



The Desert Voice

20—26 September 2004



ISSUE #33

Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO DANGER - Greetings again! It has been yet another busy week for the 121st Signal Task Force here in Iraq. We had soldiers departing and returning from R&R, awards processing, redeployment planning, two companies undergoing change of command inventories and an Adwar Girl's school visit. The weather has been fairly accommodating, with daily highs for the most part a little over 100 degrees. Friday's high was 107 and though the temperatures are momentarily headed in the wrong direction, I suspect it's just mother nature's last friendly reminder of how harsh this environment can be before the really nice weather sets in on us. We are all anxiously awaiting having to put on winter PT shirts again.

As we edge our way closer and closer to the finish line and our redeployment back to our home stations of Germany, Hawaii and Alabama, I want to express to you the importance of treating the information about our redeployment as sensitive information. Along these same lines, I caution you all to not set yourself up for disappointment by believing rumors that your soldier may be returning home sooner than expected. I know some of you have already heard rumors that we will be home by Christmas or sooner. The truth is that the redeployment timeline for the battalion is no where near clear at this point. There are a number of scenarios that are being worked through in the planning process. I expect to have some clarity on the matter in November. When we left Germany, we expected to be deployed for a year. As such, February is still the most ac-

curate date I can tell you to expect us to return. I assure you there's no intent to keep any of you in the dark about our redeployment. I will gladly share the details of it when they are known.

CPT Long and CPT Sweeney are both deeply involved in change of command inventories in their respective companies. This is no easy task. They each have to inventory every single piece of property the company owns, right down to the last wrench. Trust me, it is quite an excruciating process. Soon, CPT Sean Bratton will replace CPT Jonathan Long in Alpha Company, 121st SIG and CPT Eric Burrage will replace CPT Timothy Sweeney as the Alpha Company, 115th SIG. Jon and Tim are both exceptional leaders who have served this Task Force with distinction and rightfully earned the utmost respect of their soldiers and their superiors. While Sean and Eric are both filling huge shoes, they are, in their on right, very capable officers who welcome the challenges of command and will undoubtedly do a great job. I'm excited about working with them.

On a lighter note, I want everyone to know that CPT Sweeney was gracious in defeat (Ark. Beat Ala.) and I won't rub in as I know how painful that can be. However, I do want to point out the picture on the last page of this edition...don't he look good!

Until next week, continue to send your love and support to your loved ones. Keep the thoughts and prayers coming. It still does make a difference here.

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HHC, 121st Signal Battalion

Hello everybody and welcome back to another weeks' edition of the Tough Corner.

This week we went to the primary girl's school that we sponsor. A few months ago we started a project for new furniture and a brand new building to be utilized as a meeting hall for parent teacher conferences and student activities. I will start off with this picture.



This is from the first week of the construction where you can see wall foundation. As you can see they build alot differently then we do. The floor for the main building is actually poured last, believe it or not. Here are the walls after two weeks of construction.



The meeting hall is here finally taking more shape with the roof getting ready for final sand, concrete tiles and tar.



This is the metal cress cross laid for the roof. Their construction for floors is similar with German concrete floor construction.



Next they lay down tar after the concrete dries.



Then, this is something I do not know anything about; they put down sand on top of the tar. Then they lay down the concrete tiles on top of the sand.



When they get done leveling out the tiles with the sand they then tar the tiles in place with a gentle pitch for the rain to drain off.



After one and a half months here is the building as we saw it this week.



Just so you know, if you thought there was a cement truck; there wasn't one. This guy mixed it all for the whole building.



Here is a picture we were able to take with some of the workers



From Left to Right (Job For- man, Translator, CPT Steyer, 1SG Cromartie, CPT Miller, Se- curity Dude, Local Worker (Tile Specialist))

Lastly I leave you with this picture of some other workers, all of them were very thankful for the jobs we provided them.



Next week we will get back to section emphasis. G6 will be the concentration next week. As al- ways, thank you for your prayers and support!!!!

A Company, 121st Signal Battalion

This week we have traveled the highways and byways of Iraq for change of command inventories and conducted some live fire training as well. This is the soldiers' first chance to meet their new commander and also to demonstrate their skill at laying out equipment. We've had a great time seeing the soldiers, counting pliers and reels of wire and enjoying high temperatures that, thankfully, haven't fallen below 100 degrees. We also promoted a few folks while we were out and about. This week will have more pictures than written word, however, you will find the captions read like a who's who of the movers and shakers in Iraq.

To start the week off right, we traveled to FOB Summerall, home of SEN team F71. They've

been supporting the 1st Infantry Division Artillery and doing an outstanding job. While we were at Summerall Colonel Longo, the DIVARTY commander, stopped by to tell me what a tremendous asset this team has been to his mission. Just one more example of the outstanding accomplishments of Alpha Company soldiers here in Iraq.



PFC Morrow ready to show equipment to the new commander



SPC Barnes ecstatic about the inventories, as evidenced by the smile on her face (CPT Bratton and SFC Carter with backs to the camera, as LT Gates, SSG Porter and LT Harvey look on)

After all the fun at Summerall, we returned to Speicher for some much needed rest and the next day we conducted a convoy live fire range. The purpose of the convoy live fire range is to reinforce the convoy team's skills of achieving accurate fire from a moving, bouncing vehicle. The soldiers from Second Platoon did an outstanding job constructing plywood targets for the range and the convoy team did an outstanding job filling them with holes. The convoy team enjoyed themselves while honing their skills at putting decisive and lethal fires down upon the enemy.



SFC Sadler conducts a safety briefing for the convoy team



Gunners engaging targets at the convoy live fire range

After great success against our plywood enemies, we put our convoy training to use as we traveled to FOB Remagen, home of Node Center 50. Node Center 50 took a break from providing outstanding support to the 9th Engineer Brigade to participate in inventories. Singing and dancing could be seen and heard everywhere as the soldiers rejoiced in their opportunity to participate in this joyous event. It truly was a glorious time spent with these great soldiers.



SPC Acosta, SGT Martin, SGT Gardner and SGT Campbell ensure their trailer doesn't roll away



PFC Quint and SPC Berish cleaning up after inventories

The next day we found ourselves back on the road, this time heading to FOB Dagger, home of SEN teams F12 and F72. These two SEN teams truly outdid themselves on the inventories. They set the bar so high it will be difficult for others to meet or raise. It was truly an impressive display from the outstanding soldiers and NCOs of these two teams.



SPC Drew and SPC Plitzner listen intently as SGT Gardner explains that one of his screwdrivers was stolen by Anti-Iraqi Forces

While we were at FOB Dagger we also had occasion to conduct a promotion. SPC Kekila Keuma pinned on his new rank which only added to the festive inventory atmosphere. SPC Keuma has done an outstanding job for F72 supporting the Second Brigade Combat Team and his promotion recognized that fact. Also, being a new father, (you

may remember his daughter was born while we were in Kuwait) he needs the extra cash.



The newly promoted SPC Keuma receives his promotion certificate

Another promotion this week which took place here on FOB Speicher. SPC Torry Vernon pinned on his new rank. SPC Vernon is a member of Node Center 51 and been doing a tremendous job while here in Iraq. We look forward to great things from this outstanding soldier in the future as he assumes increased responsibility.



SPC Vernon displays his promotion certificate

Our final promotion of the week also took place on FOB Speicher. SPC Alberto Ruiz was promoted to his present rank in a ceremony heavily attended by members of the Alpha Company Headquarters section. SPC Ruiz has been a vital member of the motorpool and he's certain to continue accomplishing great things for Alpha Company. SPC Ruiz recently hurt his knee jumping off a HESCO barrier but looked great for the ceremony. A non-alcoholic malted beverage toast to our new promotees!



SPC Ruiz receives his promotion certificate as SSG Johnson and SGT Hernandez look on

You may have noticed a theme throughout these newsletters that a lot of folks are getting promoted. I have said before that we are getting top heavy with rank, and that is evidenced more and more every week. We need some fresh faces out here and I think one of those faces could be you. Pack a few things, get on a plane and come share in the fun. Don't let your life be full of regrets. Oh yeah, and don't forget the ice. Wish you were here. XOXOXOXO

B Company, 121st Signal Battalion

Greetings from FOB Warhorse!!! Well another week has gone by, and everything continues to run smoothly for us here. Not too much excitement which is good thing, sometimes the less exciting the better. We had some promotions this week, some new members added to the Bravo family and the completion of the "Double Wide".

I would first like to introduce our newest members of the Blackhawk family. First up comes to us from the Walkers, SFC Palmer Walker and his wife

Maggi are the proud parents of a new baby b d girl, Taylor Ray. SFC Walker has said that his wife is doing fine and is scheduled to be released on Monday. Needless to say SFC Walker is more than ecstatic, he has been walking around smoking cigars ever since, there is more cigar smoke around here than at a poker game.

I would also like to welcome two new cuddly friends to the Blackhawk family, now these guys or gals have yet to be named so if you have any ideas,

please let me know. But these guys came to us courtesy of SPC Sawyers mother. She sent them in patriotic gear, that is signed by her co-workers, that shows the amount of support that they have for the soldiers.



We also had some promotions this week. For our first promotion we traveled to FOB Scunion where F32 hangs their hats and promoted SPC Franco to SGT after the promotion I am still not sure what happened but SGT Franco and his battle buddy SGT Hill got a little WET. Then we returned to FOB Warhorse where we promoted SPC Eric Bryan to SGT. These two are great soldiers and will definitely make great NCOs. Then first thing this past Monday morning we promoted the always camera shy PFC Zuniga to SPC. A much deserved rank for him as well, there are not many people that work as hard as he does.



SGT Franco receiving his promotion certificate



SGT Franco and his battle buddy SGT Hill

We are happy to announce that we have finished the "Double wide". Well for the most part it is complete. We have finished all

major construction projects on it and we are now focusing on making it look nice on the inside. The one room which will be our day/TV/game/classroom/phone center/MWR/, well you get the idea, is the main focal point for us right now. We are trying to get all of the proper wall adornments in there so it will look classy but casual. If you have any ideas or would like to send something for us to hang in there please do and if anyone can come up with a name for the place, I will happy to hear it, the best we could come up with right now is "The Hawks Nest", which is good but a little tackle. I do need your help before 1SG Peaytt calls it a Bait & Tackle shop.



The completed "Double Wide"



SPC Quick and 1SG Peaytt discuss decorating ideas

It was apparent this past week that the construction bug has caught on around us, as NC52 is working on an expansion project

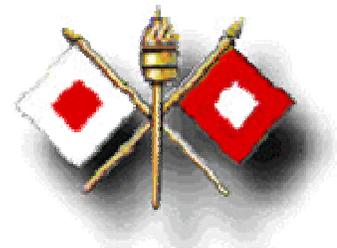
to their current office space. Lead foreman and project manager SSG Allen knows it will take a great deal of hard work and effort but he believes they are all up for the challenge. So far things are looking pretty good over there.



NC52s expansion project

I also want to thank all of the family members that took part in this past weekends VTC. It means a lot and does wonders for everyone when you can see the face of a loved one, even if it was a little blurry. Please pass the word along to others, we will continue to improve them as we go and we will do them as often as possible.

Well that about wraps up another fun filled, hard working, and crazy week from down here in Iraq. Please continue your support, take care and have a great week!!!



C Company, 121st Signal Battalion

Greetings from Sadaam's hometown of Tikrit, Iraq, affectionately known to us as FOB Danger – This week was filled with ranges and re-enlistments, champions and chores, and a new LT to welcome to the ROCK.

We all carry around our weapons everywhere we go, and this week we were able to put them to use! We put our troops on three different ranges since last I wrote, one for our crew-served weapons, and two other ranges for everyone who fires an M16 or M4. Four of our high-speed crew-served weapons experts went to OBJ Midland last Sunday with 4-3 ADA soldiers and fired the big bullets down range on the MK-19 and .50 cal weapons. It is always a treat for these soldiers to be able to fire more than a few test rounds, and they really enjoyed qualifying. On Tuesday, the company ran our own range to qualify our troops on M16s and M4s.



1LT Heather Gunther prepares for her safety brief to the firers.



SPC Smith Rimple prepares the ammunition for the soldiers on the range.



1SG Brown and the rest of our NCOs were out on the line making sure the soldiers remembered the basic fundamentals of shooting – breathe, relax, aim, squeeze! It was great to be out on the line, working hand in hand with our soldiers ensuring they qualified. Then, on Friday, we went through it all again with more of our troops on a BN-ran range. We have the majority of our troops qualified on their assigned weapons now, so we are sure to hit the enemy if ever the need should arise!

In between all of the time on the range, we have the honor of attending two re-enlistments this week. SGT Leodon Cason re-enlisted for 5 years to go to Fort

Campbell on Wednesday. He is our senior generator mechanic, working very hard all hours of the day and night to ensure our power generation remains functional for all of our signal shelters. He is very happy to be going back to Campbell, and we are very happy that he and his family decided to Stay Army!



SGT Cason signs his contract with SFC Lehman for 5 more years



SGT Cason smiles after the ceremony with CPT Longwill. HOOAH!

SPC David Nauss also re-enlisted this week, and he de-

cided to stabilize his family with us in Germany in the Big Red One! SPC Nauss is a high-speed 25Q (formerly known as 31R) working on the Division's only V4 line-of-sight transmission shelter. We are also very happy for him! The army retained two soldiers of extreme caliber and quality!



SPC Nauss poses with the Big Red One patch at DMAIN after this re-enlistment.

The chore this week was in 2nd platoon. They were working hard to put the finishing touches on their Morale, Welfare and Recreation building outside of their living quarters. They built this MWR facility a few months ago, but needed to get a few coats of paint on it before it starts to rain here next month. SPC Cevan Crosshall, SPC Jesse Weakley and PFC Daniel Carrieri all chipped in to finish their project.



SPC Crosshall focuses on not falling off the ladder as well as the delicate coat of paint on the building.



SPC Weakley braves the heat to touch up the NC53 MWR building.



PFC Carrieri, true to form and always smiling, cheeses it up while rolling on the paint.

Also from 2nd platoon comes the champion of the week - PV2 Dorian Meeks out passed, out ran and out scored his way past all of the competition on the entire FOB to be the FOB Danger Playstation Madden NFL 2005

game champion! Way to go Meeks – keep up that Charlie Rock Pride!!

Finally, we want to give a very warm welcome to our newest lieutenant, who will soon be the LEN platoon leader.



2LT Wesley Watson came to the company this week from 2nd BCT at Anaconda, where he was the S-6 for the 2BCT Tactical Command Post. LT Watson's wife, Ashley, is also a 2LT and is currently in the 38th PSB. They have one son, Landon, who is 3 years old. 2LT Watson spent this week getting used to the nice change of scenery and operations on FOB Danger as well as beginning the inventories for his platoon. He will take over next week for LT Heather Gunther, but we will wait until then to say goodbye to her – we aren't ready to let her go just yet.

R&R allocations were released this weekend for OCT, and we received a few more slots than past months, so even more of your family and friends will be heading home this month for

some much deserved rest and relaxation. The soldiers are all returning back to Iraq ready to complete their mission here with

smiles are their faces and great memories in their thoughts. We are all ready to have this deployment over with, and the light

switch is now just within reach to turn on that light at the end of the tunnel. Until next week – **ROCK STEADY!**

A Company, 115th Signal Battalion

September is winding down here at FOB Danger, and across Iraq. The soldiers of the 115th Signal Battalion look to the horizon toward re-deployment home. Although, that is still in the distance, with the halfway point of deployment gone by they now are focused on the ultimate finish line. However, that doesn't change the dedication to the jobs at hand here in the Middle East.

In fact, just this week a number of Alpha Company personnel spent time training on the Smart T. SPC Mikel Fraley of the SR 30 team conducted hands-on training for the Smart T equipment. Prior to this deployment, Alpha Company 115 had never worked with this particular equipment. Now several soldiers have had the opportunity to work with the Smart T in a tactical environment.

Since arriving in the Middle East, Alpha Company has proven to be champions of "adapt and overcome." Many soldiers have cross-trained to MOSs outside their own. The Node Center 30 team arrived here at FOB Danger with four operators, including team chief SGT Warren Hoffman. Those four have trained: SSG Dave Counts, SGT Scott Johnston, and SPC Mark Shaw – whose MOSs include: 31R, 31L, and 31P – as node center operators.

Other examples include our SEN and V1 teams. Through the

course of various signal missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II, these individuals have jelled so that the V1 operators are now SEN switch capable and vice versa. But, signal cross training is only one of the many ways the Alabama National Guard soldiers have adapted.

Take a look at the D21 team. Led by SSG Greg Bretherick, D21 serves as Alpha Company's coordination hub at FOB Speicher. Their efforts help ensure efficient operations of a company that consists of soldiers in many different locations across Iraq. The D21 members, along with all of Alpha Company, are living up to the 115th's battalion motto: "First in Duty."

Possibly the champions of "adapt and overcome" is the maintenance section of Alpha Company. SFC Roy Henson and his soldiers have yet to be outdone by the difficulties of a combat zone. Faced daily with problems obtaining parts and never enough personnel, the motor pool soldiers have never let Alpha Company down. On the contrary actually, since not only Alpha Company relies on them...but many others have come to rely on them as well.

Operation Iraqi Freedom has changed many things for this group of National Guard soldiers. But, for all that has changed much remains constant. The

company will have "cable dogs" that double as switch operators in the future – that will be a change. However, the driving force behind the new found capabilities is constant: the dedication of a citizen soldier. SPC Sonya Harris



SPC Mikel Fraley and SPC Chris Stokes during Smart T training at the Node Center 30 site at FOB Danger.



2-SGT Warren Hoffman and SPC Mark Shaw on the job at NC 30.



3-SGT Wally Thigpen, SSG Greg Bretherick, and SPC Dennis Liles of the D21 team at FOB Speicher.



4-SGT Dusten Sims, PFC Tori Turner, SGT Phillip Gunter, SPC J.M. Weldon, and PFC Adam Hodge...members of Alpha Company's Maintenance Section.



B Company, 279th Signal Battalion

It's Wednesday morning in Iraq. I'm working first shift for the first time since I've been here. There have been plenty of strange shifts covering for people on leave but it has started settling down again and we are back to working eight hour shifts. There is always work to do before or after shift. This week we are building sandbag walls around our sleep and work areas. I've been back at Camp Caldwell for a week now and am getting back into the routine.

Some of the things I saw on the convoy back have been weighing on my mind. First a little background. People at home asked me, "What's it like over there?" I told them "hot" though the temperature has dropped ten degrees in the month I've been gone. They asked, "Are we mak-

ing any difference over there?" I wrote about that a couple months ago so I was able to answer them. I hadn't seen any of the changes firsthand though. Until now.

On the last leg of my journey back to Camp Caldwell, my convoy followed part of the same route that we traveled in March. The change since then is phenomenal. The infrastructure and economy are growing stronger month by month.

Roads have been paved or patched and they have started to widen others. Irrigation ditches have been repaired. Electrical poles have been replaced and restrung. There is power in areas of towns that haven't had electricity before. There are two schools along the

route that have been reopened.

Walls have been repaired and roofs replaced. Stucco has been added to brick walls. There are even some new homes being built. Abandoned businesses have reopened and new shops built. A marketplace that we drove through is thriving.

It was nice to actually see the changes that I have heard and read about. So as I go back to work, I know that our presence here really is making a difference in the infrastructure and economy of Iraq.



SPC Peabody

C Company, 711th Signal Battalion

Hello again from the soldiers of Charlie Company 711 at FOB Mckenzie. Everyone here is in high spirits, because we have made it past the half way point, and we are hoping that it will go as fast as the first six months. We had a little thrill here a couple of days ago. The World Wrestling Entertainment star Diamond Dallas Page and former baseball pitcher, Rob Dibble, from the Cincinnati Reds visited the FOB. We were on the last stop of their world freedom tour. Capt Shirah and most of the troops got a picture with them holding the belt, even Lt Albritton got a good picture of a certain tattoo that Rob Dibble had, but we will not go where it was. You can ask him about it offline. Everyone here enjoyed seeing the guys.



Rob Dibble, SSG Gault, and DDP



Rob Dibble, SPC Howard, and DDP

On 11 September 2004, the personnel of NC15 and HQ's platoon had a small gathering to show appreciation to SGT John Finney for being selected by his peers as Soldier of the Month for August. SGT Finney was selected for his contribution to the NC15 area, working long hours moving large barriers to give protection to the Node Center area from mortar and rocket attacks.



CPT Shirah presenting award to SGT Finney

NC15 now has an EO person here at the FOB. SFC Jenkins has been up at FOB Danger for the past week doing his best to learn everything he needs to know about EO rules and procedures. Way to go SFC Jenkins. The lines will be forming to the left outside your office, so hurry back.

Until next week, everyone stay safe and you will be in our prayers.

B Company, 125th Signal Battalion

This past week we have seen several indicators of stress within the company. We are currently approaching our 9 month mark on the deployment and the stress of working and living together has grown around the company. The only stress reliever the chain of command can use is the news

that we are within three months of packing up in preparation for our return home. It also looks like all Soldiers in the company that have NOT faced any adverse action since deploying will be able to take leave and or pass before we redeploy. This week we are going to focus on the

'brains' of the signal task force, the automation section and some of the 'brawns' of the company, the line of site relay team and radio access unit team that lives on what of the remote ridgelines.

The following was written by SSG Jerrold Brown, the Non

Commissioned Officer in Charge of our Automation Section.

In past newsletter issues not much has been discussed about the company Automations office otherwise known as the "A-team". The basic role of the A-team is to provide a secure and reliable computer network for the Brigade Combat Team, and to also to assist in any technical problem solving with the network or repair and adjustment of the equipment involved. Needless to say, there is a lot of brainpower at any given time in the A-team workshop. If you ask any of the soldiers in the shop, along with those big IQ's goes a big ego and an even bigger responsibility. Those big egos come from the shop's ability to support the computer and technical needs of a small city with only five soldiers, two noncommissioned officers, and one captain.

First there is PV2 Holton, from Florida who is a self described "quiet genius". A true kid at heart, PV2 Holton considers his work for the A-team his hobby.



PV2 Holton

His true profession: playing video games. Next there is SPC Pagan, from Puerto Rico who was once a combat engineer and now builds networks instead of

bridges. He admits he had more fun playing with mines and tanks in his younger days. Now his wife, Illeana, son, Axel, and daughter, Fabiola don't mind him working with less menacing computers. SPC McBurney, from Georgia plans on making the military his career. Being an Army brat, SPC McBurney finds his job rewarding and hopes to become a sergeant major. SPC Cusimano and PFC Busby are on loan from the Commo section, but are just as enthusiastic about working with the A-team. They hope to broaden their radio skills with some computer skills and more than often provide comic relief in busy situations. Next is SGT Balthaser who is probably the workhorse of the group. In testament to his knowledge, it is a rare day when no one comes to ask his assistance on a problem. By the time you read this SGT Balthaser will be home on some well deserved R&R to spend time with his wife and one year old daughter. To keep this well oiled machine together and in motion is SSG Brown from New Mexico, but left his heart (and wife and kids) in Texas. The latest addition to this group, SSG Brown decided to make his latest Iraq experience unique. During this deployment alone he has been apart of an extension, node center, transmission and



SSG Brown

wire section. It is only fate that he finishes at the top of the list with the A-team. Last, but not least is CPT Calhoun who has not only the role of being the officer in charge of the A-team, but is also the contact between the 2nd Brigade and the First Infantry Division network control.



CPT Calhoun

With such a heavy workload, the soldiers of the A-team are generally confined to their cave in the Brigade Headquarters building. Surrounded by all types of servers, routers, and other equipment that only a techno-geek can appreciate and understand, the soldiers of the A-team can only imagine the dangers of going out on a convoy in the cool chill of an air conditioner (which is to cool the machines, not the soldiers). This is not to say they spend their time locked away in a digital dungeon. It has been rumored that once in great while they pull guard duty and participate in physical activity. So, if you have a problem with router rebooting sequences or need advice on local network configuration, chances are you have to call the A-team.

The following was written by 1LT Erick Sutton, Node Center 62 Platoon Leader

This week the focus is on the

Remote RAU (Radio Access Unit) and the mysterious and amazing double relay at Midland. This is where the crucial link between Forward Operating Base (FOB) Warrior (the main element) and Speicher (where Node Center 62 and around 30 or so soldiers are located). Without the success of this remote and austere location, communication in the forms of both voice and data would be of questionable quality—if at all existent. The link is legendary indeed. At 126 Kilometers, it is the longest Line of Sight (LOS) shot in history. It has been mentioned in past editions and has long been shrouded in mystery, but this week I intend on revealing the team that has made much of this hocus-pocus Hele On magic a reality, thus dispelling any and all planning ranges (40 kilometers) that may have been posted in noteworthy signal manuals.



Famous double relay at Midland

Many soldiers have been rotated through the site which sits in an area that would appear to look like something in a Star Wars movie or perhaps on a distant planet somewhere in our galaxy, but it is, as I have stated before, the critical link between elements from Kirkuk to those in the south. This area has also been the proving ground for young sergeants and soldiers alike. It is a place of refuge for some, yet seemingly

inaccessible to all forms of life with exception of the occasional snake (last week they saw a Sidewinder) or even a small Gila Monster passing through for perhaps a free handout from a lonely soldier standing watch in a guard point for 14 nonconsecutive hours in a day. The soldiers that have spent any time up at Midland can attest to challenges of working with other units and other Military Occupational Specialties that perhaps do not understand the importance of our mission. Yes, I could go into a whole diatribe on this matter, but let us look at the team members that have enabled the success of such an important site.

First, the members of this team include six that will be mentioned because they are assigned to this position and therefore are deemed Relay and Radio Access Unit Gurus or RARAUG's. To mention all of the soldiers who have rotated through this remote location would take more than a few pages of paper, but it seems fitting to mention the members of this team that are up on the "hill" for the rest of the time we are to be here in Iraq.

Although young (NCO wise) SGT Michael Millikan has led the way for many months, there is a new soldier I must mention—SGT Ricardo Vidaurri. He has just recently been promoted and is eager and willing to take over the E-5 slot, yet there is a lot of room to learn the ropes and grow—as this is a high visibility and critical site that takes a lot of maturity and discipline to be successful, however, I truly believe SGT Vidaurri will come out of this deployment an NCO head and shoulders above his peers. So, this week

we will focus on the team whose sole responsibility is maintaining not only the site, but a communication path that facilitates many missions to continue to be a success by, of course, enabling commanders and soldiers alike the ability to communicate with one another over long distances. Just think for a minute what it would be like without this ever important site.



SGT Vidaurri's promotion

Our leader on the hill, SGT Ricardo Vidaurri hails to us from Abilene, Texas and at age 23 wants all to know that besides being super excited in becoming the newest NCO on the hill with much room to grow and mature, he enjoys spending time with friends, boogie boarding, bodysurfing and looks forward to finishing up his undergraduate degree in either Texas or Oklahoma. Our next member is SPC Jerod James, who at 29 years of age, looks forward to attending college, but would like to add that he enjoys art, music and NASCAR. SPC James Tolley, our resident weapons expert, hails to us from Lynchburg, Virginia and states many things are up in the air for him but will consider all options. He would also like to add that he enjoys attending shooting matches, reading, and fixing computers. SPC Robert Rangel is another member of this team that

likes to boogie board in the beautiful waters of Waimea Bay. In addition to this activity, he loves to just hang out with his friends, yet would like everyone to know that he also like to let loose and just act stupid—(OK, if you say so). He also looks forward to attending college the University of Texas, and living in the San Antonio, Texas area. PVT Nicholas Spannaus is from Decatur, Illinois and at 24, claims he really has no hobbies, but looks forward to getting back to Hawaii and later plans on getting out of the military. All members of this team hold one of the, if not the

most critical piece of our network—good job to all of you, and thanks in advance for your continued success.

We approach our 9 month mark with excitement. We hope that we are able to complete our time here in country successfully, get all soldiers home on leave and prepare for redeployment with the continued success that we have had here in Iraq

Thanks for all that you do at home to keep us from worrying during our time here. Hele On!



Dangerous snakes killed at midland

Chaplain

Getting Back to Where You Once Belonged. When The Beatles' released their album *Let It Be*, it sold like crazy. There are quite a few songs on it that we would recognize regardless of our age. One such song is *Get Back*. It tells the story of a couple of people who had left good places in life looking for something else...only to find that what they really needed was found back from where they came. So the chorus, of course, goes, "Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged." Can you hear the tune as you say it?

There is a place that we all belong and, if we've left it, a place we need to get back to. It is in a loving and devoted relationship with God. Many times our choices and desires, because we're looking for that which may seem more inviting, lead us away from His presence. But without exception, when we get

there, away from Him, we discover that life without God is meaningless at best and downright painful at worst.

When the Prophet Hosea calls the people back to God, he understands our need to be in relationship with the Father. He says, "*Come, let us return to the Lord... After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.*"

And this encouragement, "return to the Lord," is speaking to us today. So be committed in your efforts to find God where He is and devote your life to Him and "Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged."



CPT Sweeney wearing an Arkansas hat after Alabama lost the game on Saturday night, with LTC Garrison looking on.