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Blackhawk Soldier receives Purple Heart

Story and photo by Sgt. Natalie Rostek

3rd HBCT PAO, Editor, Hammer Times

Soldiers of the 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment gathered April 17, to honor Capt. Arthur L. McGrue, III, 37, Sea Side, Calif., Commander of Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, with the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during a small arms fire attack on March 29.

The award was the first of its kind for any Soldier of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team during Operation Iraqi Freedom 5.3.

The incident occurred while McGrue was conducting a patrol with Company E, 1st Battalion, 125th Infantry Regiment, to get familiarized with the route from Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah to Nahrawan, Iraq.

During the mission, McGrue and his combat patrol stopped at an Iraqi Police station along the route to assess their facilities. During the stop, an informant gave coalition Soldiers a tip on a high-valued individual in a nearby town and was willing to show his team the location.

During a joint patrol with the local IPs to recover the HVI, the patrol began taking fire.

"As soon as I saw it I yelled, 'Muzzle flash in the wood line! Muzzle flash in the wood line!'," McGrue said. "We all took cover and when I went to raise my weapon I was hit."

He felt exactly where he was hit—in the chest of his IBA.

"I started rubbing my body armor and calling out that I was hit," McGrue said. "I checked real quickly for injuries and noticed my wrist was bleeding."

McGrue explained he was hit in the chest and pieces of the round ricocheted off his armor and struck his left wrist in two places. He said the physician's assistant who was with the convoy wanted to do immediate care.

"I told (the PA) it was just a flesh wound," McGrue said. "Then I moved to another wall for cover and continued to return fire."

After an approximate 15 minute firefight, McGrue said the patrol leader made the decision to return to the vehicles and leave the area. When he got back to his vehicle, he received aid for his injuries.

"I can still feel pain in my wrist," McGrue said. "I have to open bottles with my right hand because I can't grip anything very well with my left. But I know I have to lead my men and I take honor in being able to lead them."

Although he was injured in the line of duty, McGrue still keeps an upbeat attitude about the mission in Iraq.

"We have a positive effect," McGrue said. "We talk with the local Iraqi citizens in our area and they are happy to see an American presence. They (the local population) feel more secure with us here."

McGrue said he knows the insurgency has an agenda to slow the advancement of Iraqi Government and its people but said it is his job to prevent them from causing further harm and damage in his area of operation.

After being awarded with the Purple Heart, McGrue spoke to his troops and told them three things to remember.

He said, "First, remembrance of the fallen Soldiers; second, remember to wear the proper uniform because it does save lives; and remember to be prepared when you leave because you don't know what you will face." ▣



Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., Commander of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, pins a Purple Heart on Capt. Arthur L. McGrue, III, April 17, at Forward Operating Base Hammer. McGrue is the first Sledgehammer Soldier to received the award during OIF 5.3

FROM MY POSITION

By Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr.
3rd HBCT Commander

The Sledgehammer Brigade has now been in Iraq for over one month. We set establishing security and assessing our new operational environment as two of our top priorities for the first 45 days. Our integration period is soon coming to an end. It is now time to identify who the enemy is and where the enemy is so we can bloody his nose.



GRIGSBY
3rd HBCT Commander

Securing our teammates and assessing our environment will always be top priorities, but we must focus on taking our game to a higher level.

We are going to stay forward in sector, because that keeps us close to our enemies. This closeness allows us to sense more of our surroundings and accurately determine who is friend and who is foe. But by being close, we are in more danger and must keep up our emphasis on security – always improve your position.

We are in the process of moving more Soldiers and units off of Forward Operating Base Hammer and into our local communities. The “Can Do” Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment have done a tremendous job in establishing their operating bases in sector.

The “Blackhawks” of 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment are in the process of pushing forward and doing a great job. Soon we will have the bulk of two battalion-sized maneuver elements forward in sector. Expect the enemy to get uncomfortable and react in a violent manner. Stay alert, anticipate his next move and proactively hunt him down before he can affect you and your team.

As we move out into sector, we will establish dominance of all key routes. We must ensure that we have freedom of maneuver and that the enemy is confined to avenues of approach that we choose. Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets and combined route clearance patrols and checkpoints will be our tools for asserting our dominance on the key routes in sector. Our dominance of key routes will improve our safety and restrict our enemies to locations of our choosing – where we will be waiting...to bloody his nose in a violent manner.

That is our game plan: (1) secure our team in sector, (2) move more forces into sector and (3) dominant the key routes in our sector. The end result will be our

enemies waiting on the anvil for the eventual smash of the Sledgehammer. The enemy must know that the Sledgehammer Brigade is here, and we must strike fear in them through select operations that target the enemy accelerant smuggling infrastructure.


While you are working on your three-point game plan to get at our goal of smashing the enemy, think of 2 other key points: hardening your logistical tail and developing high resolution sensing systems.


In Twenty-Eight Articles, Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency, David J. Kilcullen advises the modern counterinsurgency warrior to “travel light and harden your CSS” or combat service support elements. In this fight, we are all moments away from a fight and we need all of our Sledgehammer Soldiers to be prepared for that fight. Soldiers from the Brigade Support Battalion and the Brigade Special Troops Battalion are not all living on small outposts, but they will be on the mean streets everyday and every night.

But we must be more than just prepared for the fight, we must be agile and aggressive when the fight comes. Our enemy travels with a weapon, some ammunition and maybe a spotter. His logistical tail is embedded in the community. He is quick and if you don’t “lighten your load and enforce a culture of quickness” than we will never catch our enemies.

Being able to detect who our enemies is the toughest task on our plate and why we must develop sophisticated sensing systems. By sophistication, I am not talking about technology. I am talking about effectiveness. All Soldiers are sensors, but without their input in patrol debriefs, their efforts will go for nothing. Flood the brigade staff with data. I guarantee you that we will produce products that will help you target our enemies if you provide a consistent stream of debriefs.

Our soldiers are not our only sensors. Our Iraqi Security Force partners and members of the community will provide a much greater depth of intelligence once we establish relationships built on trust. Cultivate the relationships you have with your security force partners. We want to become part of their team. Work with them to get to know their communities and the people in those communities.

Keep getting after it, but take the opportunity on a periodic basis to examine your lessons learned. This is a complex fight that we are in and we must continually think our way through the problems that we face. We are on the right path, Sledgehammers. You are doing great work. Git R’ Dun! 

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IA leader welcomes Blackhawk counterpart

Story and photo by Spc. Ben Hutto
3rd HBCT PAO

Leaders from the 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, met and had dinner with the commander of the Bey May Eagles, the Iraqi Army training unit that trains next to Forward Operating Base Hammer at Bes Maya Range Complex.

Lt. Col. John Kolasheski, Commander of 3-1 Cav, met with Col. Fadhil Abbas to discuss future joint operations and to further advance their relationship.

"I'm very impressed with the level of professionalism the Iraqi soldiers showed as we rolled through the gate," said Kolasheski. "It says a lot about their training."

Abbas presented the Blackhawk leadership with a huge meal to honor their visit and encouraged everyone present to relax and enjoy.

"My brothers, I am so excited that you are all here," said Abbas. "I look forward to working with you as one family. The Iraqi team and the American team is one team and I want to have a high level of cooperation. My Iraqi soldiers love their American Soldiers as brothers."

After their meal, Abbas and Blackhawk leadership discussed the

training the Iraqi Army was doing at Bes Maya Range Complex.

Abbas proudly explained the complex featured a sniper course, mortar course, infantryman's course and a Combat Arms School. Many of these training courses were instructed and ran completely by the Iraqi's themselves and more were almost to that point.

Abbas was understandably proud how far his country and army had come since their days under Saddam Hussein's control.

"These types of facilities are so important in giving our Soldiers proper training," remarked Kolasheski. "I'm very impressed with the facility you have here."

Abbas also assured Kolasheski the tribal division that had hindered Iraq's army in the past was not a problem with the unit under his command.

"All my soldiers fight under one flag," said Abbas as he pointed to the Iraqi flag on his wall. "No more clans or separate religions here. We all worship one God and fight under one flag."

He pointed out that Iraq was under Hussein's control for over 20 years and it will take time to change the way an entire generation of Iraqi's think, but he is confident the change will take place.

"I promise you, in five more years this country will be an example for other countries to follow," said Abbas. "We are almost there."

Abbas also recognized there were elements in his country that did not want it to change, but was confident that with America's help, they too could be overcome.


"My brothers, this country would not be free of Saddam, without your help, but this country still has bad people that must be stopped," explained Abbas. "We will stop them. I promise you this."

Blackhawk leadership was impressed with Abbas's level of commitment and enthusiasm.

"We look forward to working with you to help you rid your great country of these bad men," replied Capt. Jim Hathaway, Commander of 3-1 Cav's Headquarters Troop.

After enjoying desserts prepared by Abbas's wife and cups of steaming chai, the commanders parted ways, but promised to be in touch with one another.

"I look forward to working with you and hope to do this again soon," said Kolasheski.

The meeting will hopefully set the stage for continued cooperation between the Sledgehammer Brigade and the Eagles in the future. 



Col. Fadhil Abbas, Commander of the Bey May Eagles Iraqi Army training unit, listens as Lt. Col. John Kolasheski, Commander of the 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, discusses future joint operations in and about the Sledgehammer AO.

Soldiers beware: UXOs on FOB Hammer

By Spc. Ben Hutto
3rd HBCT PAO

Since the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team arrived at Forward Operating Base Hammer in March, they have been keeping a close eye out for any unexploded ordnance that may still be in the area of their operations.

Soldiers of the 3rd HBCT have been told to stay alert because, before the facility was taken over by Coalition Forces, it was a training area for Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. The former regime left countless missile warheads, mortars, grenades and tank rounds lying around when they were forced to flee the facility.

In addition, several undetonated combined effect munitions dropped by American warplanes during the takeover, have been found hidden under sand and rubble.

"We've probably turned up at least 60 UXOs (unexploded ordnance) since we arrived here," said Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Baker, 42, Hollywood, Md., 557th Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron.

Every Sledgehammer Soldier was warned to be on the look out for unexploded ordnance upon their arrival to FOB Hammer.

So far, that warning has prevented any unfortunate accidents from occurring.

Before the arrival of the Sledgehammer Brigade, an Air Force construction worker accidentally set off a BLU97 combined effects submunitions with a road grader. Luckily, he was not hurt, but the explosion did do significant damage to the vehicle.

"Normally, an unexploded ordnance is found by Soldiers digging sand bags, guys grading the roads or after a big dust storm," said Senior Chief Petty Officer Brad Bunde, 39, Scio, Ore., who is with the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 6 temporarily

stationed here at FOB Hammer.

When a Soldier finds something they think is suspicious they are supposed to immediately report it to their battalions Tactical Operations Center.

Bunde reminded every Soldier in the 3rd HBCT they should not try to investigate anything themselves.

"The best advice I can give is to never disrespect unexploded ordnance," explained Bunde.

As a safety measure, Bunde explained that normally he and the eight seaman he has working under him attempt to remove any unexploded ordnance from the area before they attempt to blow it up.

Sometimes, however, that isn't option.

Many of ordnances like the BLU97 combined effects submunitions are very volatile and can't be moved.

"Submunitions are very dangerous because something as harmless as a strong wind can set them off," explained Bunde.

In cases like this, Bunde and his crew are very careful to protect anything in the area and try to "muffle" the blast.

A BLU97 explosive was found on top of the building that will serve as the 3rd HBCT's new headquarters. It was detonated as they were removing it from the roof.

"There is a delicate balance there," said Bunde. "The unexploded ordnance normally isn't as dangerous as some of the (improvised explosive devices) we handle. We feel very confident using our knowledge and experience to handle these situations."

Bunde just wants Sledgehammer Soldiers to be aware and not dismiss anything that could be a threat.

"As long as Soldiers don't disturb these things, they will be fine," said Bunde. "Just give us a call and we will confirm or deny what it is." ▣



Courtesy photo by 557th Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron

The Navy's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 6 prepares to detonate a cache of unexploded ordnance at FOB Hammer.

3rd HBCT assumes control of FOB Hammer

Story and photos by Spc. Ben Hutto

3rd HBCT PAO

The Stars and Stripes and the Colors of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team shone in the morning light for all to see at Forward Operating Base Hammer on April 7.

With the temporary Brigade Tactical Operations Center in the background and the sounds of construction echoing around them, Soldiers from the 3rd HBCT took time out of their busy morning routine to watch the colors of their country and brigade raised high.

“Since 1917 this Brigade Combat Team has served our country honorably,” said Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., the commander of the 3rd HBCT.

“Three times we have come to this part of the world and now in Operation Iraqi Freedom 5.3, we stand here again. These colors represent the hard work, the blood and the ultimate sacrifice that the Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade have made in the past, today and will make in the future.”

Grigsby encouraged the 3rd HBCT Soldiers to work together and remember how important each individual Soldier is in this fight.

“We stand here today as one team,” said Grigsby. “When our country needed us, we answered the call as part of this surge. We are living history, today. We will protect and secure the populace in Madin Qada along with our Iraqi Security Force partners. We will not let Sunni extremist,

Shia extremist and Iranian influence pass freely into our area of operations and threaten the populace of Baghdad. The insurgents will fear us.”

Grigsby ended his speech by emphasizing why the 3rd HBCT’s mission was an important one and what he expected from the Sledgehammer Brigade.

“We will have some tough times, but in the end this flag, our colors and our Soldiers will be successful and we will live in a more secure world; a world that will allow our grand children to enjoy the same freedoms that we have enjoyed our whole lives,” explained Grigsby. “We will earn it and we will return home and enjoy it for the rest of our lives.”

After the ceremony, several Soldiers took photos of the newly raised colors to send back home.

“For the third time in five years, the 3rd Brigade has fought under these colors,” said Command Sgt. Maj. James M. Pearson, Command Sergeant Major of the 3rd HBCT. “I couldn’t be more proud of each and every Soldier in this brigade and will do everything I can to take care of the Soldiers that fight and serve under these colors.”

The flag raising ceremony marked the 3rd HBCT’s assumption of Area of Operation Hammer, approximately 3,000 square kilometers of land, bordering Baghdad on the east and stretching east into Diyala and Wasit Provinces.

The 3rd HBCT has established



Pfc. Nick Palmer, Headquarters Troop, 3rd HBCT, raises the colors of the 3rd HBCT, April 7, at FOB Hammer.

their FOB in a dusty part of the Iraqi desert where virtually no life support systems existed as little as four weeks ago. FOB Hammer, the new home of the 3rd HBCT, has already seen major renovations and improvements. Construction efforts are under way to build a headquarters building and improve upon temporary living quarters, mess halls, laundry facilities, and recreation tents. ☑



Command Sgt. Maj. James M. Pearson, Command Sergeant Major of the 3rd HBCT, salutes the colors during the 3rd HBCT's the raising of the colors ceremony on April 7 at Forward Operating Base Hammer.

1-15 platoon sees positive change

Story and photos by Spc. Ben Hutto
3rd HBCT PAO

Young infantrymen face the fear of stepping on the streets of Baghdad. But not alone, combat veteran non-commissioned officers take them under their wings.

Soldiers from 3rd platoon Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment patrolled the streets of Salman Pak in conjunction with the military police and Iraqi National Police.

"This is just another chance for the people to see our face and know that we are here to help out," explained Pfc. Paul Jernigan, an infantryman with 3rd platoon, as he prepared to step off.

Led by Sgt. 1st Class Peter Black, the platoon sergeant, 36, Smith Station, Ala., the group spent two hours walking up and down the streets, venturing into the town square and greeting anyone who would approach them. Their mission, while relatively simple to explain, is not simple to execute.

"We just got here yesterday, but we're going to spend six days here working with the Military Police and the Iraqi police," said Sgt. Robert Butler, 36, Kansas City, Mo.

As the Soldiers from 3rd Platoon kept their intervals, Black explained how this town is actually much better than the town in the platoon's previous area of operation in Operation Iraqi Freedom 3.2.

"The situation here is a lot better than where we were last time, based on the reputation of the Iraqi National Police working here," explained Black. "I think it helps that they work here, but don't live here. They have a good reputation. We are seeing their operations getting good results. They are taking the lead in a lot more things. Really, all we do is shadow them, in case they need back up. I think they and most of the population here know

that we are just here to help."

Pvt. Clint Biddle, a medic who served with Black in OIF 3.2, 24, Paris, Ky., agrees that the situation is different.

"The town is a lot bigger and we are working a lot closer with the Iraqi forces this time," explained Biddle. "I think they are doing a lot better job policing their towns."

The combat experience in Black's platoon will be a huge asset in situations like this foot patrol, according to many veteran platoon members.

"I've got 12 vets that have been with this platoon since OIF III," said Black. "I took over during the middle of the last rotation, but didn't try to come in and change anything. They had their routine down and I didn't want to mess with that. I have faith in my soldiers. I let my guys be thinkers on the ground. I don't dictate how things will be. I have a lot of faith in their abilities and judgment."

The confidence Black places in his veterans trickles down to the new soldiers in the squad. For most, this is their first deployment and they are taking all the advice they can from the experienced non-commissioned officers in the company.

"I use every little bit of advice they (NCOs) give us," said Pvt. Brandon Bailey, 22, Colquitt, Ga. "They all do what they can to help us because they want us to come back alive."

Black agrees.

"We have a lot of combat experience spread out throughout 1-15," explained Black. "I let the NCOs teach their men what they need to know and I tell my Soldiers to trust their leaders."

Not that it is easy to blend into a platoon as tight knit as 3rd platoon. It is a close group where everyone seems to have a nickname. Many of them have been through hard times together and that has built bonds that run deeper than casual working relationships.

"Last time I was here, me and my guys went through



Staff Sgt. Sean Holtz, the team leader for 1st squad, 3rd platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 29, Columbus, Ga., scans the streets of Salman Pak, Iraq during a foot patrol on April 16, as a local woman watches him.

in ISF; forms lasting brotherhood

some really bad stuff," explained Butler. "We had gotten really tight. They were probably the bravest guys I'd ever met. You go into situations together where you think you're going to die and nobody runs. They stand right by your side fighting and they're just as scared as you are. After that, that's your brother."

Entering such a fraternity can be daunting for Soldiers still in their first year, but the newcomers to 3rd platoon have found ways to impress the veteran members of the platoon with their zeal and willingness to do the hard work that it takes to become a good infantryman and teammate.

"At first it is hard fitting in, but once you get here and get settled it's not too bad," explained Bailey.

"Our new guys are eager," said Biddle with a smile. "They want to go out on patrol. A lot of them want their Combat Infantryman's Badge."

Butler tries to keep his new Soldiers ready. In his mind, their eagerness is an asset, but he has tried to temper it with his experience.

"When the new guys showed up I told them, 'I'm not here to be your friend. I'm your sergeant and my job is to get you out of this alive.'" he said with a straight face. "If they don't like me, I don't care as long as they are back home with their families when this is over." A smile broke over his face before he continued. "I've tried not to get too close to them, but it's hard."

The platoon marched for another hour before it doubled back through Salman Pak's town square.

The town's people filled the downtown area getting haircuts, buying food, drinking chai and going about their daily lives. As the Soldiers walked by, many adults greeted them, many children came out to shake hands or give the squad a thumbs up, but everyone was watching.

This would make many Soldiers nervous. The Hard Rock Soldiers were unfazed.

"Normally people don't bother me," explained Butler. "The more people there are; the safer you are."

Butler explained that when the people clear the street he gets worried. It is his belief in the smaller areas outside Baghdad the townsfolk look out for one another. He feels that the tribes are close and go out of their way to warn each other before something bad is going to happen.

"They know when things are going to happen. So if they aren't here or the children aren't out in the street, I get scared."

That fear isn't something that stops him, however. He explained that it was something he has just gotten used to.

"You learn how to fight it, because when stuff starts happening what are you going to do?" asks Butler rhetorically. "Turn around and run? You aren't just going to leave your guys there hanging."

As the patrol ended the NCOs went around and made sure all of their Soldiers were drinking water and reminded them to get something to eat. The Soldiers were tired and hot, but as Staff Sgt. Sean Holtz, 1st squad leader, 29, Columbus, Ga. started ribbing several members of his squad, smiles started appearing on once weary faces. At this point, there was no mistaking that this unit was something like a family.

"It's because our senior guys know your only family is your platoon over here," explained Biddle. "Line units are close. I mean, we can decompress and relax around each other no matter what rank we are. When we are lying around upstairs (where 18 of them are jammed into



Sgt. Robert Butler, Company A, 1-15 Inf., greets a small admirer in Salman Pak during a foot patrol on April 16. Many of the local children greeted the Soldiers with waves and high-fives.


a little room together), jokes just fly back and forth across the room, but jokes go out the window when we are on patrol."

The closeness of the platoon can make his job as a combat medic hard.

"I can work on 'some guy' all day and it's not hard," explained Biddle with a serious expression. "Working on one of my guys is different. The personal ties make it harder. It's like working on a family member. You have to learn to set aside your emotions and get the job done. Line medic is tough that way. Part of you wants to get hysterical along with everyone else because your buddy is hurt, but you have to be able to push all that aside and remain calm and focused on your job."

As the tired squad trudged up the stairs to their room, several members of another squad in the platoon were gearing up to provide cover for two tanks that were experiencing mechanical difficulties outside the compound in Salman Pak. Jokes were exchanged as the first squad quickly caught the other one up on what happened on the previous patrol. For a moment, it didn't even seem like they were in the middle of a war.

In the Bradley fighting vehicle he uses for temporary sleeping quarters, Black reflected on why he thinks his group will be successful this time around.

"We are really lucky to have so many guys that were in this platoon from last time," explained Black. "In today's Army, it's hard to keep a group of guys around and build a family. Believe me, in a tight area, like this, you are a family." 

203rd BSB medics provide leg for local boy

Story by Sgt. Natalie Rostek
3rd HBCT PAO, Editor, Hammer Times

Medics from Company C, 203rd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, gave a little hope to a local Iraqi boy when they provided him with a new prosthetic leg, April 9, at Forward Operating Base Hammer.

Hussein, the 15-year-old son of a local vendor, lost his leg in an improvised explosive device incident four years ago. He was treated and fitted for a prosthetic leg at a hospital in Baghdad. Since that time, due to normal adolescent growth and the harsh environment in Iraq, Hussein has outgrown the now worn-down prosthetic.

According to Maj. Cynthia Majerske, 38, Bar Harbor, Maine, battalion surgeon for the 203rd BSB, kids should have their prosthetics replaced once a year, teens once every two years.

"The challenge is the conditions you take for granted back in the (United States.) Here, it is one more challenge to face," said Majerske, who is attached to the 3rd HBCT from Fort Bragg where she is a Physical Medicine and Rehab Physician. "The prosthetic I would have proscribed is a silicone sleeve with a locking pin, but due to the harsh conditions here I want to give Hussein an exoskeleton design with a hard outer casing."

Majerske said she wants Hussein to have something he can easily take care of on his own, because it's more difficult in Iraq to take the leg to a medical professional for adjustments.



Courtesy photo by 203rd BSB

1st Lt. Terri Gurrola, 203rd BSB casts the leg of Hussein, a 15-year-old Iraqi boy, April 9, at FOB Hammer. Hussein lost his leg in an improvised explosive device incident four years ago.

"It was very rewarding to do this for Hussein," said Sgt. Jae Min Yandon, 24, Rochester, NY, medic in Company C, 203rd BSB. "The father was so thankful."

Yandon said the vendor has another son with the same problem and is trying to make arrangements with the 203rd BSB medics for surgery. [Z](#)

Sledgehammer Receives Marne Combat Patch



The Color Guard of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team stands at attention during a combat patch ceremony held April 25, at Forward Operating Base Hammer.

Photos by Sgt. Natalie Rostek



Maj. Dewey Boberg, Executive Officer for the 3rd HBCT, Command Sgt. Maj. James Pearson, senior noncommissioned officer, Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., the 3rd Heavy Brigade Commander, and Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, Commanding General of the 3rd Infantry Division, salute the colors. Leaders of the Sledgehammer Brigade stood in formation during the ceremony to receive the Marne patch awarded by Lynch. The combat patch, worn on the right sleeve of the Soldier's uniform, signifies the unit's 30 consecutive days deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 5.3. Due to the deployment extension announced April 11, by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the 3rd HBCT is anticipating a 15 month tour in Iraq.

Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, Commanding General of the 3rd Infantry Division, awards the Marne combat patch to Chaplain (Maj.) Timothy Sowers, Brigade Chaplain.



Coalition Forces visit elementary school

Story and photos by Sgt. Natalie Rostek
3rd HBCT PAO, Editor, Hammer Times

Airmen of the 557th Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron along with Soldiers of the 3rd Squadron, 1st Calvary Regiment, the 203rd Brigade Support Battalion of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Marines from a Military Training Team and Iraqi Army Soldiers from the Besmaya Range Complex visited Phas Elementary School in Al Zatia April 18, bringing equipment and supplies to aid in much needed construction. They spent about three hours fixing plumbing, power and water problems, as well as, installing pre-made shelving units in the classrooms.

The mission began about three weeks ago, according to Lt. Col. Pete Garner, 42, Camp Landing, Fla., 557th ERHS Commander, when the Airmen went to the site for an assessment of construction and resource issues.

"Some of the desks were broken or missing seats and tops," Garner said. "The bathrooms were clogged and we needed to rewire the facilities electrical work."

After the assessment, the Airmen returned to Forward Operating Base Hammer to put their findings into action. Garner said the Airmen made shelving units and gathered the equipment they were going to need to refurbish the small elementary school.

Weeks later the Airmen as well as Sledgehammer and IA Soldiers returned to the site with their equipment and a mission to repair the

school in any way they could.

As the 3rd HBCT Soldiers and IA provided security in and around the school, the Airmen and other IA soldiers installed the shelving units, fixed broken desks and the school electrical system, cleaned and unclogged the bathrooms and supplied water.

School was still in session during the construction efforts and the students smiled and waved as the Airmen and soldiers brought packages of school supplies, personal hygiene items, t-shirts and stuffed animals into the school to complete their mission.

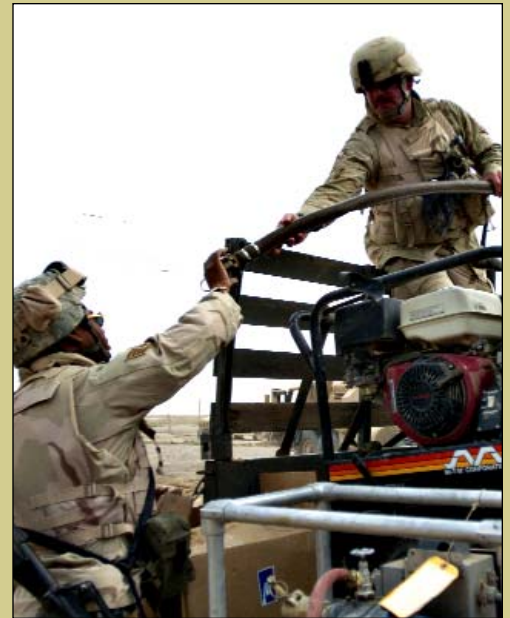
"It's the kids that make all this relevant. We are trying to do something for their future," Garner said. "They don't know what they are missing and we are just trying to improve their lives a little."

"It's neat to see how the kids interact with each other," said Staff Sgt. Danielle Bigot, 24, Virginia Beach, Va., 557th ERHS, who repaired the school's generators. "They are nice people here and I think they appreciate what we are doing. It's almost like when they see us they are seeing a hero."

Outside the facility, local children not in school swarmed the Soldiers, who were giving out toys and handfuls of candy. According to Garner, this was the crew's first opportunity to interact with the local population.

"Doing construction around (FOB Hammer) is great because it helps the Army do their mission, but it's when we can do stuff like this that really impacts our guys," he said.

The 557th ERHS has been working




Master Sgt. Jeffery Mann, 557th ERHS, hands a hose from a mobile water source to Staff Sgt. Vincent Judson, 557th ERHS in order to fill up a tank on the roof of Phas Elementary School, April 18.

for the past two months to help the 3rd HBCT change FOB Hammer into a habitable base capable of housing a brigade-sized element.

According to Garner, the 557th ERHS is a "melting pot" of active and guard Airmen made up of 36 different units from the Air Force. There are two types of engineers in the unit; horizontal and vertical.

"The horizontal team moves the earth," Garner said. "We built roads on the FOB, made the berms around the base, the water retention pond, the entry control point, we filled all the Hesco barriers that each holds one dump truck full of dirt, we clear the blown up buildings around the area and we created the vehicle fighting positions for the base."

Garner said the vertical team works more on building from the ground up. They constructed the FOB's life support areas and provided them with wood flooring, air conditioning and bathroom units. The team also built the dining facility, Moral, Welfare and Recreation Center, and Troop Medical Clinic and are still working on the brigade and battalion tactical operation centers.

"The (3rd HBCT) has been very appreciative," said Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Baker, 42, Hollywood, Md., 557th ERHS. "We have received compliments on how much has been completed in this short time. We exceeded the expectation." 



Iraqi Army soldiers from the Besmaya Range Complex carry a pre-made shelving unit into a classroom at Phas Elementary School in the town of Al Zatia, April 18.

THE WAY I SEE IT

To get you by

By Sgt. Natalie Rostek
3rd HBCT PAO, Editor, Hammer Times

As we all know, an announcement was made April 11, by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, to extend our typical 12 month deployment by three months.



ROSTEK
3rd HBCT PAO, Editor

Being that we are approaching only the second month our tour, the end may seem nowhere in site.

And after talking to some Sledgehammer Soldiers about the issue, I get the sense the majority of the brigade is less than happy about the extension.

I will be honest and tell you I am amongst those who would rather be home after 12 months, but after conducting these "interviews," I found a few new positive ways to look this.

Among the responses recieved, my favorite was from Command Sgt. Maj. James Pearson. One simple statement that made a lot of sense.

He said, "Fifteen months is less than 18 months."

If you remember before we ever left Fort Benning, Soldiers and families were told to plan for an 18 month deployment.

With this instruction being followed, the announced increase in deployment time would really be a decrease in what we were prepared to do in the first place.

As I talked with more and more Soldiers, I learned of the ways Soldiers are handling the lengthy deployment.

Some are choosing to

live day by day, completing their missions, with no reference to a calendar.

Some are living holiday to holiday, crossing off momentous occasions as they pass. Me, I choose to think of this as two separate deployments. The first, brings me up to the day I go on leave. My second deployment begins when I get back to Iraq from leave and goes through to the end.

No matter how you look at it, this deployment will end. Just like the deployments before them, we will come to our final few days and look back on all we have done. And everyone here, no matter what your job is, accomplishes something important everyday.

The impact you had on the day could be as simple as making coffee for the Tactical Operations Center, which in turn, helps keep those who are nearing their eighteenth hour awake.

It could be fixing a broken humvee in the motor pool to keep Soldiers rolling.

It could be writing stories and taking pictures for people back home who aren't here to witness this first-hand.

Whether you are infantry, conducting patrols and keeping the streets of Iraq safe, or the chaplains bringing religion to Soldiers when they may need it most, you did something today... and everyday.

So for the next 12, 15, 18, or whatever, months we are here supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom 5.3, I challenge you, before you fall asleep at night, to think of one thing you did that made a positive impact to someone.

And thank someone... it means more than you think. ☑

WORD ON THE STREET

What is a good way to spend your off time?

"I go to the gym, play online sports games against some of the guys in my tent and I have 13 books on my computer. I'm reading two of them right now."

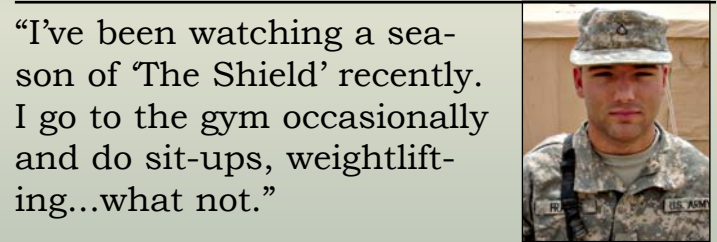


STAFF SGT.
JASON GOURLIE
BSTB
37, Spokane, Wa.



PFC.
STEVEN MOORE
1-15 Inf.
19, Orlando, Fla.

"I don't have much off time. We do 24-hour missions sometimes, so when I come back from them I'm usually trying to catch up on some sleep."



PFC.
JESSE FRANKS
HHT, 3rd HBCT
19, Summerville, SC

"I've been watching a season of 'The Shield' recently. I go to the gym occasionally and do sit-ups, weightlifting...what not."



SPC. CHRISTOL
DUDLEY
203rd BSB
24, Freeport, NY

"When I'm off, sometimes I use the internet and computers to keep in touch with my family. Sometimes I'll do my hair or my friends hair at night. When I do that I usually watch music videos on my computer."

QUESTION FOR NEXT TIME

What rumors have you heard about the 3rd HBCT?

**BRICKYARD
CHAPEL WORSHIP
SCHEDULE**

Sunday

**8 a.m.
Liturgical**

**9:30 a.m.
Catholic Mass**

**11 a.m.
General Protestant**

**1 p.m.
Gospel**

**3:30 p.m.
Latter Day Saints**

**7:30 p.m.
Contemporary
Protestant**

The Brickyard Chapel is located next to the Moral, Welfare and Recreation tents, and the Mayor Cell across the street from the Desert Grill Dining Facility.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

The power of a mother's love

**By Chaplain (Maj.) Timothy Sowers
3rd HBCT Chaplain**

May is the month set aside to celebrate Mother's Day.



SOWERS
3rd HBCT Chaplain

A mother is a powerful influence in the family. Her gentle touch, words of encouragement, dedicated service, precious time and special gifts affect each member of the family.

Abraham Lincoln said this about his mother, "I remember my mother's prayers and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life...All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel Mother."

George Washington said, "My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her."

Each of our mothers blessed us with the gift of life. They nurtured us mentally, physically and spiritually. Many times it is our mothers who prayed with us at night and read to us those first bible stories, which we know and love.

Our mothers not only provided for us spiritually and physically, they also pass along the wisdom of the ages.

Consider the truth found in the following phrases. These remind us of our mother, especially when we find ourselves blurting them out.

Have you ever said, "This hurts me more than it hurts you," or "don't pick, it'll get infected," or "you can't judge a book by its cover," or "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." How about, "I'm going to give you until the count of three" or "Who do you think you are? Madam Butterfly?" Finally, I am sure we all have heard our mother's say, "Why? Because I said so, that's why?"

A mother's love has long been recognized.

In the United States Julia Ward Howe (who wrote the words to the Battle Hymn of the Republic) first

suggested Mother's Day in 1872. This was to be a day dedicated to peace.

Ana Jarvis also worked hard to establish a national Mother's Day. In 1907, on the second Sunday in May, she persuaded her mother's church in Grafton, West Virginia to celebrate Mother's Day. Momentum quickly grew.

By 1911 every State had its own observances. President Woodrow Wilson, on May 9, 1914 signed a joint resolution of Congress recommending Mother's Day as a National Observance.

As mother's day quickly approaches, we are reminded of fond memories and thank God for the gift of a loving mother.

Whether separated, deployed or residing in the same location, make it a special day, extending reconciliation, love and peace. ☑

When you thought I wasn't looking

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you hang my first painting on
the refrigerator,

And I wanted to paint another one.
When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you feed a stray cat,
And I thought it was good to be kind
to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw you make my favorite cake for me
And I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I heard you say a prayer,
And I believed there is a God I could
always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I felt you kiss me good night,
And I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw tears come from your eyes
And I learned that sometimes things
hurt,

But it's all right to cry.
When you thought I wasn't looking,
I saw that you cared
And I wanted to be everything that I
could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking,
I looked...and wanted to say...

Thanks for all the things I saw
When you thought I wasn't looking

--Author Unknown

SLEDGEHAMMER HEROES

In Memoriam

Staff Sgt. Harrison Brown

Pfc. David Simmons



The third set of boots, rifle, helmet, and dog tags belong to Sgt. Todd Singleton, 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division



Photo by 2nd HBCT, 10th Mountain Division, Public Affairs Office

"(Brown) was the type of leader who could make or break a Soldier. He loved his family. He also would not hesitate to let everyone know that all great athletes came from the south."- Staff Sgt. Elocious Frazier, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment

"Simmons was a great Soldier who was my best friend. One night we went out and got matching tattoos. After that evening we were referred to as the Marne Brothers. Everyone thought we were twins."- Pfc. Jared Green, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment