



The Desert Voice



13 – 18 April 2004

Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO DANGER – Greetings again from the Sunni Triangle. The days are getting longer and warmer here with the temperatures getting up into the 90's most days this week, and the hours of daylight extend to around 8:00 p.m. It was another productive, safe and busy week for the Signal Task Force.

The obvious highlights for me this week were the privileges to promote and reenlist some outstanding soldiers. It was my pleasure to start the week by promoting Mike Tobias to the rank of Captain. A secondary benefit to this act was that I could steal him from C Co. and put him to work in the S3 section. I had the honor of reenlisting three Noncommissioned Officers at various locations across our sector. SSG Perez, SGT Gardner, and SGT Reed all made a further commitment to serve our nation this week. Reenlisting on the battlefield is the epitome of selfless service, and a testament to their courage. Each of these great soldiers are relatively young in their military careers, and entered into a new obligation to the Army knowing that this was most likely not their last visit to this region of the world. The U.S. Army, while it is the most powerful force on the planet, isn't that big, and we will have a presence in this theater for many years to come. I'm proud to have them on the team.

The battalion has almost reached its quarterly goal for reenlistments and we're only three weeks into

the quarter. SFC Carol Lehman, our Retention NCO, does a tremendous job. I wouldn't trade Retention NCOs with anyone. But the real secret to why we're so successful in retention is due to the quality of first line leadership we have. Platoon Sergeants, First Sergeants and Company Commanders have created working environments that people want to be a part of and stay in. Ok, I admit, the \$10,000 dollar tax free bonuses don't hurt our retention effort, but we all know money can't buy happiness.

Also this week I met with Mr. Omar Jasim, the regional director for communications in the Salah Ad Din province. We developed a "way-ahead" strategy on how together we will improve the communications infrastructure for the province, and ultimately the good people of Iraq. After all, this is why we are here, to stabilize the country and provide a secure environment so that the Iraqi people can one day be self reliant.

Finally, I want to solicit your help with the schools we sponsor here in Iraq. Operation I CAN (Iraqi Children Assistance Network) is a Division wide effort to collect and distribute supplies to the schools within the 1st Infantry Division's footprint. The 4-3 ADA Battalion is collecting the supplies that we will deliver to the school we sponsor. Through your generosity you can have a direct, positive impact on the lives of these children, who are the future of Iraq. At the end of this newsletter is the mailing address

and some suggested items of need for Operation I CAN. Thank you for your thoughts and prayers for our safety, it does make a difference.

Alpha Company

Alpha Company has had another great week in beautiful Iraq. Both temperatures and winds are on the rise this week with highs in the 90s and winds up to 35 knots. Also on the rise this week, SFC Branyan has improved his bench press to 300lbs in preparation for the FOB Remagen weight lifting championship on the 28th of April. In order to compete in the contest, participants must also show their skill in one other event, which includes spades, ping pong or foosball.



1st Platoon's Not Quite Olympic weight room. From Left to right: 2LT Carbone, PFC Acosta, PFC Negrette

Weight lifting has probably become the favored past time at FOB Remagen due to a lack of internet access in the MWR facility. You will probably remember in the 27 March edition of Desert Voice that Remagen's MWR tent tragically burned down destroying the computer equipment. This past week a

representative from the FOB traveled to LSA Anaconda to pick up an internet package only to discover it was missing. Needless to say, an investigation has been started to find the missing equipment.

We had three soldiers this past week take part in the Fighter Management Pass Program (FMPP). The FMPP provides a four day pass out of theater for soldiers to get some much deserved down time. SGT Harris from headquarters platoon, SPC Flores from first platoon and SPC Frye from second platoon traveled to Qatar for their well earned vacation. All reported upon their return that they had a relaxing and enjoyable weekend. We don't know how often we'll get the FMPP slots, but we plan to take full advantage of it when we can.

Alpha company had its first two reenlistments this week. SGT Ford, on FOB Speicher, has the dubious distinction of being the first Alpha Company soldier to reenlist in Iraq. Also, SGT Gardner also reenlisted this week at FOB Dagger. Both are headed to the home of our beloved Signal Corps,



2LT Gates reenlists SGT Ford
Fort Gordon Georgia after our return to Germany. Both also received tax free bonuses for their continued service to our great nation. Only in a combat zone can you get station of choice and a tax free bonus. We're honored to keep

both of these great warriors on our team.



LTC Garrison reenlists SGT Garner
This past week has found everyone well. There was a slight hiccup with mail delivery this week when the mail trucks didn't show up for a few days, but everything seems to be back on track now. We're looking forward to even warmer temperatures and gustier winds. It's all part of the Iraq experience.

Bravo Company

This week in Bravo Company involved inventories, a reenlistment, an accident, and a better force protection posture.

CPT Donley finished his inventories in Danger, Wilson (formerly FOB Arrow), Speicher, Anaconda, Gabe, and Scunion this week, leaving Warhorse (and the HQ section) to do over the next several days. Along with the inventories, we have been able to go see soldiers and sites that are normally outside of this company's Area of Operation. We saw F73 on Speicher, F74 on Danger, and RR53 on Wilson for the first time this week. I'm proud to say that the inventories are going well, and the soldiers are all in good spirits.



RR53 on Arrow
From Left to Right: SSG Cady, SPC Land, CPT Dooley, PFC Johnson, SPC Foreman, PFC Hill

In addition to the inventories, we made it out to Gabe a couple of times this week to visit F33. While there, we serviced generators, picked up and delivered equipment and mail, and did a re-enlistment for SGT Reed. LTC Garrison and his convoy team made it down (after some brief excitement) and swore SGT Reed in for a few more



LTC Garrison swears in SGT Reed for his reenlistment



CPT Dooley promoted PFC Simpson on Gabe

years. In addition to his picture above is PFC Simpson's promotion picture from last week.

However, not all of the news this week is good. The convoy team experienced its first set back this

week with a vehicle accident which injured two of our soldiers. In route, on a routine convoy from Warhorse to Normandy and Echo, vehicle #3 in the convoy team didn't see the convoy come to a stop. Once they realized the mistake, they jerked the truck onto the island, saving trucks one and two from certain destruction, but they flipped their truck in the process. The truck came to a sudden stop as it rolled 90 degrees onto its side and came to a rest. Making matters worse, the truck in question is one of our open back gun trucks, meaning there is a soldier standing in the back manning the machine gun. He's strapped to the gun mount, but the mount is "gravity fed" into the pedestal which is bolted to the bottom of the truck. In addition, there are several "gravity fed" steel plates surrounding the bed of the truck, ironically, for the gunner's protection. When the truck rolled, the mount, and therefore the gunner) and several of the plates were thrown from the truck. The end result is that the driver (SPC Rich) was okay with only minor bumps and bruises. The gunner (PV2 Kubilis) and the passenger (PFC Mathias) were both medically treated and evacuated first to the Warhorse TMC, and then flown to the Anaconda Combat Support Hospital. PV2 Kubilis received no broken bones, and was returned to the company with some "happy drugs" and a profile for some deep bruising. PFC Mathias, unfortunately didn't fare as well, and suffered a broken pelvis, requiring pins and a lengthy rehabilitation process. He was further evacuated to Landstuhl for care. The only good news from the event is that the doctors seeing PFC Mathias stated that the break was a good one (as far as breaks

go, I guess) and that he should enjoy a full recovery after his rehabilitation, which should last from six months to a year. We will continue to keep him in our prayers.



PV2 Kubilis and the B825 Gun Truck. These pictures were taken in Kuwait, prior to entry into Iraq.

Now, to end on a little more positive note, attacks are way down from last week throughout the company area of operations. If you'll remember, we have been increasing our protection levels on the perimeter of our camps, and it appears to be helping. After a rough last week, the camp appears to be settling in again.

The temperature has been rising, approaching 100 degrees in our area. We all have assembled our work areas and installed our air conditioners to help us deal with the heat. At 100 degrees we know that yes, we are warm, but also that the temperature will still rise, probably approaching 140 degrees at mid summer. Today, however, is a fantastic break as we are experiencing our first daytime rain

shower which is cooling us off and keeping the dust down.

Enjoy your week. I'm going outside to stand in the rain.

Charlie Company

Greetings to the family and friends of Charlie Rock! Although the temperature has begun to rise here, the soldiers continue to do an outstanding job. Charlie Company currently has soldiers deployed throughout the 1st Infantry Division's area of responsibility and beyond providing outstanding command and control communications to the war fighter. Currently our soldiers support the division main headquarters, 101 MI Bn, the Division Engineers, 1-18 Infantry and others here in Tikrit. RR53 (SSG Cady and his team) support a ¼ Cav Troop near the town of Adwar. Our RETRANS section rotates on a 3-week basis on a ridgeline. SPC Taylor is currently 20 miles from the Iran border supporting the 30th Enhanced Separate Brigade (North Carolina National Guard) with a satellite link. SGT Whittimore and PFC Quinonez have been supporting the Division Tactical



CPT Poston with SPC Johnson and PFC Stadler

Command Post in a number of locations from near the Iran Border to south of Fallujah. SPC Johnson and PFC Stadler have also been in a number of places since our arrival in Iraq. Both were posted NE of Kirkuk for a few weeks in order to train soldiers from the

B/125th Signal Battalion on satellite equipment. After a short return here to Tikrit, they are



C company convoy team currently south of Fallujah providing communications support to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Each of these soldiers and teams has done an outstanding job providing communications support while detached often many miles from the rest of the company. Their success is a testament to the training and character that each of these soldiers possess.



LTC Garrison promoting CPT Tobias to his present rank on FOB Danger

This week also saw the promotion of 1LT Tobias to rank of Captain. We want to congratulate CPT Tobias on his recent promotion!

I know that many rumors continue to persist about the attacks throughout Iraq. We are all at risk on a continual basis here in Iraq. However, we have taken every necessary step to ensure that each and every soldier is as safe as possible both on and off of the bases here. I believe that we have seen the fruits of our labors here in

regards to force protection. I also firmly believe that your prayers also continue to shield and protect us from our enemies. Keep those prayers up! **CHARLIE ROCK!**

HHC

Good day to everybody. This week as you all have heard has been very busy here in Iraq. Let me reassure you that we are all doing fine and doing our duty to the finest standards in the Division. This week we have had multiple



CPT Steyer with SPC Shepard re-enlistments. The first re-enlistment was two fine soldiers SGT Shepard and SPC Shepard over a VTC to the rear. Here is SPC Shepard at G6 and his wife SGT Shepard on the VTC Screen.



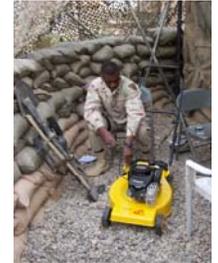
SGT Shepard seen here with Rear-D commander, 1LT Lamborn through a VTC screen in Kitzingen, Germany.

Later on in the week we were honored to have another re-enlistment for SSG Perez in front of the Burned out Palace. LTC Garrison administers the oath to SSG Perez on top of HHC 6.



SSG Perez reenlisting with LTC Garrison on the roof of HQ6.

On an interesting note here is CSM Butler, yes that is right, putting together a lawn mower? What grass? There is no grass in the desert!



CSM Butler

One of the last pictures for this week will be MSG Bassham who arrived about a week ago. We are so glad to have him on our team again.



MSG Bassham

And last, but not least, the one who gets us our mission every time and gets what every soldier wants prior to re-enlisting – SFC Lehman.



SFC Lehman

Chaplain

Keeping a long-distance love close to your heart - Most of us, by far, are away from those whom

we love the most. This separation is anything but easy on healthy relationships and can be toxic to struggling ones. That's why we all need to continue to work toward strengthening the bonds that exist between us who are deployed, and you, our loved ones...our wives, husbands, fiancés, and

girl/boyfriends. What I want to do this week is simply offer a few strategies for keeping that long-distance love close to your heart.

1) Communication – The obvious one that we always hear about is communication. But that's because it is so vital to every aspect of life. As a Signal Battalion, we know this more than most...just let someone's phone go out and there seems to be enough pain to affect everyone around. In your relationships, keep talking. Keep chatting on email. Be honest about how you're feeling. Share both the pains and the joys.

2) Encouragement – Believe it or not, there is no easy place to be in this deployment. Some say the spouses have it harder, while others argue that the soldiers are the ones really suffering. Let's be honest and agree that much of this deployment sucks for everybody. In that light, encourage one another. The soldier might say to the spouse, "You're doing a great job with the kids. Thanks for being there." Or you might say to your soldier, "We're all proud of what you're doing over there. And we're praying for your safe return."

3) Love – It might seem obvious to say that we should "love" our "loved ones." But it's not. You see, loving each other has less to do with feelings that may diminish over time and more to do with a decision that we've made to support and be committed completely to the one we "love."

Continue to love one another and fulfill the commitments that you've made to support and remain faithful. Work on deepening that love through words of encouragement and deeds of kindness toward each other.

A/115 SIG

During this week one of our patrols took us to FOB Speicher. We dropped off some gear for the highly motivated soldiers of the D21 team. The team has constructed a screened in porch in front of their living quarters to combat the mosquitoes that will be coming soon. They are also in the final stages of finishing an addition to their living quarters. I was very impressed, but it did not stop there... I was introduced to SFC Jay Byerly from the 67th CASH who had nothing but praise for the D21 team. Chaplain Kochenburger from the 67th CASH envisioned an area where soldiers could relax... and he decided that a coffee shop would be great for soldier morale. SFC Byerly is a man of action. He coordinated the effort, and the D21 team pitched in helping make the chaplain's vision a reality. In approximately 30 days they built the "Rusty Nail Café," which is pictured below. The facility is now open and is providing comfort and relief to soldiers across FOB Speicher.



CPT Sweeney, SSG Bretherick & SFC Byerly



The D21 team: SSG Bretherick, SPC Shivers, PFC Dodd, & PFC Heath (SGT Thigpen & SPC Liles not pictured)



Inside of the "Rusty Nail Café"

C/711 SIG

This week Charlie Company has been enjoying the cooler weather – especially SGT Donnie Dobson, pulling tower guard duty! As seen in the picture, SGT Dobson is enjoying his duty.



SGT Dobson in his guard tower

Today is a quiet day, as Friday is the weekend for the local people of Tikrit. The tower overlooks a school for young girls and is usually bustling with activity. SGT Dobson feels good about what he is doing when he sees the children playing and having a good time. He also takes his duty seriously. He and PFC Clarence Aikens are responsible for

watching the perimeter that overlooks the local town of Tikrit. They are the eyes and the ears of our security defense and they know how important their job is.



PFC Aikens at his guard tower

When these two are not pulling tower guard duty, SGT Dobson is a V3 transmission operator and PFC Aikens is a mechanic! Here in Charlie Company, 711 Signal everyone pitches in to help with the extra details, and they do so with amazingly few complaints. We are proud of all our unit members and the positive attitude's they have! **GO GUARD!**

B/125 SIG

As usual in the Atta Min Province we have stayed active in our role of providing communications to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division (2/25 ID). We want to share a few words to highlight some of the accomplishments that have occurred in this last week, touch on the leave program, plus cover some soldier promotions and child births.

First, our top development of the past week highlights the diverse skills and missions in the company. We did a little traveling to include an Easter patrol to pick up parts and move soldiers around the province. The biggest highlight of the patrol was some unexploded ordinance we found on the route that delayed us several

hours. Second, we finished setting up a command and control node in the barracks area. The barracks area and the work area are separated by three miles. R04 (call sign for the command node) is manned by SPC Cusimano and PFC Busby. These two soldiers recently returned from a RETRANS mission at FOB Gains Mills and have quickly transitioned



PFC Schleger at the 11D palace on FOB Danger.

over to the new assignment. Third, we picked up a convoy escort mission (SSG Turner, PFC Walker, SPC Rodriquez) to escort political advisors to and from the government building in Kirkuk.



SPC Nunez, PV2 Duran and SPC(P) Miller pulling guard during a convoy halt.

We finished setting up camouflage and overhead cover for the shelters and generators here at FOB Warrior and FOB Speicher. This project was a focus to provide protection from the summer heat

that is about to pound down on us. We have scrounged commercial air conditioners and even procured commercial generators to provide our own cool air to protect our electronics from the heat. The project will continue as we work on the outlying FOBs.

Rest and Relaxation (R&R) leaves have started for the Company. R&R Leave is a maximum of two weeks plus the soldier's travel time and the most we are able to have on leave, at the same time, from the company is 15. Currently we have eight enjoying their well-deserved R&R. The intent is to allow everyone to go on leave but best estimates are that only 75% of the company may get the opportunity. Senior leaders (Platoon Sergeants and above) will be among the last to be allowed to take leave.

We would like to mention some overdue highlights. We have promoted five soldiers in recent weeks: SSG Van Kampen (Small Extension Node G42, highlighted last week), SGT Milikan (Money Shot Relay Z62, Midland, Non Commissioned Officer in Charge), SPC Nixon (Node Center 63 "Second to None"), SPC Turner (Small Extension Node G74), SPC Peabody (Electronic Maintenance, discoverer of the "ghost card"). SGT Holloway (Electronic Maintenance) had a birthday and a close up view of unexploded ordinance on the same day. He is now 26. We have had plenty of new members to the "Hele On Team that we have been remiss in identifying. They are SGT Guerrero (Headquarters) baby girl, SPC Reyes (Motorpool) baby girl, PFC Turner (Small Extension Node G74) baby boy, 2LT Sutton (Node Center 62) very large baby boy, SSG Kirsh (Small Extension Node G41) baby boy, and SGT

Correa (Small Extension Node G32) baby boy.

As a side note, the Company football team is undefeated with an average winning margin of 30+ points. We have already made room for the championship trophy by the front door.

We also need to make an administrative note. We have had reports that mailing addresses and phone numbers have been changing on our contact rosters for the families. Please help us, help you, by updating our Family Support Group with your new information by contacting the Family Readiness Help Desk at the battalion in Hawaii. The phone number is (808) 653-0288

Finally I want to make a comment about a recent political cartoon I read. The cartoon highlights all the diverse tools in a Swiss Army Knife. Next to the Swiss Army knife is a US Army knife that shows all of the things you can do with the average Army soldier. In just this past week the average Army soldier in *this* company and throughout Iraq has conducted patrols, escorted political advisors, built overhead cover, installed air conditioners, cleared unexploded ordinance, cut grass with a hand saw, played football and most importantly maintained perfect communications for the 2/25ID and 1st Infantry Division. Keep that in mind when speaking or corresponding with your son or daughter.



SFC Harbst pulling guard during a convoy halt.

B/279 SIG

Hello from Co B 279th, a little about us. We are from North Alabama with the Company HQ and 1st Platoon (NC22) located in the city of Guntersville. The remainder of my company is 2nd Platoon (NC23) as Det-I Co B located 50 miles north in Huntsville and is co-located with 279th Signal Battalion HQ. I am the only representative from the 279th carrying the designation. Co A 279th was deployed as Co B 711th. The 279th HQ was not deployed. The 279th, 115th, and the 711th are all National Guard Signal (Title 32) Battalions of the 142nd Signal Brigade. The 142nd also includes a Title 10 Signal Battalion the 29th.



The 279th Signal Battalion was originally constituted in the Army of The United States on 25 May 1944 as 279th Coast Artillery Battalion. It activated on 31 July 1944 at Shemya, AK. It inactivated on 28 November 1945 at Fort Lawton, WA.

Redesignated on 22 January 1951 as the 279th Antiaircraft Artillery Gun Battalion and allotted to the Alabama National Guard, the unit was organized and federally recognized on 19 February 1951 with Headquarters at Huntsville, AL.

It reorganized and was redesignated on 1 June 1951 as 279th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion. It was redesignated on 1 October 1953 as 279th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons).

The unit converted, reorganized, and was redesignated on 2 May 1959 as the 279th Signal Battalion (Corps). It was ordered into active Federal service on 1 October 1961 at home station, and

released from active Federal service on 10 August 1962, returning to state control.

I look forward to the mission that is ahead working with "Danger's Voice". It is a privilege and an honor to serve in this capacity.

SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT



Soldier: PFC Vishna Jagdar

Duty Position: 31R, "Antenna Dog" for Alpha Company, 121st Signal Battalion

Forward Operating Base: Dagger

Home State: New York

Family: Single

What he has to say about serving in Iraq: Because my Mom was injured on 9/11 at the World Trade Center, being here is special for me. It's really hot and we stay very busy, but we're on the best FOB around, so it's not bad at all.



CPT Campbell, SGT Cruz and SGT Harbst evaluating the situation with an unexploded ordinance.

Operation I CAN

Operation I CAN (Iraqi Children Assistance Network) because you CAN make a difference.

The U.S. Army presence in Iraq has had quite an impact on the local population, and unfortunately there is a misconception on the part of some of the Iraqi people as to America's intention in staying here. The problem of this misconception lies mostly in the Army's assumption of the peacekeeper role. Although it has made great strides to improve its ability to maintain peace and stability in impoverished areas of the world, the ultimate success of the U.S. Army still depends on the support of its citizens back home. The Army's presence in Iraq provides a conduit through which ordinary American citizens can reach out and touch the lives of the Iraqi people in a positive way. This will enable the military to achieve its goal of establishing and fostering a stable Iraqi government and safe Iraqi communities. With the ultimate goal of bringing U.S. soldiers back home safely and quickly, Operation I CAN will distribute supplies to school children in Saddam Hussein's

hometown of Tikrit, the population of which depended greatly on his generosity, or lack thereof, for all of its basic needs. The most effective way we can foster and spread the ideas that make America great is by affecting the schoolchildren who are the pride and future of Iraq. For too long Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime prevented Iraqi children from growing up in a safe and promising environment. For too long we have said that we can not help the children of Iraq who need it most. Now, we can finally say, **"I CAN."**

Operation I CAN will distribute all donated supplies to school-age children in Tikrit, Iraq directly from the hands of U.S. soldiers, with the support of local community leaders. The supplies will be delivered in accordance with a timeline that maximizes the effectiveness of the distribution. You only need to pay the cost of mailing the supplies, which can be sent Space Available and should be no heavier than 70 pounds.

For more information visit their website at <http://www.operationican.com>.

The mailing address for I CAN is the following:

**HHB/4-3 ADA/1ID
OPERATION I CAN
c/o 1LT W.A. Diefenbach
OIF II – FOB Danger
APO AE 09392**

If you have questions and concerns you can email them at operationican@yahoo.com.

Some suggested items needed for the schools include:

- Pens/Pencils
- Sharpeners
- Erasers
- School Bags (tote or backpack style)
- Crayons
- Notebooks/Paper
- Construction Paper
- Blackboards
- Rulers
- Coloring Books
- Any school/educational toys
- Personal Hygiene Items
- Basic First Aid Products
- Girls Hair Ties (Barrettes)
- Clothing
- Shampoo (the girls love this)
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes
- Pre-School/Kindergarten Toys
 - Interactive Toys and games
 - Balls
 - Playground Toys

