care for conditions ranging from kidney stones to shrapnel wounds, while others simply asked for information or sought advice.

The most telling sign of the resident's ease around the IA Soldiers was the large presence of children. The children were overjoyed by the toys that were handed out and several laughed and joked with the Soldiers while waiting their turn. With the new school year starting in a few days, many of the children went through the line multiple times for much needed school supplies. Later in the day, some of the IA Soldiers helped the children by carrying boxes of supplies that were too big for them to hold.



300 Sheikhs Gather to Plan Security Transition



*Story and photos by Maj. Joe Sowers
3rd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Officer*

BAGHDAD — Iraqi governmental officials met with more than 300 sheikhs from the Mada'in Qada in Baghdad to discuss the way ahead for reconciliation in their area, Oct. 4. (A qada is roughly equivalent to a county in the U.S.).

Leaders from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division and Multi-National Division Center attended as observers.

“When this many sheiks attend a meeting such as this, it is an indicator that the people are tired of the violence and have a desire to return to normalcy,” said Maj. Dave Fivecoat from Delaware, Ohio, 3rd BCT operations officer.

The sheikhs agreed security in the qada had improved since the arrival of the 3rd BCT in March 2007, and pledged to continue cooperation with U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to fight terrorism. To that end, they discussed a plan that would lead to the eventual acceptance of concerned local citizens into the Iraqi security forces.

The sheikhs also proposed a plan to increase coordination between tribal leaders and the government.

U.S. commanders hold out the concerned citizens programs as Iraq's best hope for reconciliation and stabilization from the ground up, but stress that the concerned citizens must, in a timely manner, be folded into the official ISF.

According to Maj. Jeremy Moore, 3rd BCT ISF liaison, the meeting was a positive step towards that transition.

“We are optimistic that their inclusion will ultimately enable the ISF to accurately represent and effectively secure the local populace,” Moore said.

In the meantime, actions and intelligence from the concerned citizens have led to a dramatic turnaround in the security situation.

“We've seen a large increase in tips that have led to the seizure of caches in the areas where concerned citizen groups are formed,” said Maj. Rhett Griner, 3rd BCT effects coordinator. “We have received 34 tips that have led to the arrest of 91 insurgents in the last 90 days.”



Brig. Gen. James Huggins from Augusta, Ga., deputy commanding general for maneuver of the Multi-National Division Center, talks with an Iraqi governmental official as they move into a sheik meeting in Baghdad, Oct. 4. The meeting between 300 sheikhs, Iraqi security force leaders, Iraqi governmental leaders and Coalition forces focused on reconciliation.



Skill Courses Center Opens in Khak-E-Jabbar



*Story and photos by
HQ ISAF public information office*

KABUL, Afghanistan – Regional Command Capital’s Turkish Battle Group and Civil-Military Cooperation opened three skills development centers recently.

“Our target for the centers is to give job skills to approximately 700 Afghan residents in Khak-e-Jabbar and Bagrami to give Afghanistan a prosperous future,” said Brig. Gen. Kasim Erdem, RC-Capital Commander.



Brig. Gen. Kasim Erdem, Regional Command Capital Commander, (left) gets a tour of the weaving class

Cemile Galip is studying carpet-weaving. “I began this course two months ago and now I can weave a bit,” Galip said. “Carpet-weaving is lucrative.”

Samiullah Zizi is studying to be a blacksmith and has learned how to make pipes and tea kettles.

Abdurrahman is attending a computer course and hopes to be a computer engineer.

“This is the first time I have ever written my name on a computer screen,” Abdurrahman said.

Students can sell products they make at the center. They can keep half of the profits and the other half goes to improve the centers.

Overall, RC-Capital has opened 12 centers to teach sewing and embroidery, carpet weaving, computer, Turkish language, and blacksmithing in Bagrami, Khak-e-Jabbar and PD-9 Khud Hill. The centers employ 21 instructors and have 435 students.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony opens the skills center. Looking on is Brig. Gen. Kasim Erdem, Regional Command Capital commander

Also attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony were Seyit Mahmut Halik, chief of Public Education Department, and Dr. Hamide Huma Nuristani, Kabul Education Chief.



Students take part in the weaving class



UK Troops in South Iraq Down to 2,500 from Next Spring



Story and photos courtesy of UK Ministry of Defense

Gordon Brown has set out the government's strategy for Iraq and promised more protected vehicles and greater internet access for deployed personnel in a statement to the House of Commons today, 8 October 2007.

In a detailed statement the Prime Minister also paid tribute to UK Service personnel killed and injured on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; welcomed a recent announcement by the Iraqi Government for a Basra development fund; set out the next stages in the UK operation and announced new support for Iraqi civilians who have worked for UK forces.

freely to determine their own political future, calling upon "the International Community, particularly countries in the region and Iraq's neighbours, to support the Iraqi people in their pursuit of peace, stability, security, democracy and prosperity".

Mr Brown highlighted the success in training and mentoring Iraqi Security Forces, and improvements in the security situation in the south:

"Over the past four years the UK has helped train over 13,000 Iraqi Army troops, including 10,000 now serving with the 10th Division which has been conducting operations in Basra and across the south of the country without the

requirement for Coalition ground support. As we tackle corruption, 15,000 police officers are also now trained and equipped in Southern Iraq. And the Iraqi Army 14th Division - with around 11,000 men - are in the process of joining them and have already taken on responsibility for Basra City, bringing security forces in the south to almost 30,000 now and over 35,000 by June next year.

Mr Brown said that the government intended to reduce British force numbers in southern Iraq to 2,500 from next spring as Iraqi authorities prove increasingly capable of shouldering security responsibilities:

"Mr Speaker, during our engagement in Iraq we have always made clear that all our



Prime Minister Gordon Brown met British servicemen at Basra Air Station on 2 October 2007. Photo by: Cpl Steve Follows

The Prime Minister set out the government's overarching strategy in Iraq as follows:

- first, to work to bring together the political groupings in Basra and across Iraq;
- second, to ensure that the security of the Iraqi people and the new Iraqi democracy is properly safeguarded, as well as the security of our own armed forces;
- and third, to work for an economy in Iraq where people have a stake in the future.

Mr Brown added:

"Our strategy is founded on the UN mandate renewed last November in UN Security Council Resolution 1723. Whatever disagreements there have been about our decision to go to war, there can be little disagreement about the unanimous UN position affirming the right of the Iraqi people

decisions must be made on the basis of the assessments of our military commanders and actual conditions on the ground. As a result of the progress made in Southern Iraq, US, UK and Iraqi commanders judged over the last 15 months that three out of the four provinces in the UK's area of control in southern Iraq were suitable for transition back to the Iraqis - and these have subsequently been transferred to Iraqi control.

"As part of the process of putting the Iraqi forces in the lead in Basra, we have just gone through a demanding operation which involved consolidating our forces at Basra airport. This was successfully completed, as planned, early last month.

"The next important stage in delivering our strategy to hand over security to the Iraqis is to move from a combat role in

the rest of Basra province to “overwatch” which will itself have two distinct stages. In the first, the British forces that remain in Iraq will have the following tasks:

- training and mentoring the Iraqi army and police force;
 - securing supply routes and policing the Iran-Iraq border;
 - and the ability to come to the assistance of the Iraqi security forces when called upon.
- Then, in the spring of next year - and guided as always by the advice of our military commanders - we plan to move to a second stage of “overwatch” where the Coalition would maintain a more limited re-intervention capacity and where the main focus will be on training and mentoring.

“And I want now to explain how - after detailed discussions with our military commanders, a meeting of the National Security Committee, discussions with the Iraqi Government and our allies, and subject to conditions on the ground - we plan, from next spring, to reduce force numbers in southern Iraq to a figure of 2,500.

“The first stage begins now. With the Iraqis already assuming greater security responsibility, we expect to:

- establish Provincial Iraqi Control in Basra province in the next two months as announced by the Prime Minister of Iraq,
- move to the first stage of “overwatch”,
- reduce numbers in southern Iraq from the 5,500 at the start of September to 4,500 immediately after Provincial Iraqi Control and then to 4,000,
- and then in the second stage of “overwatch”, from the spring - and guided as always by the advice of our military commanders - reduce to around 2,500 troops, with a further decision about the next phase made then. In both stages of “overwatch” around 500 logistics and support personnel will be based outside Iraq elsewhere in the region.

“At all times achieving our long term aim of handing over

security to the Iraqi armed forces and police, honoring our obligations to the Iraqi people and to their security, and ensuring the safety of our forces.”

The Prime Minister announced a new policy which more fully recognises the contribution made by local Iraqi staff who work for our armed forces and civilian missions in uniquely difficult circumstances:

“Existing staff who have been employed by us for more than twelve months and have completed their work will be able to apply for a package of financial payments to aid resettlement in Iraq or elsewhere in the region, or - in agreed circumstances - for admission to the UK. And professional

staff - including interpreters and translators - with a similar length of service who have left our employ since the beginning of 2005 will also be able to apply for assistance.

“We will make a further written statement on the detail of this scheme this week.”

The Prime Minister announced plans for more armoured vehicles and for increased internet access for British personnel, saying:

“Mr Speaker, the safety and security of our armed forces remains our highest priority.

“The Mastiff patrol vehicle offers the best known protection against mines and roadside bombs and I can announce today that in addition to the 100 bought and deployed last year in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Ministry of Defence is placing an order for an

additional 140 Mastiff patrol vehicles.

“And in recognition for the work of all our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan - and to help our troops stay in touch with home - we will provide additional funding from the Reserve to double the number of internet terminals and provide free wireless internet for soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan so they can email their families from their living quarters.



Prime Minister Gordon Brown met British servicemen at Basra Air Station on 2 October 2007. Photo by: Cpl Steve Follows



Graduation Day: Abu Ghraib IPs graduate from training



Story by U.S. Army Spc. L.B. Edgar
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD — Iraq’s capital gained 744 more police officers as the newest members of the Iraqi Security Force graduated from the Baghdad Police College in the Rusafa District, Sept. 20.

The graduation ceremony followed 30 days of training in which the Iraqi Police (IP) learned the basics of providing security and the importance of reconciliation.

“These guys are the first class to go through the reconciliation process,” said Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell,

Now full-fledged members of the ISF, the former volunteers are headed home as IPs to police their neighborhoods.

Yet, this was not always the case. Previously, IPs were assigned without consideration for their neighborhoods.

However, after completing the course, which includes vehicle and building search techniques, hand-to-hand combat and use of weapons, the IPs are heading home to fight terrorists in their backyards.

According to one of the new IPs, Sufyan Taha Sarhar, this is a marked improvement because residents know who

belongs in their neighborhoods and can, therefore, provide better security than outsiders.

“I will be literally implementing all the training in order to defeat the terrorists,” he said through an interpreter.

Abu Ghraib is an especially important area for ISF to have a strong presence because traditionally it’s been a hot bed of insurgent activity, said Lt. Ahmed Shihab.

“It is very important to educate the students of security concerns since they live so close to Fallujah and Ramadi,” said Shihab, one of the IPs’ Iraqi Army trainers.

Although this is the first class to graduate



Iraqi police (IP) celebrate their graduation from the Baghdad police college in the Rusafa district, Sept. 20. The first class of its kind graduated 744 IPs of Abu Ghraib province from the 30-day course, which provides training before returning the local police officers to their communities.

the deputy commanding general for maneuver for Multi-National Division-Baghdad and the 1st Cavalry Division. “It’s a great success story. These guys were volunteers, initially. They fought against al-Qaeda in Iraq in Abu Ghraib, under the condition they would have to join the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).”

True to their word, the IPs joined the ISF, adding to a trend of cooperation in Abu Ghraib, where an “awakening” of Sunni sheiks sparked the growth of a homegrown security force, dubbed “the volunteers.” These citizens grew tired of the violence of Sunni extremists in the area and took up arms with the Coalition.

the course, another class of 800 is scheduled to graduate Sept. 25, and the goal is to train 12,000 more IPs over the next six months, Campbell explained.

The strategy of putting ISF in the neighborhoods in which they live is a hallmark of the Baghdad security plan. In January, the commanding general of Multi-National Force-Iraq, Gen. David H. Petraeus, sought more Coalition and ISFs in order to bolster security. By allowing residents to join the ISF and then serve their own community, the hope is the ISF members and residents will be more comfortable with one another as well as more willing to join the ranks of the ISF, Campbell said.



Romanian UAV Monitors 200 km Area for Security in Al Kut



Story and photo by Spc. Beatrice Florescu
MNC-I PAO



Dan, electronic technician, Romanian Army Military Intelligence, performs preflight checks on the Shadow 600 unmanned aerial vehicle

The Romanian contingent is present in Al Kut with a Military Intelligence team handling the unmanned aerial vehicle recording activity on a radius of up to 200 km, said Commander Isache Liviu.

“The team members’ identity cannot be disclosed publicly for reasons of personal security,” Isache said. “Their dedication and commitment is our legacy and they continue to serve voluntarily even if it is hard to keep everything running with no parts or support from the manufacturer.”

The current UAV is a Shadow 600 unit, from AAI Corp., Baltimore, Hunt Valley, Md., Isache said. Maintenance is performed by the Romanian technicians and even the major repairs, including engines are done locally in Al Kut.

“This unit is out of production and parts are not even provided anymore by the manufacturer,” Isache said. “The team has to be inventive and creative to either repair the broken parts or recreate them out of other parts in order to maintain the capability active.”

In 1998 the Romanian Army started using the Shadow 600 UAV, Isache said. Since 2003 it is used in theater in Al Kut only. The Shadow 600 covers a radius of 200 km of the area of responsibility. The Romanian crew works with Ukraine, Poland, and U. S. forces and continues to execute multiple missions, Isache said.

More than 70 missions have been completed since 2003 and were exclusively conducted by the Romanian element. There is availability for real time imagery on computers, Isache said.

“This service can be implemented, although it has not been requested yet,” Isache said. “The communication can be continuous day or night regardless of weather conditions. We can actually provide accurate data in real time, helping to prevent attacks on the base or patrols, flights and convoys.”

The crew is composed of 13 members of mechanics technicians, electronic technicians, payload operator incoming information, internal and external pilots, analyst, and navigator-airmen.

“We operate often in the dark and many missions are night missions for obvious security and intelligence purposes,” Dan, electronic technician, said. “It is a beautiful job and every time we have obtained information pertaining to positions, potential equipment and weapons, it gives us a sense of accomplishment. Each mission saves lives and that is our job.”



The Shadow 600 unmanned aerial vehicle used by the Romanian Army crew has two cameras and captures detailed images enabling the operator to identify human silhouettes on ground, with an operating range of 200 kilometers



Coalition, Iraqi Forces Work to Halt Violence in Baghdad



*Story by Jim Garamone
Special to American Forces Press Service*

Coalition and Iraqi forces in northwestern Baghdad have stopped the cycle of violence there, and Iraqi citizens are resuming their lives in safe and secure neighborhoods, a Coalition commander in the area said today.

Second Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, part of Multi-National Division-Baghdad, took over responsibility for the area in November and immediately set out to defeat al Qaeda and Shiia extremists by denying them access to the population, Army Col. J.B. Burton, the brigade's commander, said.

The effort got a huge shot in the arm in January when troops from the surge of additional forces began flowing into Iraq. The brigade fields five maneuver task forces, three of which came from surge forces. These units "gave us increased combat power and capabilities to do missions," Burton said.

The brigade also fields an embedded provincial reconstruction team that helps with reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. "They provide us the savvy necessary

To stop the cycle of violence, the Coalition and Iraqi forces had to get out into the neighborhoods, Burton said. "We had to get out into the city, live among the citizens, fight alongside the Iraqis and deny insurgents, criminals and extremists free access to the population," he said. "The Baghdad security plan, along with the troop surge, allowed us to do just that, thus increasing our ability to affect the communities and combine our efforts with those of our Iraqi partners."

Fourteen joint security stations are in the region. The move allowed the forces to create safe neighborhoods with controlled entry and exit points manned 24 hours a day by Iraqi security forces. The joint security stations are "providing our Soldiers, the Iraqi security forces and local citizens continuous access to each other so that we can collectively solve the problems of the communities from a common perspective."

And the strategy is working. There has been an 85 percent reduction in violence in the region since May, Burton said. "Of our 95 mahalas, or neighborhoods, 58 of them are now considered under control," he said. "Thirty-three remain in



U.S. Army Sgt. Justin Silverthorn, from Charlie Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Ft. Lewis, Wash., laughs with an Iraqi Army Soldier at a U.S. and Iraqi Army security checkpoint in Tarmiyah. Photo by U.S. Navy Mass Communication 2nd Class Summer M. Anderson.

to understand and integrate resources from various joint and interagency actors to assist us in achieving our objectives," the colonel said.

Ten Iraqi Army battalions and two national police battalions partnered with the brigade.

The area is heavily urbanized, covering 93 square kilometers and containing more than 1 million people. The northern and eastern parts of the area are primarily Shiia, while south and west are primarily Sunni. Some neighborhoods are mixed, and those are primarily in the eastern part of the region.

a clearing status, with violence continuing to go down, and four remain in a 'disrupt' status."

Murders are down from a peak of more than 160 reported murders per week a year ago to less than five per week today. Improvised-explosive-device and small-arms attacks are down from a peak of 50 per week in June to less than five per week since the end of August, Burton said. Car-bomb attacks are down nearly 85 percent due to efforts aimed at the Karkh networks. These had a "tremendous impact on insurgents' ability to instruct and employ those types of weapons effectively," the colonel said.



Georgian Contingent Defends Bridges and U. S. Troops



Story and photo by Spc. Beatrice Florescu
MNC-1 PAO

The dust settles in the distant sunset as Soldiers take their positions on the Diyala Bridge for another shift of the 31st Georgian Battalion Soldiers tour of guard duty. For the next 12 hours they will guard and ensure that transportation is safely flowing on this route.

Soldiers guard the bridge and intervene whenever needed to aid and assist the convoys encountering difficulties, while passing through the area. This is how Georgian Soldiers have also become friends with U.S. troops.



CAMP WARHORSE, IRAQ - Georgian Army 1st Lt. Giga Avaliani scans his sector from the gunner's position, during a patrol through Diyala bridge area.

"I like being on the tower and being friends with U.S. Soldiers," said Cpl. Zurashvili Rezo. "We participate together in briefings, formations and start our shift relying on each other. I like that the rules of engagement are also in Georgian language and that helps us a lot."

A 50 cal. Gunner, Zurashvili is happy to have trained and learned how to use both Georgian and U.S. weapons, he said. There is also an expressions' exchange ongoing between them, each other trying to learn a few phrases in the respective languages to communicate better.

There are differences between the two bridges guarded by the Georgian troops in the Diyala province. The Diyala bridge is more active, while the Asidiyah seems to quiet down in time.

"The Asidiyah bridge is quieter on the side of the Shiite population," said 1st Lt. Nakani Paata, platoon commander in charge of 12-hour shifts on the Diyala

bridge. "There are very few Sunni, maybe two or three villages. They usually shoot at our troops and the U.S. troops."

The Georgian and U.S. troops work well together. The Georgian component is comprised of all volunteers of different backgrounds and ethnicities, among Croats, Muslims and Serbs. A strong team spirit bonds them and they celebrate all the holidays together maintaining unit integrity and cohesion.

"When we came from Georgia the accommodations here on the bridge security check point were very poor. But, we rebuilt the rooms and we made things ourselves, with our bare hands."

The Georgian troops will move to Camp Delta as soon as the main body of their brigade arrives, anticipated the Battalion Commander, Maj. Kobaidze Kakha. He was also content that the command of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, gave a positive review for the Georgian troops, he said.

"We are trained in skills in Georgia and Kuwait for different tasks that we are dealing now with the bridges and bases we guard," Kakha said. "There are no big differences between the Georgian Soldiers and the U. S. Soldiers, except that U.S. Soldiers are more practically experienced, since some of them are here on a second or third tour, and have been better exposed than Georgian Soldiers who are here for the first time."



DIYALA BRIDGE, IRAQ - Georgian Army Sgt. Besic Kopanadze stands ready to react at any moment as needed, in the gunner's seat on the first Humvee at the entrance on the Diyala bridge.



82nd Sustainment Brigade Brings Clear Vision to Forward Troops



Story and photos by Spc. Robert H. Baumgartner
82 SB PAO

FOB Hammer, Iraq – One of the primary missions of the 82nd Sustainment Brigade is to enable combatant commanders to have freedom of action unconstrained by logistics. The brigade directly impacts the individual war fighter by dispatching its optometry team out from LSA Adder to more remote and austere forward operating bases. This allows commanders to maintain vision readiness without sending their soldiers away to on of the larger bases.

The optometry team’s mission satisfies another function of combat readiness; soldier reassurance. Operating in an environment where the difference between living and dying is measured in seconds, soldiers need to be confident in their ability to spot a threat before it materializes.

“A lot of times soldiers come to see us because they want to make sure nothing changed, that they are still seeing well. When these guys are on the road, accurate visual acuity can mean spotting an improvised explosive device before it’s too late,” said Staff Sgt. Mark Maczuga, NCOIC of the 82nd SB optometry team.

Maj. James Q. Truong, chief of the optometry team, describes how soldiers will come to see him with a new found appreciation for clear vision. Now that the stakes have been raised, having clear vision is no longer a matter of convenience.

“Soldiers will come to me and tell me that they haven’t worn glasses for years. When asked why, they say that they



The two-man 82nd SB optometry team get a helping hand loading on to a waiting helicopter that will take them from FOB Hammer to FOB Kalsu.

see clear enough for life back in the U.S., but out here, they want to see perfect,” Truong said.

Even though all American soldiers go through a screening process before entering the theater, some will inevitably slip through the cracks, experience changes in vision, and otherwise find themselves with less than perfect eyesight in the combat zone.

“Despite the rigors of the Army’s pre-deployment Soldier Readiness Program, a soldier’s prescription can change during the course of the deployment...glasses are lost or scratched...not to mention the dust storms and dry eyes that can affect a soldier’s vision once in theater,” Truong said.



Maj. James Q. Truong, optometrist with the 82nd Sustainment Brigade, checks the eyes of a 3rd Infantry Division soldier at FOB Hammer.

In addition to examining fellow American soldiers, the optometry team also sees our coalition allies, such as El Salvadoran troops at Camp Delta and Polish soldiers at Camp Echo. Some of our coalition allies may not have the same vision standards in place, and a visit by the 82nd SB optometry team may be the first time they have ever been seen by an eye specialist.

“One particular soldier from El Salvador was told by his commander to come and see us while we had a clinic set up at [Camp] Delta. He was a 38-year old tower guard, and had never been to an optometrist. We tested his vision and it was pretty bad, so when he got his glasses he was amazed. He didn’t even know what he was missing,” Truong said.



Story and photos by Ken Allen
The Maple Leaf, National Defence Canada



Yemeni Army Pte Ahmed, centre, prepares to leave the ship. Wishing him good luck and farewell is Toronto's commanding officer, Cdr Stephen Virgin. At left is Yemeni Coast Guard Col Abdula M Algalal, who arrived to take Pte Ahmed home. Photo by MCpl Kevin Paul

HMCS Toronto - Private Ahmed of the Yemen Army has a strong will to live. Floating in the Red Sea for nearly 20 hours after fleeing the volcanic eruption on the island of Jazirat At-Ta'ir on October 1 proves it.

The Yemen Army post at which he was stationed along with 28 other soldiers, witnessed first-hand the massive power of Mother Nature. Pte Ahmed's only choice was to dive into the water and swim away from the island.

When the volcano erupted, the six ships that make up Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, including HMCS Toronto, were 128 kilometres south, sailing on a course which would take us directly past the island.

After learning of the catastrophic eruption, the fleet sailed quickly to the site to investigate. We could see the lava spouting hundreds of feet into the air and flowing down both sides of the small mountain that made up most of Jazirat At-Ta'ir. The glow of the molten rock lit the night sky above the island.

The Yemen Coast Guard asked if NATO could assist in the search, informing us that 21 soldiers had already been rescued, but eight others were still missing. HMCS Toronto moved to within one kilometre of the island and launched her small boats. With spotlights and lookouts keeping a vigilant eye on the seas for survivors, the boats moved inland. Toronto and the rest of the NATO fleet searched long and hard throughout the night, but to no avail. At daybreak the Yemen

Coast Guard thanked us for our efforts and we resumed our original mission.

Then, 10 kilometres northwest of Jazirat At-Ta'ir, the USS Bainbridge discovered a survivor in the water and our plans were changed again. With revived hope, the NATO fleet renewed the search for the other seven missing soldiers. It was a task made daunting by the extremely hot weather and the sun's reflection on the sea making it difficult to spot objects.

Suddenly, a small hand lifted above the water hundreds of yards from the ship. This tiny motion caught the attention of Leading Seaman Valerie Martin, standing sentry on the deck. All hands looked to where she pointed as she called out to her crewmates.

Toronto's RHIB sped to the exhausted survivor. LS Frank Stewart reached into the water and grasping Pte Ahmed's arm, pulled him into the boat.

"My heart dropped when I saw him," says LS Stewart. "We just pulled him into the RHIB and he looked exhausted. When we pulled up along the ship, the crew threw down some coveralls for him because he had no clothes on. I helped him put them on and he grabbed my arm and just kind of nodded. I don't speak his language but I knew he was grateful. That's what we train to do. I think that that one moment made my career."

Pte Ahmed was exhausted, hungry and extremely thirsty. His eyes were red from long exposure to salt water and sun during his ordeal. He had the bewildered look of a man who could not believe what had just occurred.

We continued our search throughout the day, but were only able to recover the bodies of two victims.

The Yemen Navy came alongside later in the day and Canadian sailors, piping the side, stood respectfully as the victims were repatriated to their countrymen.

Pte Ahmed was later picked up by a Yemeni Coast Guard cutter, wearing an HMCS Toronto ball cap and waving with gratitude.

Toronto is a warship, with various weapons of destruction and protection, but on this particular day it was not a warship, but a ship of mercy.

Korean National Day Celebration



German Unity Day Celebration



Swedish SNR Visits Eckerd College



Eid-UI-Fitr Celebration Luncheon



U.S. CENTCOM Organization & Family Picnic





Staff Sgt. Mark Maczyga (foreground) and Maj. James Q. Truong of the 82nd SB Optometry team dismount a Blackhawk helicopter at FOB Hammer. The optometry team was at Hammer to set up a 3 day clinic and provide clear, comfortable, single vision to soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division. US Army photo by Spc. Robert H. Baumgartner