



The Desert Voice

30 August—05 September 2004



COMMANDER'S CORNER

This week was packed full of convoys and briefings since I had the pleasure of escorting our replacements, LTC Thomas, MAJ Abano, and CPT Bairaktaris from the 250th Signal Battalion, 42nd Infantry Division. We were able to travel to most of our FOBs and meet many of the soldiers, as well as, the key leaders within the Battalion. However, these visits were different from my normal, routine visits, because the soldiers were able to see the rainbow patch that the 42nd Infantry Division wears on their left shoulder. For those of you who are not familiar with patches or military protocol. The patch on the left shoulder represents the soldiers' unit; hence seeing someone with the rainbow patch immediately told our troops that these soldiers were our replacements. You could physically see the excitement come over their faces. The rainbow patch was the symbolism of the "light at the end of the tunnel" for us here in Iraq. It was nice to see soldiers' spirits lift, knowing now that the end is coming closer. Overall the 250th Signal Battalion visit was a success. The Battalion Commander, S3, and G6 planner were able to sit down with many of the staff and commanders to get some good insight on what they have ahead of them. It was our pleasure to share some lessons learned and anything else we could think to tell them that would better prepare them for their mission here during OIF III.

Another focus of this week has been awards. Every company in the Battalion has been frantically producing awards for all of their soldiers. Even though we are only in our 30th week, the Battalion must turn in all of the awards now, in order to ensure they

will receive the awards by our redeployment. The S1 shop has been buried under awards and as they process their way through them, more and more awards are starting to overwhelm my desk for signature. On a funny note, when I walk into the ALOC now it makes me think of a comic strip with people running around the office and paperwork just flying all over the room. But they are doing a great job and the companies are really working hard to ensure all of their soldiers receive an award for all of their hard work and dedication, which they have displayed down here. So keep up the good work everyone, and I will keep do my best to keep my hand awake and strong to sign each and every one of the awards....all 900 of them. Ahhh...."the rainbow patch," my light at the end of the tunnel.

A big morale booster came this week with the arrival of football season. It is yet another indicator that the end is in sight. We deployed right after the Super bowl last year, which marked the end of the football season. The signal task force is certainly passionate about its football. Aside from the realization that we're only a football season away from coming home, it affords us lots of ammunition to poke fun at people's favorite teams when they loose or boast about a recent victory. Already we've humbled the Chaplain over the dismal showing his LSU (Losers Survive Ugly) Tigers put up against Oregon State; big asterisk by that win, and MAJ Walters is in full defilade after the 51-0 loss by Syracuse to Purdue. Oh, by the way, the HOGS

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won big!

That about sums up this week. Remember to continue to send your love and support to your soldier. These next couple months are the tough ones. I compare it to the third quarter – when you are already beat down

from the first half and the end is still a ways off. So, your loved one still needs you. Thank you for the thoughts and prayers. All of your support is truly appreciated and it does make a difference.



HHC, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALION

Good day to you all today. Well, I am back now so I gave 1SG a break from the newsletter. I hope you all enjoyed her articles as I have. I have some bad news, all of the pictures I had from the R&R process that I was going to share with you have been lost as my hard drive crashed on my computer.

R&R process: Here is a written example of what most soldiers go through to go on R&R. I will not be able to get too detailed for security concerns, but I will tell you all that I can. Upon receiving an R&R slot each soldier has to submit a leave form (DA31) on where and what slot they have. After submitting their leave form we put them all in for a flight request to one of the two gateways here in Iraq. The two gateways we currently use are Kirkuk and Balad. Lately we have been getting most of our flight requests approved to the gateways. But, there are times when we do not get the requested aircraft (helicopters) for movement. If we do not get the aircraft we then have to ground convoy to one of the gateways a day prior to their actual leave time slot. For example if a soldier had a leave date of the 8th then he has to be at the gateway at least a day prior to the leave slot. After arriving at the gateway all soldiers are processed, checked for leave

forms, ID cards, tags and then turn-in their weapon and ammunition. After which they are assigned sleeping quarters and manifested for a flight the following day. The following day they get on an aircraft and fly to Kuwait. After arriving in Kuwait you get on a bus and go to Doha where you turn-in your Protective Vest and Helmet. You then go get a briefing on the leave process and things to expect upon returning home. During the leave briefing you state where your leave address is. At that point they start processing your leave itinerary for once you hit a gateway in the United States or Germany. That evening and early morning you receive your itinerary and manifest lock down time. The lock down time is when you can no longer leave the bay and go to PX, dining facility or the food court. The lock down time can be anywhere from 4 to 12 hours. Yes, that long. But, in the end they normally keep adjusting the time so it is about 4 hours. Then you go through customs and to another waiting area. Where you again wait about another 2 hours or so and then finally get on a bus back to the airport. When you get to the airport you load on to the plane and away you go. What a feeling that is! You arrive in Germany if you are going to Europe you get de-

planed and get briefed again on when you are expected to return. If you go stateside you deplane for an hour or so as the plane is re-fueled. Soldiers in Germany then get their bags and load a bus and go to their respective Kaserns. Those on the way to the states go to the gateway and begin their commercial airline tickets to their final destination. Then on the return you do the same thing, just in reverse. Although there is a lot of waiting and leave seems to be a blink in time every soldier has stated it is well worth it. Right now at current levels it appears that all of those who left seven months ago will be afforded the opportunity to return home for R&R. I hope that this may clear up some of your questions out there!!

My next emphasis will be on promotions. We have had the opportunity to promote a bunch of people this month.



LTC Garrison promoting SFC Martin

Here is LTC Garrison speaking just before pinning SFC Martin. Mrs. Martin was able to join us for this extra special event via a VTC. Here is a picture of her on the screen. Congrats SFC Martin it has been long over due.



The VTC

Next we were able to promote SFC Tufele from EMS. Congratulations on a job well done, keep up the excellent work that you do everyday keeping our shelters up and running.



CPT Steyer and 1SG Cromartie promoting SFC Tufele

We also promoted SPC Wellons from the NOC. His daily effort in the Network Operations Center has been pivotal on a daily basis. Thanks SPC Wellons for all of your daily efforts.



SPC Wellons

Here is PFC Owens being pinned by CPT Steyer and SGT Smith. Keep up the good work!!! PFC Owens is a huge asset to the S3 shop!!!



CPT Steyer and SGT Smith promoting PFC Owens

Up at the G6 we promote Fernandez to SPC.



SPC Fernandez's promotion

SPC Fernandez's efforts in the DCMO (COMSEC) office have enabled the BN to have remarkable success across the Division.

Re-enlistment: We were able to re-enlist SPC Mitchell up at G-6. Here he is giving his wonder-

ful speech which none of us will ever forget.



SPC Mitchell's reenlistment

Okay I promise the last picture really. Here is SPC Mitchell with all of the support he could muster for his speech.



1SG Cromartie, CW2 Rucker, CPT Steyer, SPC Mitchell, MAJ McCaffery, SGM Vandertie, SPC Salazar, MAJ Jones and MAJ Self

Until, next week, it is great to be back, the NCOs and soldiers are continuing their great work!! Please continue to keep us all in your thoughts and prayers!! Tough 6 out!!

A COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALION

This week we have a star studded extravaganza to share with you. Everybody who is somebody is featured because it's the first of the month, and you guessed it.... Promotions. So put on your tuxes and party gowns, let the champagne flow and join us as we highlight the beautiful people that make up this great company. We'll also regale you with stories of the accomplishments of the fine soldiers of this great company. The only invitation you need is the copy of the Desert Voice that you are reading, so let's go.

The following piece was written by 2nd Platoon Leader 1LT(P) Jaord Gates.

Greetings from the mighty "Commo Ready", located here on beautiful FOB Speicher just north of Saddam's hometown of Tikrit. It's hard to believe that it's already September and that over seven months have passed since we left that wonderful little town called Kitzingen. And although the road has been long and hard for the soldiers of 2nd Platoon, we have managed to shine through it all and continue to lead the way for A Company and the 121st Signal Battalion.

As always, this past week has had its ups and downs but we continue to exceed the standard in everything we do. One down for the week is the end of the Olympics, which we all spent hours at a time eagerly watching and cheering! But on to the good stuff... We start our adventure with a warm welcome to the newest member to the Commo Ready family, 2LT Kyle Harvey. LT Harvey is coming to us from the

lovely home of the Signal Corps Fort Gordon, GA. He and his wife were fortunate enough to have a little bit of time to get settled in Germany before he was shipped down to us. He has anxiously been learning all he can so he can soon take over the reins from me as the new Platoon Leader, but not before that we must have some fun with hand receipts and property book inventories!

Normally the greatest advise to give an incoming LT (aside from telling him to always listen to his Platoon Sergeant), is to make sure he knows how to handle his Company Commander. But alas, LT Kyle will not have the joys of getting to work with big man CPT J.E. Long and all his witty ways and bad jokes as we are also preparing for the eventual arrival of our new company commander. Good luck LT Harvey, you've come to best Signal Platoon in the U.S. Army.

This week has been packed with all sorts of exciting adventures for 2nd Platoon. We continued our previous week's training by heading out to Memorial Range again for another round of M16/M249 zero and qualifications. The first day we met many difficulties with the wonderful Iraqi weather, in which gusting sandstorms and high winds jammed many of the M249 SAWs and tore half the targets off the boards. Add on the blistering heat and you can see that a good time was had by all. The next range was much more successful as we met calm, clear skies and eager soldiers, ready to shoot their weapons straight and true and score

high.

Now I'm not going to say that our sister platoon (1st) aren't good shooters or anything (from the last newsletter) but I have a feeling that some scores may have been embellished just a bit (i.e. – LT Carbone). With nearly everyone complete, we'll anxiously get ready for the final round of qualification next week before the big convoy live fire run!

The past couple weeks have been like Christmas for most of the soldiers as our illustrious Platoon Daddy (and his sidekick, SFC Craig) took a much needed break back home on R&R. As you know, when the cat's away, the mice shall play! But peace was soon restored and we're all back to the grind! Now we face a new challenge this month while Remote RAU Team Chief SSG Keys fills in for SFC "Airborne" Carter and the craziness of the SEN teams and Data Package. In another new challenge for 2nd Platoon, a Tropo team from Ft. Hood is currently joining us to bring in a link to Kirkuk. They will be adding the wonderful job of the V3 section and will no doubt continue to bring in solid shots for us.

And while we're on new additions, I almost forgot about our new Vantage Switch, a giant box that sits noisily in our MWR tent and helps the process more trunks using Voice Over Internet Protocol phones. The NC, especially SGT Robles, has been key in making this happen. Also at the NC, SSG Prado, our on-site handyman, is always keeping his hands full in helping to ensure that all the ACs and commercial

generators work while PV2 Clark, in his spare time away from wiring the DREAR, has been catching camel spiders and keeping them as pets for the whole site to enjoy.

We now journey out to where the rubber meets the road, where the fighting begins, and where boys become men. I'm talking about the SEN teams. So let's start our next story at the F71 snake pit, where things have become a bit more hectic with team chief, SGT Miller, gone on R&R. These guys are always getting into something while in support of DIVARTY out at FOB Summerall. For instance, PFC Bond and PFC Morrow were recently tasked to help the Army by training to become combat life-savers. And while this was a great sadistic wish for PFC Bond, who loves to get shots, it wasn't so pleasant for PFC Morrow, who took 2 days of convincing (i.e. – harassing) by his team and was even quoted as saying, "I don't think I can do it. Look at my hands, I shake too much!". Sorry Charlie, but you'd better listen to SPC(P) Barnes' orders!

About an hour south of F71 lies another great outpost team, F72 who supports the 2nd BCT over at FOB Dagger. SGT (P) Freeksen, known by many as "the Freekshow" and his team of misfits have been providing flawless communications support each and every day. Being on one of the smaller FOBs, the team often enjoys their other tasks which include guard duty, escort detail, combat patrols, and convoy security for daily log packs to FOB Remagan. Through all this, they have even found time to train on their new

data package and promina which they helped install to be put to use in the 2nd BCT TOC. A final note is a big congratulation to our newly promoted soldier, SPC Jagdar, who is one of the true studs of the team. Keep up the good work F72.

We now move locally to one of our next star teams, F22. These guys have done an outstanding job all around supporting the 601st Aviation Support Battalion. Every time I go out there to visit the unit, I hear constant praise from their SIGO and Command Group. They even helped support another SEN team, F74, by giving our B Company brethren their AC from their building to help keep them cool. What a nice bunch of soldiers. This week has been a busy one for the team. SGT Hammond continues to mold his soldiers, including the newest member from HHC, SPC Bucci, by staying late hours at the office and diligently trying to show him, SPC Spiller, and PFC Civitrese how to conquer the game "Need for Speed". So that's why he's always on the night shift! Meanwhile, newly promoted PFC Bordelon shows her support for 601st by coming to and cheering (w/o pom-poms) at their softball games and giving thirty players water and smiles. This team is truly made up of saints!

Our final team is also located close to home, F21. These guys have an extremely tough mission in supporting the high profile 4th Aviation BDE. The team has had to deal with some personnel shifts recently when SPC(P) Gonzales left to be a (V) 3 team chief and PFC Cantrell was added from F22. Be as-

sured that he is fitting nicely into the team and is current being mentored by strongman SGT Richardson. Also on the team is PFC McElroy, who recently returned from R&R from "Hurricane Alley" (i.e. – the Florida coastline). This soldier was so excited to be going home that he completely forgot about the biggest storm of the year! But this didn't dampen his spirits as he used his combat tactical training to fight the storms, going from hurricane party to hurricane party back home and even to the beach to surf! Crazy kid! Granted, there are certainly no monsoons over here but the sandstorms and heat can be just as fierce. Regardless, fun (but not so much safety) were had by all...

So as you can see, things couldn't be better for 2nd Platoon (well, maybe unless we were sent home early)! But speaking of which, we got a small taste of redeployment with a recent visit from the Command Group of our replacement unit from the 42nd ID. While the whole network plan is not yet fully complete, it was a great sight to see them standing on ground and with that, a small light at the end of the tunnel. So from all of us in the mighty, mighty 2nd Platoon, we'd like to say to our friends and families back home that we miss them, we are doing good, and we will see them real soon! - "COMMO READY"

Our first promotion this week was SPC Vishnu Jagdar at FOB Dagger. SPC Jagdar's promotion orders actually came in while he was en route to depart on R&R, so instead of keeping him from going home we held off on the promotion until his return.

We did, however, call ahead to let the air terminal know that a VIP soon to grace the terminal, which worked in his favor. The flight had been overbooked so they started taking people off the plane, beginning with the lowest ranks. SPC Jagdar's new status ensured that he stayed on that plane and got home on time. It just goes to prove that the wealthy and famous do enjoy extra perks in life.



SPC Jagdar displays his new rank and promotion certificate

For our second promotion on the week we traveled to FOB Remagen for SGT Eric Smith's promotion. With all of the paparazzi it was hard to get close enough to take a picture, but we muscled our way in. SGT Smith's promotion has been a long time coming, so you can guess that all the important people were there to see it. However, due to confidentiality agreements we cannot disclose their names here. It was quite a celebration that last well into the night, but we were unable to stay for all of it because we had to return to FOB Speicher for



SGT Smith delivers his speech as SSG Jones, part of his bodyguard entourage scans the area

the promotion ceremony of four more of the people you know and love. The atmosphere was electric as we watched SGT Drukemiller, from SEN team F74, SGT Jackson from EMS, SGT Maye from Supply and SPC Moree from SEN team F11 pin on their new ranks. As you can well imagine, when you have four celebrities of this magnitude in one place, it was pure chaos. The acceptance speeches were gracious and witty and the water cascaded over them while they were doing pushups as it only does for the beautiful people. They laughed, they cried, they got really muddy. It was a glorious day.



(Left to Right) SGT Drukemiller, SGT Jackson, SGT Maye, SPC Moree



SGT Prager and SGT Kent help keep the celebrities cool



SGT Druckemiller doing his celebratory pushups



SGT Jackson and SGT Maye doing pushups



SPC Moree does pushups

As you can see, this really is a little slice of heaven. Beautiful weather, beautiful landscape and beautiful people. It's all right here. I really can't think of any-

where else I would rather be. There are so many stars in one place that it's almost its own little universe. And by the way, if you are going to stop by, please

bring a bag of ice because it's still pretty hot outside. Wish you were here. XOXOXOXO

B COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALION

Greetings from FOB Warhorse!!! Well things this week were pretty normal or as normal as they can be. We had some promotions already this week with more to come, the "double-wide" is coming along and we are preparing for the Labor Day Weekend.

This week we promoted SPC Depreist to SGT and SPC Hill to SGT. SGT Depreist is on the Super Rau 52 team, and has been an outstanding performer since going on mission to the Baqubah Police Station. SGT Hill is a part of F32 on FOB Scunion supporting 2-63 Armor Battalion. These two young soldiers deserved and earned the right to be called "Sergeant", they have made tremendous impacts on their teams and in the success of the units they support.



The "double wide" is coming along slowly but surely, we ran out of one vital thing this week, wood. But do not worry we are getting more on Saturday. Hopefully next week I will be able to show you a building that has walls on it. We even had a little extra help this week as SGT Abbot from D12, helped pound a few nails. He seemed to know what he was talking about, because he kept commenting on how it does not look that "square". I guess it being "square" is a big deal when it comes to building things. What do I know, I am not Bob Vila.

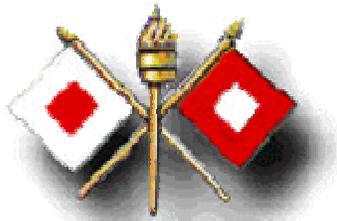


To kick off Labor Day Weekend for us, the 1ID Band moonlights as a Rock band called "Enter Sandman", the concert begins in a couple of hours, and many people that have heard them play before say that this should be an entertaining show.

Once again 3BCT is sponsoring some Labor Day games to boost morale. Our basketball team is hoping to continue its dominance over the other units this weekend. "The plan is to bring another plaque home with us after this weekend" says SFC Caldwell. With the way they have been playing, I am sure that they will. We have also entered a few other events such as volleyball, horseshoe toss, Tug-o-war, and the Hummvee pull. Hopefully we can dominate those events as well.

Some of sitting around in the Dining Facility had an interesting conversation on the best 80's TV Theme. My favorite has been and always will be the theme to Miami Vice. What other TV show defined the 80's better than Miami Vice. There were some that voted for Magnum PI. Others voted for Cheers. But really was there a better show than Miami Vice. I leave it up to you to decide.

Well that is about it for this week. Please continue your support, it is greatly appreciated and needed. We are almost done with this tour, and we are starting to see the light at the end of tunnel. And we all know that when we get to the end of the tunnel that all of our families, friends, and loved ones will be there waiting for us. Thanks again, take care and have a great week.



C COMPANY, 121ST SIGNAL BATTALON

Greetings from FOB Danger! While most of you are enjoying your Labor Day time off, we continue our mission here in Iraq with determination and pride. Crossing the 7th month hurdle this week is another accomplishment we can all be proud of! The soldiers here continue to work hard providing communications for the Commanding General, DMAIN and six other MSC headquarters here on this FOB. Certainly not an easy task, but these soldiers are adaptive and creative in overcoming any kind of issue this Iraqi heat, dust, sun or time can throw at them.

The company is particularly proud of its RETRANS section this week, as we were able to promote three outstanding soldiers in that section. We promoted SPC Kasandra Ryan to SGT, adding a knowledgeable NCO to the Retrans site and two SHARC vans. Also, we promoted two deserving PFCs to SPC – SPC Jennifer Quinonez and SPC Lynnea Pelafigue. SPC Quinonez has traveled all over Iraq with the Assistant Division Commander for Manuever (ADC-M) and his DTAC Command Post to provide tactical communications from the DTAC SHARC van. She has been required to be self-sufficient and technically superior in her job, and has per-

formed above her rank and peers for quite a while. SPC Pelafigue has been sharing her time between supporting the Commanding General and his DMAIN SHARC van and up at OBJ Midland manning the Division RETRANS site. She enjoys the change of pace between the two locations and always excels at her missions. Way to go, super troops – your promotions are most deserved!



Platoon Sergeant SFC Rohan Wallace and CPT Longwill pin stripes on SGT Ryan!



Section Sergeant SGT Jamie

Whittamore and CPT Longwill are proud to stand next to the newly promoted SPC Quinonez



SFC Wallace and CPT Longwill posing with the newest SPC in the company, SPC Pelafigue!

The following portion of this article was written by 2nd Platoon Leader, 1LT Robert Barry, proudly responsible for NC53 and F73.

The end of another month has come and gone for the Node Center 53 soldiers. September should be a good month as the temperatures hopefully start to cool and some soldiers that have been long awaiting R&R finally get a chance to go and see their families back in Germany and the US.



CPT Longwill and SGT Coss pinning on new, well deserved rank on SPC Roque Luna.

One of the highlights of this past month was when NC 53 was proud to promote PFC Roque Luna to the rank of SPC. SPC Luna is a very motivated soldier that has done great things for NC 53 and has also been doing a great job on the Battalion Commander's convoy team as a M249 gunner for the last 3 months.



At the bottom right corner of this picture, you can see SPC Luna in the front leaning rest position.

Like any other NC 53 promotion, the day would just not be complete without Super Soakers and water jugs to help SPC Luna celebrate his important day.



SPC Taylor in his "man dress"

In order to better understand the Iraqi culture, some of NC 53's

soldiers decided to test out the benefits and drawbacks of the Iraqi garb. One soldier was quoted as saying, "It definitely keeps you cooler, but a strong wind is enough to make anyone a little uncomfortable."



Node Center 53 is well on its way to the 2 million calls mark for the deployment, since we just hit the 1.6 million mark on 2 Sept. Another landmark for NC 53 was the COMSEC changeover for the month of September. NC 53's previous record for re-keying our Divisional and National Guard Node Center internodals and our extension links was 45 minutes. Node Center 53 is never happy to rest on its laurels, so we bested our previous record by 7 minutes to set our new *SMOKING* record of 38 minutes.

A COMPANY, 115TH SIGNAL BATTALION

Let it rain! Although watery precipitation is likely a few months away here in Central Iraq, Alpha Company 115's new operations' building is ready. On Friday, the company's convoy soldiers put the final nail in the tin roof covering the new building... and the natives are already trying to move in!

A camel spider made an at-

tempt to claim his own "office space" this week. The creature apparently hitched a ride in a bag belonging to Platoon Sergeant SFC Steve Jones, choosing a nice corner desktop to call home. Maybe Kevin Costner was right: "If you build it, they will come." Although, Iraq is a different sort of "field of dreams."

All jokes aside, SSG Charlie

Newton has again molded a finished project to make Alpha Company proud. The new company building at the Node Center 30 site here at FOB Danger has already proven its worth. The structure, which replaced tents at the site, has created a cooler working environment by 15-20 degrees. SSG Newton has moved on to his next construction

project, located here at FOB Danger's SYSCON site.

Several Alpha Company troops returned to duty from R & R this week, including Node Center 30's switch supervisor SFC Philip Blaxton. SFC Blaxton missed the major construction at the site. He reports being "fairly impressed. It's a vast improvement as far as accommodations and cooling."

With the return of one group of soldiers from R & R, another round is on their way home for September. Among those scheduled to leave in the next few days is SSG Jack Belew. SSG Belew is a veteran of Vietnam, one of several Alpha Company soldiers with previous experience in a combat zone. At

the top of his list for rest and relaxation is: "getting as far away from the sand as possible."

SPC Sonya Harris

3 September 2004



SSG Jack Belew, sitting on go for his upcoming R & R.



The newest office space renter at Node Center 30 on FOB Danger.

C COMPANY, 711TH SIGNAL BATTALION

Hello again family and friends! It's September!! Wow that sounds nice. The ninth month of the year, kids are back in school and maybe the weather will soon start cooling off.

This has been an exciting week around here. Besides tracking Hurricane Frances, we've been hustling to repair damaged equipment and keep signal flowing. I am very proud of our soldiers.



Working together to lower an antenna

They pulled together and replaced an antenna in its entirety as well as several other antenna cables, guy ropes and of course lest I forget, a generator. They restored three links in less than an hour! Awesome work by any standard.



SFC Bodiford, PFC Hawkes, SFC Heard, SSG Lay working together



SFC Freeman holding the antenna base

Other exciting news is the departure and arrival of more troops going on R&R. For the better part of August, there was a notable peacefulness in the male quarters due to the absence of

several less than quiet soldiers. Yes, that would be SSG D'Andrea, SGT Milan and SGT Weeks. All lively, good soldiers that we missed dearly and are glad to have back with us. (get out the ear plugs again!)

For the month of September we have even more folks scheduled to return to their loved ones. It looks like everyone that wants to take leave will get the chance too. HOOAH!

In other activities, the Node Center section has been finishing up their operations (ops) building.

As you can see by the picture below, some work harder than others. Funny how the increase in pay, results in the decrease in productivity! (just kidding, SFC Freeman works hard at drinking coffee and managing work schedules).



SFC Freeman's heavy labor

Well that about wraps up the activities for this week. Ya'll take care and know that we are thinking of you always. From our hearts to yours! Be safe!

B COMPANY, 125TH SIGNAL BATTALION

This week has NOT been an enjoyable one. The Brigade has endured some hardships and we have had a whirlwind of network issues. Easily the most network issues since arriving in Iraq. We have suffered numerous Node Center outages from generator failures and other maintenance issues. We have had a Small Extension Node, G33, supporting the 1-27 Infantry Battalion in Hawijah, that has developed some problems that we experienced difficulty isolating to repair this week. This has caused the convoy team and our electronic maintenance section to make numerous trips throughout of our area of responsibility. I wonder sometimes how much money we could charge for doing house calls to fix phones and computers under such dangerous conditions...probably a lot. Because of our numerous trips out to G33 this week we decided to make them the center of this week's newsletter.

The following was written by LT Erick Sutton, Node Center

62 Platoon Leader.

This week our team focus is on a team that happens to be away from the main element, G33. Led by SGT Kulanahenalu Rickard, from Wahiawa, Hawaii, who can't wait to get back home and go to the beach, hang out with his friends, and of course spend copious amounts of time with his wife. He, like most of us cannot wait to go enjoy some time at the beach. After all, we are always 20 minutes from a beach on the island of Oahu. Incidentally, SGT Rickard's goals after his enlistment are to attend college and once again spend lots and lots of time with his wife.



SGT Rickard



PFC Miller, PFC Snell and PFC Dunne

G33 is a Small Extension Node on FOB (Forward Operating Base) McHenry. They are supporting 1-27 Infantry Battalion, an organic infantry battalion under 2nd Brigade Combat Team near the Iraqi city of Hawijah. This is the most dangerous area in our area of operations. G33 is currently supplying several lines of communication in the form of secure (SIPR) and non-secure (NIPR) internet avenues. They pride themselves by providing a key communications package that enables their supported unit and many other personnel the ability to pass data and voice not

only intra, but also inter theater as well. Their main focus has been to provide direct support to 1/27's TOC (Tactical Operations Center). 1/27 Infantry is also known as the Wolfhound element. G33 continues to be a vital part to the Task Force Wolfhounds success by upholding the "Hele On!" standard and maintaining a professional and positive attitude even though they are at an austere FOB with fewer amenities than most of us. They never see some of the things we take for granted. Thank you, G33 for your dedication to duty, focus, esprit de corps and drive to carry on through this deployment.



Tom Liddy from General Dynamics at G33

Well, let's examine the team in depth shall we. SGT Rickard, as we know, is from Hawaii. I still remember his promotion on Sills Field at the completion of PLDC last November. His family and wife were there supporting his accomplishment, but I bet he didn't know that he was going to be sent over to the Middle East and lead a team in combat two months after his promotion to SGT. Not many E-5's can say they have the experience that SGT Rickard has. Not many have endured and carried on with such candor and professionalism like he has either. Good

job SGT Rickard, keep it up.

Our next team-member is SPC Dunne whose first name is Sean and at age 20 (born June 20, 1984) hails to us from Roseville, California. He would like to note that his hobbies include hanging out with friends on the beach (sounds familiar), playing video games, and spending time with his fiancé. His goals after his enlistment is to return home to Roseville, CA, attend college and get married. He states that he also wants to go out and get some cool tattoos when he returns to Hawaii.

SPC Daniel Miller at age 21 is the next member that must be mentioned from this team. He enjoys playing the guitar, working on cars, and going to the beach. His goals in life include a successful college career with a focus on a good educational experience. The first thing he wants to do when he gets back to Hawaii is to go out to eat. He also looks forward to actually driving his car—what a concept!

We mustn't forget the eldest member of the team, SPC Damion Mullins, who at age 26 enjoys portrait drawings as well as playing the guitar and the violin. He is also fond of weightlifting, and running. His focus when he gets back is to register for his last three classes so he can graduate from college with a degree in business management—great job. Coming to us from Bellevue, Washington, his goals after his enlistment involve going back to the Puget Sound area and attending college at Seattle University to pursue an M.B.A. as well as work diligently in the Juris Doctorate point degree program.



SPC Mullins and SGT Rickard

Our final mention this week, but not the last member of the team because the last team-member is on well-deserved R&R (SPC Raley) and will be mentioned at a later date is PFC Joshua Snell, who at 20, claims that his hometown is Grundy, Virginia. He enjoys taking apart and repairing electronics and wants to add that his goal in life is simple: to live life to its fullest. When asked what he wants to do upon his return to Hawaii, he declared, "I just want to wear some civilian clothes."



CPT Campbell and SGT Rickard

So, it is evident that this is a team with an overall aspiration not only to go to the beach and some day attend and/or finish college, but also to enjoy some well deserved time with friends and family. Sometimes, it seems, we tend to take many things for granted, but overall I truly believe we will all take one

thing back with us: a new found love, respect, and understanding for the freedom that we all cherish from our great Nation founded upon many of the ethos' and principles that we all continue to work hard at defending and protecting...until next week, "Hele On and First Strike".

Overall, a very rough week! G33 is a young group of soldiers in a very dangerous area of Iraq. They have endured a lot of what the enemy has to offer and through it all, have maintained their military bearing and always ensured their mission of maintaining communications to the 1-27 Infantry Battalion was completed successfully. Through their hard work and dedication the Brigade is able to maintain communications with one of the most active sections within our area of responsibility. So when

you think you are having a bad day, just imagine what this team goes through everyday and what they have endured over the last eight months. They are living under life threatening conditions, working countless hours everyday and still maintaining a positive attitude. I am truly proud of this team. Hele On!



SFC Coe, SPC Ariza and SPC Harris being promoted by CPT Campbell



B COMPANY, 279TH SIGNAL BATTALION

The soldiers of Co B 279th Signal Battalion received a treat on 12 August 2004. MAJ Grannon from CMATT (Coalition Military Assistance Training Team) located at FOB Caldwell asked if we had some soldiers that would be interested in helping test fire some brand new AK-47's. CMATT is responsible for training the ING (Iraqi National Guard) located at FOB KMTB (Kirkush Military Training Base). We would be given a weapons familiarization class and run thru the range that the ING is trained on. I hope that we never have to use the AK training that we received but it is a good feeling to know that you can now handle the AK-47. The new AK-47's were bought to replace the worn out

rifles of the old Iraqi Army. We were told a story about the ING during weapons training. The CMAT personnel said they could identify the soldiers of the old Iraqi Army because they all turned their heads when they fired. It was explained to him that the reason they did this was because the weapons were so

out that when fired the bolt cover would fly off and hit them in the face. Of course it was very hard to find the time with our very busy schedule but did manage to scrounge up 13 willing soldiers that would pull a little extra time out of their normal schedules to help out CMAT.

We ended up sending thirteen soldiers to the AK range. It was hot, of course, but no one was complaining. The AK is a very different weapon than the M-16 so is the ammo which comes in a tin can which has to be opened with a can opener like device. If you needed ammo in a hurry you would be in trouble. Most people agree that the AK-47 is a fine close combat weapon but is lack



SSG Lusk



SPC Gregory

ing in long range accuracy. One reason for the accuracy problem is the difficulty in acquiring good site picture, you do not want to place your nose close to the weapon as you are taught with the M-16. You could end up with a bloody nose or black eye, the AK has a nice little kick to it. Each soldier got to fire about ninety rounds. We actually got to do a little rock and roll on full auto.

Our own CPT Cheek came away with a more positive impression of his own M-16. He felt

the AK-47 was harder to control than the M-16. He would rather He said that he use to think the AK-47 was better due to the larger round, but after the class and training with the larger round he feels the weight factor is a disadvantage in that you can not carry as many rounds.

SSG Russell (V-3 team chief NC23) was very impressed with the AK. He had no problem hitting what he was aiming at. He would like to trade his M-16 for one of the new AK's.

SPC Gregory (SEN C74) thought the training was outstanding. He feels like he knows the enemy better now that he is familiar with his enemies' weapon of choice. SPC Gregory would like to see training on the RPK as well.

SGT Weber (SEN C73) feels confident that if overrun by a terrorist element he would be able to take use of their weapons and use it against them to provide lethal fire to protect his fellow team members.

All the soldiers that participated got a certificate from CMAT for

the training they received. The training was a welcome break from the daily grind of the Signal world. CMAT promised they will have another training opportunity to allow others to participate in the training.



SPC Weber



SFC Rhoades



CPT Long



BN XO, MAJ Self...."Huh?"

CHAPLAIN

American author Julia Ward Howe is remembered chiefly for her poem "Battle Hymn Of The Republic." According to her daughter, Howe once invited her friend US Senator Charles Sumner to meet a rising young actor. But he declined her invitation, saying, "I don't know that I should care to meet him. I have outlived my interest in individuals." Julia later wrote in her diary, "Fortunately, God Almighty had not, by last accounts, gotten so far."

gotten beyond caring about people? In fact, our heavenly Father is interested in every individual member of the human family. God, the Father is, in fact, like a devoted shepherd who leaves his flock of 99 sheep in the safety and shelter of the fold and goes out to find that one lost lamb. To help us understand the intensely individual nature of God's love for us, Jesus told us that the very hair of our head are numbered. And even in the Psalms, we're told that God delights in His people.

Sometimes, we all feel as though we're unwanted and alone. We might think no one cares, no one listens, and no one really knows what we're going through. But be encouraged, God does care perfectly, He listens intently, and He knows even better than you what you're going through. So draw close to Him, find comfort in His word and in prayer. Place yourself where God is and allow His Holy Spirit to wrap arms around you and comfort you.

Aren't you glad the Lord hasn't

TYPICAL WORK WEEK

