



The Desert Voice

08—15 August 2004



COMMANDER'S CORNER

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO DANGER – Greetings again from north, central Iraq. Let me begin by thanking those of you who provided the excellent feedback on this publication. There were some great recommendations. After all, we do this for you and we want to incorporate things that are of interest to you. Keep the feedback coming and help keep us straight. It's good to hear from your audience, and we will implement the suggestions you made. We will continue to publish this newsletter weekly. Suffice it to say, that there was much more support for continuing a weekly publication than changing it to bi-weekly.

It is important for you to understand that writing about what we do operationally has to be done very carefully, and very generically to keep this publication unclassified. This is why to be on the safe side, the commanders tend to focus on MWR, social activities, promotions, reenlistments, and non-operational subjects in their columns so that we keep the things that only belong in Iraq...in Iraq. If the truth were known, I'm probably bending some Army regulation by not having this newsletter screened by the PAO or someone outside the battalion prior to publishing. You know what they say, "It's much easier to ask for forgiveness than permission" in some cases.

At the battalion level, we spent a lot of time this week thinking about and initial planning for the redeployment. We continued our dialog with the 250th Signal Battalion and the plan for how they will assume our duties. We're identifying what items will be left here, the administrative accountability for the same, and sorting out the logistics how to most efficiently transfer the property.

The Commanding General, MG Bat-

site, visited the battalion and NC53 this week. He couldn't say enough good things about what our soldiers are doing and was gracious enough to recognize a dozen or so deserving soldiers with one of his new OIF II, "Danger 6" coins. He also officiated over the reenlistment of SGT Catron of C Company, who will be going to Ft. Huachuca, Arizona upon our return. The CG informed us that the R&R period will extend beyond November and that we should see an increase in the number of monthly allocations. Given this, everyone should be able to take R&R.

We were also visited by the new 98th ASG Commander, COL Santala. His organization will play a big role in our reintegration into the Kitzingen area.

All things considered, it was a really quiet week here. Well, there was CSM Butler's journey to Baghdad. CSM Butler, the wise man that he is, first noticed and stated that, "Nothing in Iraq works right." He's absolutely right. While on the road near Baghdad, he was passing a large truck. The truck hit a bump or pothole in the road and its fuel tank became detached from the truck. Naturally, the truck began to slow down immediately in the absence of fuel. The fuel tank on the other hand, kept right on going down the road along side the CSM's vehicle with fuel spewing out everywhere. Through some skillful driving all was well and the CSM completed his mission. Now I know why he chooses to drive himself. Thanks for the thoughts and prayers, it does make a difference.

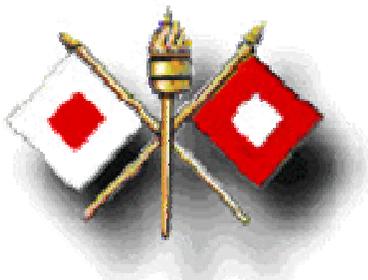
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HHC, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALION

Hello again to all the HHC families!! Things here are going well and we have made it through another week. The weather continues to be hot but it is not so bad. I think we have made it through the worst part with flying colors so we are anxiously waiting to see what this place throws at us next. I have heard some bad rumors about the rainy season (which sounds like no fun), so for now we will continue to maintain and sustain in the heat.

We started out the week last Sunday with a company Bar-B-Que (and no we didn't plan it for the commander going on R&R) it just seemed to workout that way. We are excited that we have crossed the halfway point in the deployment so we used that as a reason to celebrate. Our cooks have to go through a lot to get things a little at a time for us but they always seem to come through. We were able to enjoy a few steaks, hamburgers, hotdogs, chicken and side dishes. The food was great and then we spent the rest of the day playing volleyball and just hanging out enjoying the music that PFC Agosto was nice enough to provide. Water fights seem to have taken center stage recently so here are some pictures of everyone enjoying their well deserved downtime.



(SGT Wilson and SPC Evans attacking CPT Romanowski)



(CPT Romanowski, SSG Perez, and SGT Andreas giving their all during a grueling volleyball competition)



(SPC Grinage losing the battle but never giving up the good fight)



(SPC Bowen, SPC Velez, SPC Henson, and SPC Leddick giving their opponents hell on the court!! It was a great match!)



(SGT Molina, SGT Randolph, SGT Wilson, SPC Gianesin, CSM Butler, and SSG Briggs enjoying the food and music)



(Here are a few of the weapons used during the water fights. [These were all donated by Bill and Jan Guzman.](#))



(SGT Williams doing, *^&%#@ who knows what, oh, he must be PMCSing his vehicleJ)

On a more serious note we had a visit from our Commanding

General and the opportunity for some of our great soldiers to receive a coin. I wish we had enough to give one to everyone because our soldiers are working so hard and they are all deserving but as you all know we only were able to honor a few. The following soldiers were chosen for their outstanding performance. SSG Gallagher and PFC Wellons from S3, SPC Whitehead from S1, PFC Jurco from the motor pool, and SPC Gianesin for EMS.



(SPC Gianesin receiving his coin from MG Batiste)

A COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALION

I will start this week with a correction to the last week's story about PFC Rodriguez. PFC Rodriguez is a member of SEN team F12, not F72 as I wrote last week. I wish to express my apologies to family members of both SEN teams, which are collocated on FOB Dagger, for the mistake. I hope this in no way detracted from their enjoyment of the story. And speaking of FOB Dagger, that's where we'll begin this week.

One evening this past week, SGT Freerkson, SPC Dickerson and PFC Lovitt were sitting outside enjoying the beautiful Iraqi night sky discussing the best way for Iraq to proceed with the upcoming elections when suddenly a trip flare went off outside the perimeter. PFC Lovitt, always on guard for trouble, immediately dove to the ground and began crawling under the vehicle. At the same time SPC Dickerson, always a big fan of the Karate Kid film series, immediately took up a proper karate fighting stance and prepared for the worst. SGT

Freerkson remained sitting so he could act as a decoy, drawing in any Anti Iraqi Forces for SPC Dickerson to take down with his marshal artistry. Meanwhile, PFC Lovitt's apparent role was to ensure that the perimeter around the bottom of the vehicle stayed secure.

After several minutes of not seeing any bad guys and not hearing any gun fire, PFC Lovitt declared the underside of the HMMWV secured and crawled out. Dickerson then relaxed his "whooping crane" pose and SGT Freerkson continued sitting in his chair. "Whatever that was, I'm glad it's over" Lovitt remarked. "How many of them were trying to get through the wire?" SPC Dickerson asked two soldiers who were passing by, returning from the guard point. "The stray dog?" one of the guard soldiers asked. "Yeah, the dogs" Lovitt replied thinking quickly "they usually, uh, travel in packs." "Just one" the guard soldier replied. "Why are you all dusty?" the soldier asked

"you look like you've been crawling around in the gravel." "Oh, I though I had an oil leak under my truck and I wanted to get right on it" Lovitt replied.



PFC Lovitt secures the underside of the HMMWV during a canine wire breach

Work continues on our commercial data package here at fabulous FOB Speicher. PFC Ewell was traded to FOB Danger to help with their data package for a case of soda. Actually Ewell should only be at Danger for a week. That is, unless I'm able to finagle more soda out of the deal.

Every day is a new learning experience with the commercial communications equipment and the soldiers have done a great job learning from the new challenges each day brings.

SPC Bucci has rejoined the Alpha Company ranks. SPC Bucci was requested by Headquarters company back in October to ensure they were ready for the deployment, and now that he has things in order there, he's back with the winning team. It hasn't been determined yet exactly where Bucci will be working, but we know he'll do great things.

In sports news, FOB Remagen recently hosted a Punt, Pass and Kick contest and we are proud to report that SSG Jones finished first, SSG Meiss finished second, SPC Muniz finished fourth, and SFC Branyan finished sixth. In SFC Branyan's defense, he is much older than the other participants and we give him high marks just for showing up. As always, Alpha Company leads the way in 1ID sports.

Whether by design or accident, Alpha Company is where the beautiful people are. The following pictures will give you a small glimpse of the glamorous life they lead.



SGT Harris and SPC Gibbs keeping the generators running



PFC Navarro, SPC Young and PFC Sells help tidy up the gravel while SGT Cornell supervises



PFC Smith and PV2 Roberts working in the motorpool while SGT Lopez

from C Co, 711th SIG critiques



PFC House enjoying the beauty of Iraq from the back of a HMMWV



SPC Ethington is the man behind the curtain

And that about sums up the week. Now that we're past the halfway point, it's all down hill from here. The forecast for the high temperature for the rest of the week is a comfortable 112 and nothing but sunny skies. Iraq is definitely where the good times are. We're still saving a place for you. Wish you were here. XOXOXO

B COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALON

Greetings from FOB Warhorse!! Well another week has passed for us, and things continue to go great. We had some great things happen this week as we had another promotion, and a new member to the Bravo Company

family and we continue work on the "Double-Wide".

Well like every week we also continue to fight the heat but lately, we have hit a bit of a cool wave as the temperatures dipped to a high of only 110. Believe it or

not the difference between 110 and 120 degrees is amazing and it has been making a difference at night and the early mornings, it is actually making PT a little more enjoyable. You can see what the heat does to an individual, espe-

cially after taking our protective body armor off. Just take a look at SPC Letourneau after we promoted him.



Showing off his new rank



SPC Letourneau and his crew

The Blackhawk Construction company really got moving on the "Double-Wide" this week, as we continue to work this project. SPC Quick and SGT Johnson have been instrumental in getting this project where it is. With 1SG Peaytt and SFC Teriipaia directing everything, we can not go wrong. I even lend a hand every now and then. LT Kato has even come out to pound a few nails with us. We are progressing nicely with the project, even with the 100s of other things that need to get done, but never worry the service we give to our customers as not faltered one bit since we started the project.



The crew hard at work



LT Kato and 1SG Peaytt surveying from up above

We are still feverishly trying to get our webcams up and working so we can do a video conference back to Germany. I also want to report that we beginning to work on compiling a CD of pictures that everyone has taken since they have been there. There are many pictures, some of which I can not, or fail to get in the newsletter each week. Our goal is to get a CD home by October full of pictures and to get it out to all of the families that support us.

I am happy to report that our company basketball team remains undefeated. Something about beating everyone on FOB Warhorse makes us walk around here with our heads a little higher. Soon they will be entering the playoffs, and hopefully bringing us another trophy home. Everyone here wishes them the best

of luck in each game. We are getting ready for the Labor Day Games that 3BCT is going to hold over the Labor Day Weekend, with a little planning, we are going to try and sweep every event this time. They even added the horseshoe toss to the Labor Day Games, in which we have full faith that 1SG Peaytt will emerge victorious.

Well that about wraps it up from here for this week. Please continue to keep all of us in your thoughts and prayers, every little bit helps out here. Please be careful and have a great week.



SFC Walker working hard in the NC Ops



C COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALON

What a great week to be in Iraq! This edition of the Rock Steady Newsletter is dedicated to our big party! We started this past week with a celebration of reaching the 180-day mark of our deployment. While no one can 100% guarantee that we are less than 180 days from home now, it sure was great to say we had six months under our belts!! A lot of preparation went into getting things ready, and I want to start by thanking 1SG Brown for coordinating the food. We started off our celebration by having a yummy pizza party here at Rock Central. The Dining Facility catered to our request and sent over lots of steaming hot cheese and pepperoni pizza.



1LT Heather Gunther, CPT Rob Romanowski and 1LT Justin Kato (so that is where he has been hiding...) all partaking of the pizza at the 180 Day Celebration.

Next, we moved into a Spades Tournament. With team names like '67 Camaro, Strike Team, Kudos, Check da Block, and the Yazzi Cats, it was definitely a high-spirited and energetic time. However, in the end, the Kudos (SGT Benjamin Growden and SPC Johnny Jordan) climbed to

be the top of the heap and took the tournament victory home. Finally, we moved outside for some Tug-of-War action and a good, ol' fashion water fight. The Tug-of-War was a daring battle of strength and stamina, but in the end...the team with the girl on it pulled the mark to the finish line! Congratulations to 1SG Robert Brown, CPT Dawn Longwill, PFC Tyquan Felder, SFC Dhotra Harrise and SSG Mervin Manning, who comprised the winning team. NICE WORK!



PULL HARDER!!!! WE'RE ALMOST THERE!!!



The Tug-of-War Opponents... Sorry fellas...better luck next time!

At last, the heat got to everyone and the Super Soakers took over. So did the water balloons, the coolers, and the plain old water bottles. Not one single person escaped the drenching...

whether in DCUs or PTs, on or off shift, willing participant or not. Water balloon warfare, tactical maneuvering around the buildings and sheer speed were all used. In the end, everyone had a great time, and it was definitely nice to cool off in the 123 degree heat of the day.



SPC Melissa Jimenez, SPC Nathan Haselhorst and 1SG Robert Brown prep the water fight by getting over 200 water balloons ready for the festivities! DUCK!



SSG Gustavo Reina and his trusty Super Soaker



SGT Elisa Dornquist reloads her cooler while SPC Christian Palmer recovers from her soaking at the 180-Day Celebration.

News from home, whether in the US or Germany, comes often, and we all appreciate that so much. The outpouring of support for your Rock Steady soldiers is most appreciated. Being home alone and/or worrying can sometimes be just as hard as being the one deployed, and we understand that too. We appreciate the high spirits you have maintained through the first half of this deployment, and we absolutely cannot wait to all have a celebra-

tion together when this whole thing is over. I am looking so forward to meeting the families of these outstanding soldiers!!! You have so much to be proud of them about, as they are truly making a difference here in the Big Red One! Much love and thanks to all of you back home, and until next week – **ROCK STEADY!**

B COMPANY, 125TH SIGNAL BATTALION

Again, another week just passed us by! Time flies by like a snail going uphill through molasses. Our rest and recreation leave surge is finally ending and about 40 soldiers are returning back to Iraq...rested and refreshed. Node Center 63 learned to fight fires, conducted basic weapons training and focused on maintenance. Node Center 62 has volunteered to become a dumping ground for broken computers across the entire brigade combat team. Thanks! And both platoons had a visit from General Dynamics Technician Tom Liddy, who upgraded portions of our equipment and helped save Node Center 63 from a corrupt hard drive in the workstation that manages the entire system. Headquarters platoon executed two basic rifle marksmanship ranges and prepared for some urban combat training that will be talked about next week.

So to begin, the Mighty Node Center 63 continued its high up-tempo state as it has, continuously throughout this deploy-

ment. The week started on fire (literally). At FOB Gains Mills SSG(P) Herring, SGT Zavala, & SPC Cortez had opportunity to cross-train and show off their skills as firefighters using bottled water to put out a four acre vineyard fire. Due to their quick reaction and initiative they may have very well saved the living quarters of the FOB and millions of dollars in vital operation equipment. During the week we accomplish many other missions to ensure optimal support to the Second Brigade Combat Team.



Our own firefighters: SSG(P) Herring, SGT Zavala and SPC Cortez



Fire at FOB Gains Mills

One of the platoon's main focal points is to maintain all of our equipment to highest standard. The key element and tool used to accomplish this is by conducting preventive maintenance checks and services, better known as PMCS's. The soldiers in the platoon do a great job in keeping our equipment up and operational. They have to pay close attention to the smallest details to ensure our success in providing the best service possible. It is vital to prevent equipment failure for the overall success to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team. The soldiers in the Mighty NC 63 take pride in all they do, "**SECOND TO NONE!**".

From Node Center 62, this week's satire includes a reference to the duty of the platoon's job of accepting and turning in equipment so the brigade can once again function with the aid of a multitude of fixed computers and printers. Once again, the heroic members of 1st Platoon faced adverse conditions by ensuring these computers were evacuated in an expeditious manner. This week the enemy comes not in the form of mortar fire or rockets, but in the form of a herd of Holstein colored boxes. Each of these moo-tacular containers held a multitude of broken laptops which have become a NC62 extra-special duty. Again THANKS for volunteering.

Tobyhanna, the contracted gurus who repair these "lame duck" laptops and printers are the ones that physically repair all of this equipment. Although, all of us have played a part by ensuring that all of the brigades' broken

hardware issues are met by receiving and returning functional computer equipment back to the front line, some of the more notable players in this process include SPC Judd, SSG Bracewell, and PFC Devlin.

In other news, our resident expert General Dynamics representative Tom Liddy received a free ticket to Kirkuk via helicopter in order to assist the main Hele On element with any network issues that may ensue. SFC Wright was instrumental in ensuring this mission was carried out without a hitch. When the helicopter returned from Kirkuk, we received many things. This week's prize straight in from Kirkuk, besides the Lieutenant, were the 17 laptops which were mentioned above, mail, and other items of importance. The most notable was a full box of stylish and practical ballistic sunglasses. Unfortunately, these glasses don't come in a "clip on" form, so those of us

requiring prescription eyewear are still just going to have to squint. We also received a brand new digital camera from Kirkuk that will play a great role in assisting the documentation of these last couple of months as we enter the downward slope of our deployment.

Again, our week was a busy week for our great company since we must remind you we usually only talk about what we do IN ADDITION to maintaining communications across an entire province in Iraq. On a daily basis we maintain communications between 10 different forward operating bases, over 100 phones, and about 200 computer clients on 3 different networks. We appreciate all of the support you provide us on a daily basis. What you do makes our job here in Iraq easier. Hele On!

A COMPANY, 115TH SIGNAL BATTALION

They're at it again! Alpha Company 115 Signal Battalion spent this week at FOB Danger working on the new home for the Company's Command Post (CP). SSG Charlie Newton and his team of "carpenters" are well on their way to completing the building located at the Node Center 30 site.

On Monday, the crew took down the existing tents at the site. That same day, the floor was laid for the soon to be 24 by 28 feet structure. By Friday, the building had truly

taken shape with walls and a roof. In replacing the tents on the site, the company hopes to provide not only a larger working environment, but a cooler one also.

SSG Newton's construction crew, consisting mostly of Alpha Company's convoy team, is no stranger to the business of building. Since arriving at FOB Danger, SSG Newton has overseen numerous projects – most notably the company's MWR (Newton's Gun Rock Café) and the new living quar-

ters for the maintenance section. He predicts this latest project to be completed in about another week.

Also this week, D21 welcomed a new member. SPC Odus Ford joined the team at FOB Speicher on Thursday. A D21 team member, SGT Wally Thigpen, expects SPC Ford will become an asset to the team, which also includes SSG Greg Bretherick, SPC Shivers & SPC Dennis Liles. SPC Liles is currently at home in North Alabama on R & R.

With almost six months in the sand behind them, Alpha Company 115th remains dedicated to Operation Iraqi Freedom II. The National Guard soldiers remain first and foremost focused on signal. However, necessity is indeed the mother of invention. Since arriving here in the Middle East, this group of soldiers have learned much more than Signal...including skills as carpenters, electricians, and more.

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SPC Sonya Harris



SPC Jenkins and SPC Pounders working on the floor.



SSG Newton with SPC Freeman standing by while the work on the floor is inspected.

C COMPANY, 711TH SIGNAL BATTALION

So far, August has been a good month for the crew here at FOB McKenzie. It seems that the temperature has declined just a little and the DFAC started a "midnight chow" program. We all know that these topics are two of the three most important topics in country; the third being sleep.

Well, with this newsletter, I wanted to put the spotlight on our highly motivated and hard working Node Center crew. SSG Daniel is the ringleader of this crew and his henchman are SGT Bryars, SGT Thomaston, SGT Reed, SPC Dailey, SPC Taylor and SPC Granberry. These guys make the work day fun around here. Whether it's playing the guitar, playing cards or just the actual tales that come out of the NC area, there are many laughs throughout the day. Best of all,

are the creative stories that SSG Daniel and SGT Thomaston invent (a.k.a. "RUMORS") and distribute among the network and our battalion. They are classics.



L to R: SSG Daniel, SGT Thomaston, SPC Dailey, and SPC Saldana

This week, we recognized SPC Harold Glass as our "Soldier of the Month" for July. SPC Glass was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation and a battalion coin for his hard work and initiative and we want to congratulate

him again. Keep up the good work, SPC Glass. Also this week, LTC Garrison paid us a visit here at McKenzie for SPC Metcalf's (F14) reenlistment and we would like to congratulate SPC Metcalf and wish him luck in a long and prosperous career in the Army.



SPC Glass being presented his award by CPT Shirah

CHAPLAIN

Coping with the Mid-Tour Blues – Part 2 of 4 – Be Positive:

There are essentially five ways we might deal with the challenges of being separated.

- (1) We might become angry and shake our fist at whoever will listen.
- (2) We may become bitter and turn away from the help of each other.
- (3) We could become weak and lose sight of the big thing... our purpose for being here.
- (4) Many would become whiny and sing along, "Same song, second verse. Outta' get better, but it's gonna' get worse.
- (5) Or, we might sit down and count the blessings, the positives about being here on this deployment and this separation

Yes, I know! With a cursory glance, there doesn't seem to be

much positive about any of this. In fact, most of what you and we hear on the news is bad. And if we're not careful, we'll find ourselves dwelling and focusing on those difficulties. It's easy to miss the positive things about Operation Iraqi Freedom, so we have to consciously focus on those good things.

I'd imagine that many of you have improved some aspects of your life in these last six months. How about that class you took and what you learned? How about the weight you've lost and how much better you feel? How about the closer relationships you have and the communication break-throughs you've made? How about the spiritual growth you've experienced and how much closer to God you feel? How about the other decisions you may have made to better yourself? If nothing else, you've made it this far...and that alone should be applauded.

From our perspective here, we've also experienced personally positive things. We've seen schools rebuilt; we've taken part in helping children get needed medical care that they would never have seen under the former regime. And regardless of what the media is saying, the Iraqi people are grateful to us for removing a brutal tyrant and giving them the freedom for self-expression and self-determination.

There are too many great things happening to ignore them. When you find yourself down and depressed during these mid-tour weeks, practice focusing on the positives and relegating the negative thoughts to the back seat of your minds. Because when it's all said and done, with a little personal responsibility, our experiences here and yours there will make us better people.

