



The Desert Voice



15 – 21 March 2004

Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ – The Signal Task Force in AO Danger was invaded this week by two groups of highly motivated, highly trained members of an elite militia. I'm not referring to Former Regime Loyalists, Bathist sympathizers, or expatriots from Saddam's Republican Guard. I'm talking about the Alabama National Guard! Charlie Company, 711th Signal Battalion and Bravo Company, 279th Signal Battalion arrived in sector this week. We welcome CPT Shirah and CPT Cheek along with all their NCOs and soldiers to our team. They proved to be skilled at their craft by coming up in the network with very few problems. Now we just need to work on the language barrier. Being an Arkansan myself, I've had to do some translating for those in the Task Force from north of the Mason-Dixon line.

The last piece of our Task Force will arrive this coming week with Alpha Company, 115th Signal Battalion. They will replace Charlie Company, 234th Signal Battalion out of Iowa. The Hawkeye soldiers have done a great job this past year, and I know they're anxious



to get started on their journey back home to their families.

The highlight of the week was the Division Transition of Authority ceremony conducted in front of the Tikrit Palace. MG Batiste and CSM McCarty unfurled the division colors and assumed responsibility of the mission in north, central Iraq.

Soon all the pieces will be in place, and we will finally be able to establish a battle rhythm that is predictable for

everyone. Each company has spent a lot of time on patrol over the last few weeks building the network and reacting to the unexpected. Traveling around the battlefield is something we all take very seriously. As you all know, the Division has suffered losses to enemy attacks with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and small arms fire. Our prayers are with the families of the fallen heroes in this trying time for them. Being on the road comes with the job, but families and loved ones should know that do our best to mitigate the risk. Task Force Signal soldiers rehearse and plan each movement deliberately. We consolidate movements to minimize the number of those that are exposed. We travel in armored vehicles to the greatest extent possible and only trusted, well trained leaders are allowed to lead the patrols. If it's any consolation, we make it as safe as it possibly can be.

It was another good week for the Task Force. Morale remains high and the soldiers continue to do a great job. My hero of the week is our S-2, CPT Maria Callo. In addition to keeping all of us up to speed of what's happening across the Division footprint, she ordered up some magnificent weather this week. Highs were in the 70's, and scarcely a cloud in the sky. Well done Duece!

Alpha Company

SGT Setters, SPC Metcalf, SPC Snider, PFC Sheils and PFC Rayburn welcomed the newest addition to Iraq this week.....

A PX facility at Pacesetter. While the Wurzburg PX it isn't, it does stock most of the essentials and the always

necessary snack foods. MREs are still on the lunch menu there, so the PX does offer an alternative for the midday meal. Also, during the summer months, it's

always nice to have luxury of knowing deodorant is readily available if you run out. I'm told that if they can get a couple hundred more people on site, they will qualify for a contracted dining facility. Applications are currently being accepted.

Recent plans for an AAFES PX, to be opened up on FOB Packhorse, have been postponed. This setback occurred when the AAFES worker who was designated to open the makeshift PX unfortunately sprained her ankle. She is currently undergoing therapy for her injury. The PX opening has been delayed for two weeks or until the AAFES employee has fully recovered. Please join us in praying for a speedy recovery.

SGT(P) Reese's team arrived safely at KMTB (another FOB in Iraq) this week. All report they are doing well. The soldiers flew to the dream destination while they're equipment was being transported by commercial carrier. A rumor that the equipment had been misdirected was dispelled when they called to let us know they had arrived safely and were in system.

The practice of mounting line-of-sight antenna heads on towers continued with week on FOB Lancer. Determined to get communications to their supported units, SGT Miller and SPC Nathaniel Smith installed an antenna head on the local water



SPC Collins, hard at work

tower. The tried and true method of tape and bungee cords proved to be a success again. We are currently documenting our recommended methods and submitting them to Fort Gordon for inclusion in future Field Manuals.

This week we welcomed the newest members to the Alpha Company team, the Alabama National Guard. We met them briefly at Camp Udairi before we headed north and they've finally caught up with us. They are bringing needed assets as we try to support not only the 1st Infantry Division but 3rd Corps units as well. We're glad to have



The Gun Truck Crew – PFC Francisco, SGT Cornell, and PV2

them on board and look forward to working with them as part of the team. An added benefit is that we will become fluent in Alabamaese.

As always, we are thankful for mail from home. The process for getting mail to the outsites is continuing to improve so don't despair if your package hasn't arrived yet.



Enjoying the Iraqi sun – SPC Barns, SPC Kramer, PFC Francisco

Bravo Company

B62 and B63. Farewelled 124th. Completed TOA. Completed move in. Pedroza ran cop off road.

This week's work has been fast and furious (think driving movie, the Convoy Team will understand). We integrated some Alabama National Guard personnel into our company and network, we completed the Transition of Authority, accepting this mission as our own, we farewell'ed the members of B Company, 124th Signal Battalion (Bulldogs), cleared the tent and moved the last personnel into their trailers, and had some great driver's training for the convoy team.

Two SEN teams from C Company, 711th Signal Battalion, Alabama National Guard joined our company during the week.

B62 and B63 were received, escorted into place, and set up their systems with the best of them, and are now fully integrated into the company, and into the network. When I mentioned that we had other guys from the National Guard in our company, they replied "Yeah, Sir, but they are from up North." -You guessed it... Northern Alabama.

3rd Brigade Combat Team underwent their Transition of Authority from 2nd BCT, 4ID this week, officially marking the beginning of our mission. At the conclusion of the festivities (military ceremony, actually) we offered to have "movie night" in the company MWR tent to farewell the members of the Bulldog Company of 124th Signal Battalion. They replied that it would be nice, but they'd rather watch "American Idol" as their

farewell. Apparently they really like that show. They watched it, and explained it to me (never seen it), and then departed the next morning. Godspeed to them. Have a safe trip.

The convoy team did quite a bit of driving this week. We had missions in Baghdad, and several in the general area. Generally, the concept of the convoy is that we own the road, and we will make the civilian traffic go around us. We typically drive right down the middle of the road and make everyone else wait on us. Well, my driver (SSG Pedroza, who by the way is an excellent driver...usually) decided that the middle of the road was no longer good enough for us, since he couldn't get around the truck in front of us. He decided to take the left lane of the two lane road and make the oncoming traffic jump on to the shoulder. The first car SSG Pedroza "pushed" off the road: a brand new Iraqi Policeman, in his shiny new police cruiser. Three cheers for SSG Pedroza; if you are going to do it, do it right!



Some members of the Convoy Team at Corps HQ

The teams of the week are F41 and F42. I only wanted to get one of them at a time, but the two teams are so integrated, they are hard to keep separate in my mind. Together, they provide services to the 3BCT TOC and ALOC. They have been heralded by the Brigade Signal Officer and the Brigade Commander for the outstanding support and quick response times to meet the Brigades communications requirements. These guys are putting in an excellent performance thus far into the mission.



F41 and F42 Site, Supporting 3BCT



F41 and F42 Morale Tent

Charlie Company

Charlie Rock has just completed another exciting week in beautiful Tikrit, Iraq. This week has seen our numbers continue to grow as we welcomed Node Center 14 from C/711 Signal Battalion from the Alabama National Guard. This platoon is a welcome addition to the signal task force as they bring many skills from the civilian world that help us both within the signal network and with quality of life issues. They have already begun integrating with the rest of the company and the network.

Charlie Rock also conducted numerous patrols this week within the surrounding area with many soldiers playing a key role in these movements: SPC Deller from the motor pool, PV2 Edwards from NC53, and PV2 Bowser from the extension section. Each of these soldiers has done an outstanding job on these patrols that have directly impacted both our mission and made the roads safer for other coalition forces.

During the past week we have also seen the promotion of PV2 Jones to Private First Class. He has done an outstanding job during the deployment and this is a well-deserved promotion.

Everyone in Charlie Company would like to thank their families and friends for the letters and the packages they have begun to receive. Each of these makes an impact on the recipient and is much appreciated. Thank you for your continued support.

CHARLIE ROCK!

HHC

Good day all. This week has still been a busy one for all us. On Saturday we picked up Charlie Company 7/11th Signal from Taji and escorted them back to FOB Spiecher and FOB Danger. While waiting on the airstrip for them a few of us were able to catch some sleep.

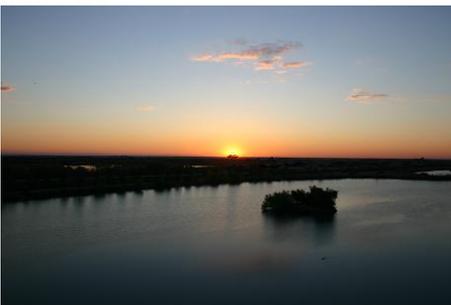


As you can see SSG Perez and SGT Housden are catching some extra winks for the long convoy back to FOB Danger. After the long convoy we helped them move into Soldiers Palace.

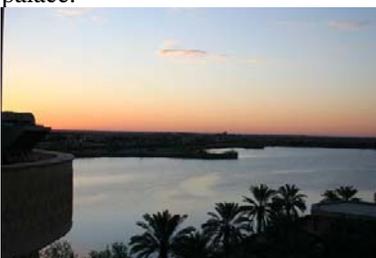
CPT Romanowski led a convoy up to one of our remote sites (Midlands) where he re-fueled the fuel pod and dropped off rations. Here is a picture of an overview of Midlands on the living quarters and work buildings.



The living conditions are quite sparse, but they are livable and time on station is limited to two weeks at a time. Back here at FOB Danger we had two change of responsibility ceremonies. Sorry, no pictures here, I was unavailable for both of them. I will try to get a picture of it for next week.



I will leave you all with two pictures of the sunrise here in Iraq from the soldiers' palace.



Chaplain

Someone once asked me, "What do you do when an elephant wants your chair?" The answer I was given... Give it to him! The reason is obvious: elephants are big enough to do what they want, when they want and how they want. So my question to you is this, "What do you do after you give the elephant your chair?" There are lots of things you COULD do. For instance, you could just stand around and wait for him to get up. Or you could scream at him to move. Or you could kick the elephant (probably not the best idea) to try to move him. Or you could call your friends and complain about the elephant that took your chair. Or you might decide that once you do get your chair back, your going to move it far away from all the elephants of the world. All these are things we CAN do about the elephant, but what is the best thing to do?

Sometimes being a part of the Army family feels like being around a big old elephant in that the Army always seems to do what it wants, when it wants and how it wants. How have you responded to the Army sitting down in your chair...maybe in all of the ways I mentioned before...and that's okay. But my hope is that we can move beyond that and do what is best. Keeping in mind that a year-long deployment is much more a significant emotional event than an elephant taking your chair, what is best?

What is best is the encouragement found in I Peter 5:7: Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. God DOES care for you and wants to take your anxiety and stress far away from you. Draw close to God during these times and He will draw near to you.

Soldier Spotlight:



Name: SPC Elizabeth Whitehead

Job: S1 Mail Clerk

- **What would you like to see improved at your FOB?** *I can't think of anything. Dining facility is nice, MWR is nice...maybe just the laundry service.*
- **What do you like most about your job?** *I enjoy putting a smile on people's faces when they get their mail.*
- **If you could ask for one thing in a care package what would it be?** *My husband.*

- **How did seeing the palace complex make you feel after seeing how the commoners of Iraq live during your convoy north?** *It was sad to see the children walking around all dirty, without shoes, such poverty out there, and in here, the palaces are so big and beautiful. It seems like two different worlds...outside the gate and inside the gate.*



Soldiers in S1 celebrate SFC Vinson's birthday by improvising a birthday cake on a dry erase board at FOB Danger. (Right to Left, 1st row: SFC Vinson, SGT Lopez, and SPC Kahraman, 2nd row: PFC Burns, SGT Gonzalez and SPC Store, 3rd row: SSG Barreto)

Rear-Detachment POCs

- Commander: 1LT Lamborn 355-2967
- NCOIC: SFC Young 355-2715
- HHC Rear-D CDR: SFC Jaggernaut 355-2885
- B Rear-D CDR: SGT Versie 355-2616
- C Rear-D: SGT Garcia 355-2602

Family Readiness Group POC's

- HHC FRG – Edith Floro
- A FRG – Mindy Long
- B FRG – Debbie Pedroza
- C FRG – Laura Poston

