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Issue 1

# The Wagon Wheel

15th Sustainment Brigade



Wagonmasters in the house

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## Coming Soon



We need your help filling this space! Every month, the Wagon Wheel will list significant upcoming events from all over MND-North. If you know of anything that should be placed on the calendar, please contact the editor at [matthew.cooley@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:matthew.cooley@iraq.centcom.mil) or call DSN 318-827-6101

## Wagon Wheel

### 15th Sustainment Brigade

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On the cover: Qaysar Adnan, an Iraqi painter, puts the 15th’s patch onto one of the walls surrounding the brigade’s headquarters here Oct. 5 moments after a transfer of authority ceremony. (Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley)

## Reason #12 for Soldiers to bring a battle buddy: Fido and Friends

This striped hyena was captured on a U.S. military base in Iraq.





# Wagonmasters in the house!

Story and photos by Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley

CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq – The 15th Sustainment Brigade “Wagonmasters” took over the Multinational Division-North sustainment mission from 16th Sustainment Brigade in a transfer of authority ceremony at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation building here Oct. 5.

The Fort Hood-based unit’s new area of responsibility spans from the Turkish border at Habur Gate to northern Baghdad, an area roughly the size of Pennsylvania.

One might say that the Wagonmasters have big boots to fill.

“During the course of the deployment in MND-N, [16th] planned and executed over 6 thousand convoy logistical patrols driving over 6 million miles delivering supplies to the war fighter. We issued out over 6 million gallons of fuel, 4.5 million bottles of drinking water, and delivered 23 thousand tons of subsistence. We handled over 40 million pounds of mail. We made facility and structural im-



Col. Larry Phelps, 15th SB commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Nathaniel Bartee, 15th SB senior noncommissioned officer, uncase their unit’s guidon in the Morale, Welfare and Recreation building here Oct. 5 as part of a transfer of authority ceremony.



Pfc. Malorie Cano (left), 15th SB supply specialist, and Spc. Liz Rivera, 15th SB wheeled vehicle mechanic, raise the Texas state flag in front of the brigade headquarters here Oct. 5 only minutes after a transfer of authority ceremony.

provements across the brigade footprint to the tune of 74 completed projects valued at over \$61.5 million,” Col. Martin Pitts, 16th SB commander said.

Although it could be said that the 15th has a lot of work ahead of them, the command and most of the Soldiers have done this before.

“Finally, for the third time in less than 5 years, the Wagonmaster colors have been unfurled in Iraq,” Col. Larry Phelps, 15th SB commander said.

“Coach, your team is ready – put us in!” he told Brig. Gen. Paul Wentz, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) commander.

“There is no better unit to replace the magnificent Soldiers of the 16th Sustainment Brigade than the 15th,” Wentz said.

Phelps thanked the 16th for setting “the example of what right looks like in a sustainment Brigade” and for a smooth transition which he referred to as “professional.”

“We are honored to be serving at this historic juncture in the Iraqi mission,

and looking forward to working with the 264th, 515th and 395th CSSBs. Together we are an unstoppable team,” Phelps said.

The Wagonmaster’s mission will entail much of the same things that the 16th’s did, but with one large difference.

American Soldiers are going home.

As Phelps told his Soldiers in a recent gathering, tens of thousands of Soldiers will return to the U.S. in the coming months along with all of their equipment.

The 15th is responsible for sustaining the force in MND-North, closing bases across the area, and getting Soldiers home.

Phelps was proud and wasted no time in spreading the Wagonmaster “brand,” the unique 15th patch. As the TOA ceremony was underway, civilian painters marked the walls surrounding the brigade’s headquarters with the 15th patch, the trademark wagon, along with other Wagonmaster markings.

Following the TOA ceremony, the Wagonmasters raised their colors, the

*Continued on 4*

*Continued from "in the house"*

Belton, Texas flag, and the Texas flag in a short ceremony outside of the brigade's headquarters to the song "The Eyes of Texas are Upon Us."

Belton is 15th's adopted community and the raised flag

was the city's first made specifically to be flown in Iraq.

Phelps told the group that it would be a matter of hours, not days, until the 15th patch was everywhere.

"Where we put our brand ... we bring our standard."

## 515th CSSB sponsors safety rodeo

Story by Sgt. Dalene Marsh, 515th CSSB  
Photo illustration by Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley

CONTINGENCY OPERATING SITE MAREZ, Iraq - The 515th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion sponsored a safety rodeo Oct. 3 emphasizing driving and operating skill as well as safety.

The purpose of a safety rodeo is to test the Soldier's skill on their assigned vehicle including vehicle operation, team work, and safety.

The vehicle operator is required to drive through a series of stations which simulate practical conditions the Soldier might encounter while on mission.

At each station the operator is rated for both time and skill.

At the end of the rodeo the scores are tallied and the winner earns bragging rights as the top operator, said Sgt. Humberto Sanchez, who has been in the Army for more than 7 years and has participated in 11 similar rodeos. In 10 of those rodeos, Sanchez earned the top operator bragging rights.

To earn the bragging rights as top operator, the driver must maneuver their truck through four stations with a flatbed semitrailer.

According to Sgt. Xavier Salone, who has been in the Army for over 9 years and has participated in six rodeos, the specific truck used is a military tractor-trailer used in transportation companies for the purpose of rapid and efficient transportation of supplies and equipment.

At each station the driver is required to position the truck and trailer so that equipment can either be loaded or unloaded from the trailer.

The operator must exercise skill maneuvering the truck and trailer into the yard and staging it to be loaded. Points are calculated according to the number of attempts used to position the truck and trailer as well as the speed and safety exercised, said Salone, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the central receiving shipping point, or CRSP, yard for the 359th Inland Cargo Transport Company and a La., native.

Drawing on experience from the prior rodeos, Salone

incorporated all aspects of the mission requirements while emphasizing skill and safety.

Using the mission necessary equipment, Salone created the stations involving a forklift, a container handler, and the tractor-trailer.

The rodeo was inspired by an accident in a different battalion, Sanchez said.

"A load was dropped and a Soldier was injured," Sanchez said, which made the 515th examine the issue of safety.

Salone wanted something that would be fun, competitive, and emphasize safety.

There are four stations, each one testing the Soldier's skills in quickly backing, loading or unloading equipment from the tractor-trailer. Once each station is complete, the Soldier is required to proceed through each station in reverse order.

The competition itself has been a work in progress – the first safety rodeo was scheduled for Sept. 18 with three teams competing.

However, a convoy came in and the Soldiers had to go to work, shortening the time of the rodeo.

"The mission comes first," Salone said, and the rodeo was rescheduled for Oct. 3.

"The hardest thing is to schedule the rodeo around the mission and to allow the Soldiers

enough time to practice," he said.

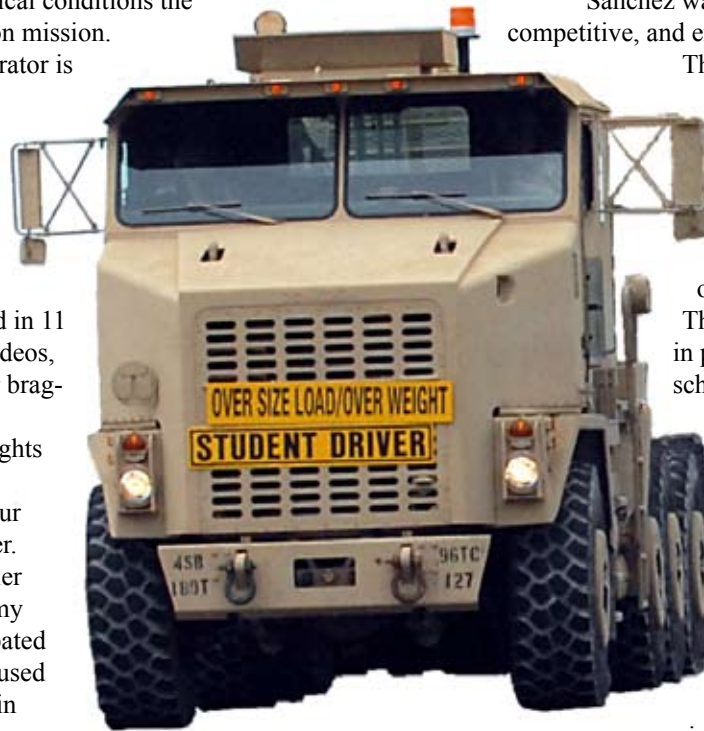
Due to mission requirements, several quick changes had to be made on the day of the rodeo, but the competition continued.

There were three teams of three Soldiers in the competition, and in the end, the bragging rights went to Pfc. Adam Ridgway, Spc. Angela Otero and Spc. Meinardo Benitez.

According to Salone, this team had the best time and was the most efficient while operating the equipment safely.

"It feels great!" said Ridgway, a truck driver from Iowa.

To earn the top operator title, Ridgway had to back a forklift off the flatbed trailer, drive it into a container, pick up a load of boxes and load them onto the trailer.





Sgt. Sandylane Rodriguez, movement and chemical biological radiological and nuclear NCO HHC, 15th STB, 15th SB, gives a dance performance with other Soldiers at a Hispanic Heritage month luncheon at the main dining facility here Oct. 10.



Lt. Col. Paula Lodi, commander 15th STB, 15th SB, dances with Alex Cruz, logistics warehouse contractor and Salsa dance instructor, at a Hispanic Heritage month luncheon at the main dining facility here Oct. 10



Story and photos by Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley  
CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq – “One of our primary rules is to work hard; play hard,” Col. Larry Phelps, 15th Sustainment Brigade commander, said to a group of service members after he danced the Bachata.

That’s right, the Bachata, the hip-swinging dance from the Dominican Republic.

The “Wagonmasters” and the 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms hosted Hispanic Heritage month luncheon at the main dining facility here Oct. 10 that included Hispanic foods, a poem, slide presentations, music, a guest speaker, and dancing.

Sept. 15 – Oct. 15 is Hispanic Heritage month by congressional law and yearly presidential proclamation.

“I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs,” Sgt. Railin Isaac, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 15th Special Troops Battalion, 15th Sust. Bde., orderly room noncommissioned officer and Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic native, said as she read the presidential proclamation.

Sgt. Sandylane Rodriguez, 15th STB movement and chemical biological radiological and nuclear NCO and Humacao, Puerto Rico, native; Sgt. Elizabeth Whitehead, 15th STB personnel clerk and Los Angeles native; Sgt. 1st Class Andrea Parris, 15th SB paralegal NCO and Lancaster, Pa., native; and Isaac did a dance routine involving several styles of Latino dance and music wearing colorful, traditional dresses.

Later, they were joined by Alex Cruz, logistics warehouse contractor and native Honduran living in Los Angeles. Cruz teaches a free Salsa dancing class at the Morale Welfare and Recreation building here at 8:00 p.m. every Friday.

They took turns dancing with Cruz and each other to a wide array of music before picking senior officers and enlisted Soldiers from the audience to dance with.

Guest speaker Master Sgt. Francisco A. Morales, liaison officer 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 15th SB, and Dominican Republic native, spoke on “embracing the fierce urgency of now,” a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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# ¡Bailamos!

## Q-West celebrates Hispanic Heritage



Sgt. Railin Isaac, Headquarters and HHC, 15th STB, 15th SB, orderly room NCO, and Alex Cruz, logistics warehouse contractor and Salsa dance instructor, give a dance performance at a Hispanic Heritage month luncheon at the main dining facility here Oct. 10.



1st Sgt. Jeanette Short, first sergeant HHC, 15th STB, 15th SB, dances with Alex Cruz, logistics warehouse contractor and Salsa dance instructor, at a Hispanic Heritage month luncheon at the main dining facility here Oct. 10.

*Continued from "Bailamos"*

quote and the celebration's theme this year.

"This year's theme recognizes the strength and hard work of Hispanic Americans and how their contributions make our nation more vibrant and diverse," Morales's speech began.

He gave a brief history of the observance which started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week and later became a 30-day-long celebration beginning on Sept. 15 – independence day for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua as the now-dissolved Captaincy General of Guatemala. Sept. 16 and 18 are Mexico and Chile's independence days respectfully, and Columbus Day, Oct. 12, also known as Dia de la Raza, fall within Hispanic Heritage month.

Morales said that this year's theme was a call to action to bring equity to Hispanics in federal positions. Morales said that Hispanic Americans are the only minority still lacking representation in that arena and that it is time for a change.

The event's program had examples of Hispanic Americans who have broken barriers such as Sonia Sotomayor, first Hispanic American Supreme Court justice, retired Lt. Gen. Edward Baca, former National Guard Bureau chief, Cesar Estrada Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers of America, and Ellen Ochoa, first Hispanic female astronaut.

"We are so close now to making history. Let us not look back at this moment and say we had the opportunity, but we did

not act. Let us not, in years to come, say we acted – but too late. Let us instead – together – complete this task of generations, by embracing the 'fierce urgency of now' – today," Morales said in closing.

Many people, Soldiers and civilians alike, volunteered to make the event possible.

The Soldier's dresses were handmade largely by Spc. Gonzalo Medina, laundry, shower, and textile specialist 506th Quartermaster Company, 515th Sustainment Battalion, 15th SB, during his free time, including late nights and his off-day, the Soldiers said.

Medina, a Bayamon, Puerto Rico native also controlled the music and slideshow presentations for the event.

"I'm Hispanic ... I got to represent wherever I go," he said explaining why he did it.

Not all of the volunteers were Hispanic either. Parris said she did it because she knew how to dance.

Maj. John B. Herd, MWR director and Florence, Miss., native, was pleased with the volunteer support.

"Having lived in South America for several years, my hope for the event was that it would bring forth all the rich aspects of the Hispanic culture that many may never experience; art, language, natural beauty and cuisine. The event far exceeded my expectations thanks to the time and talent of many volunteers."

## Keeping your home away from home safe

Story and photo by Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley

CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq - Containerized housing units are what one might call a Soldier's humble abode.

This home away from home is about half the size of a standard trailer home, and with up to two Soldiers sharing the quarters, it may be somewhat challenging to make homey.

But Soldiers' ingenuity has repeatedly shown that it can be done - and done safely.



A Q-West fire department truck waits for a fire emergency here. If Soldiers don't keep their CHUs safe, they may be visited by one.

"I understand that the Soldiers in the CHUs try to make them a little bit of home, but they have to have a good balance," "Safety Dave" Sullivan, the 15th Sustainment Brigade safety officer, said.

"They have to ask themselves, is this right?" he said of anything that a Soldier does with their room.

Safety Dave's biggest concern was fire.

"If the guy in CHU A's CHU catches fire it's likely yours will go up too," he explained. "It's a matter of minutes in fires in the CHUs."

One of the main causes for CHU fires is faulty or overloaded power strips, he said. Only power strips with the CE, UL, or GS stamps are safe for use.

To help fix this issue, the Q-West fire department and Task Force Safe will freely exchange Soldier's non-approved power strips, one for one, no questions asked at the fire station here.

"I don't want to see any military ... or anybody getting injured from a self inflicted wound from stupid stuff – that's a waste," John Petrovic, the Q-West fire

chief, said.

Power strips have a maximum amount of power that they are rated to handle listed somewhere on them. The amount of power that a device uses is also listed on the device.

Sullivan urged Soldiers to do the math and make sure the sum of power being used by the devices plugged into a strip is less than the maximum that the strip is rated for.

Petrovic also mentioned that it is a good idea to plug microwaves and refrigerators directly into the wall and never into a power strip together as they are high powered appliances.

"Don't daisy chain!" Sullivan said, referring to using multiple extension cords or plugging one power strip into another.

There are a number of items which are not permitted in CHUs as they are considered a safety hazard as well. Candles, coffee pots, and hot plates are among the list of fire hazards not allowed.

"Americans like to grill ... but

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*Continued from "safe"*

not in the CHUs," Safety Dave said.

Sullivan said that if Soldiers wish to grill, they must do so outside of their pad's walls.

Morale fires are also permitted, but only with a burn permit from the fire department.

Another, possibly less noticeable fire risk is faulty wiring and light ballasts. If your florescent lights don't turn on immediately or flicker, it could be a sign of trouble and needs to be reported to the chain of command or mayor cell, Sullivan said.

Petrovic also noted that Soldiers sometimes disable their smoke detectors during sandstorms and then neglect to turn

them back on.

The smoke detectors' sensors may also become dirty from sand, he said, and the dust needs to be blown out of the detectors' vents from time to time.

Empty or inoperable fire extinguishers can be another problem. The fire department here will also exchange them one for one, Petrovic said.

Is there really a high danger of CHU fires?

According to Petrovic there was an average of two CHU fires a month until recently, when the fire department and other safety officials stepped up their safety education efforts.

Although Sullivan and Petrovic agreed that fires are the biggest safety

concern in the CHUs, Sullivan noted some other considerations.

Non-tactical vehicles are a danger to Soldiers on the pads, and are therefore not authorized, even for loading and unloading.

It is a Soldier's responsibility to bury the cables running between their CHUs, for safety and the cable's protection.

"If you see something doesn't look right report it," Safety Dave said.

"We need to take care of each other. Everyone who left ... we all come home together."

In case of emergency on Q-West, call 911 on SIPR, NIPR, or contractors' VOIP phones.

## 1083rd Trans. Co. supports the drawdown

Story by Staff Sgt. Rob Strain  
Photo by 1st Lt. Reginald Davis

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq –Soldiers from the 1083rd Transportation Company, a National Guard unit from La., are jumping at the opportunity to run missions.

With talk of leaving, packing up, and withdrawal from Iraq, the unit's work is truly just beginning, said 1st Lt. Reginald Davis, the company's executive officer.

"The withdrawal out of Iraq is one of the largest movements of manpower and equipment in our modern military history, and the 1083rd TC is right in the middle of assisting and making it happen," Davis, a Shreveport, La., native said.

A heavy equipment transport company, the unit provides adaptive heavy equipment transport capabilities, Davis explained. The capabilities include staging onward movement, integration,

retrograde, and sustainment operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as a full range of joint military operations.

The 1083rd relocates heavy equipment on the battlefield and provides bulk and containerized

"I am definitely looking forward to the remainder of this deployment, especially when we're able to haul tanks which are the epitome of HET haulers," said Staff Sgt. Michael Levesque, a training noncommissioned officer from Bossier City, La.

Since President Barack Obama forecasted the Aug. 31, 2010 deadline to remove all U.S. Combat Troops from Iraq, the operational tempo has increased which has, in turn, increased the company's workload as a transportation asset, Davis said.

The Soldiers have already run more than 14 missions covering an area from Mosul, in northern Iraq, to Al Asad, in western Iraq, in the two months since its arrival in theater, Davis said.

The 1083d TC hauls everything from armored vehicles, cranes, M1A1 Abrams tanks, to engineer equipment and T-Walls, he said.

The unit is currently taking on one of the largest missions since they assumed the mission from the 233rd Transportation Company in August, Davis said. The mission involves moving more than 50 vehicles using more than 30 heavy equipment transporters.

With its heavy equipment transport capabilities, Davis said, the 1083rd is trained and ready to provide transportation assets not only to Multi-National Division-North, but also throughout Multi-National Corps-Iraq in support of sustainment operations and the responsible drawdown of U.S. forces out of Iraq.



Staff Sgt. Shawn Harris, a Shreveport, La., native with the 1083rd Transportation Company, 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, checks bumper numbers on heavy equipment transport trucks several days prior to a mission.



# STRESS!

**STRESS DOCTOR  
APPROVED**

## Homefront Survival Strategies

Editorial by Mark Gorkin  
15th SB "Stress Doc"

When a soldier deploys everyone in the family feels the impact. And I mean everyone. I recall one spouse describing how after her husband deployed, each day, in the late afternoon, the family dog would sit at the front door waiting for his master to come home. Eventually, with a saddened look, the dog would give up the vigil...until the next day.

While patience is a virtue, a spouse or a family needs to do more than sit and wait, especially when the stress level for the spouse is so palpable. Why should this be? Isn't it the soldier who is going down range, potentially moving into harm's way? A study during WWII helped me better understand why the spouse's role can be so challenging. The project involved assessing the stress levels of military pilots and co-pilots. The results clearly showed that on fighter missions, the co-pilots had significantly higher stress levels. In contrast to his partner, the pilots not only steered the aircraft, but when challenged by the enemy the pilot could make a response, that is, he could fire back. The co-pilot did not have the same opportunity to make an active coping response. And there's a direct correlation between diminished active and focused problem solving and negative stress levels.

When it comes to separation, the soldier has been preparing, gradually getting into a mindset to leave, to take on the tasks and roles for which he or she has been diligently prepared. However, regarding the realities of deployment, obviously, the spouse cannot prepare for combat nor can she directly control events down range, yet emotionally and spiritually she's right there with her soldier. So if

you believe the spouse or significant other is a soldier's co-pilot, then clearly spouse and homefront stress must be addressed. (And speaking of "co-pilots," in no way is God being tossed out of his longstanding role.)

Before delineating a list of active stress management behaviors and coping strategies, let me highlight a few broad areas of potential stress facing the spouse, family and indirectly, of course, the soldier in the field.

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**"Strong silent types get  
 a lot more ulcers than  
 they do Oscars."**  
 — — — — —

### Four Homefront Stressors with Some Strategies

1. Separation Anger, Angst and Assessment. As deployment nears, sometimes couples consciously or not create or magnify issues to fight over. In the short term, it might seem to make separating easier. ("Good, I'm glad he's out of the house already.") But eventually guilt or dis-ease can set in. And this lingering angst is not helpful to the soldier's or the spouse's peace of mind in their respective roles; also, people around both the soldier and spouse feel the aftereffects. You may become a "stress carrier." (You know the definition of a stress carrier – someone who doesn't get ulcers...just gives them!)

In addition, paradoxically, some partners want the soldier to leave because the sooner he or she leaves, the sooner "I can start the countdown for his (or her) return." Again, if motives aren't clear,

the relationship waters can be muddied. If necessary, early in the deployment, acknowledge getting off on the wrong foot; try to clean up any unresolved or perplexing separation stuff.

2. Murphy's Law of Separation. In the first couple of weeks, something's going to go wrong; not likely horribly wrong just annoyingly wrong – whether with down range to home communication or with the kids getting sick, or to who knows what. And chances are, initially, still dealing with separation angst people will overreact as they are on the stress edge. Just know that glitch happens, especially early on, and as much as possible, try to go with the flow.

3. Take off the Mask. Some people deal with stress by becoming "strong silent types" -- they put on a mask, disguise their feelings to the outside world and even try to fool or numb themselves. (And numbing techniques can range from masks and mania to Michelobs and Merlots.) Of course, I'm not just talking about the traditional male. These days I think there are almost as many Rambettes as Rambos out there. And remember, "Strong silent types get a lot more ulcers than they do Oscars." Also, signs of increased cynicism and callousness or impatience and defensiveness may indicate that the mask is more trouble than it's worth. Remember, there's a real difference between feeling sorry for yourself and feeling your sorrow. When feeling sorry for yourself you tend to blame others; when you genuinely feel your sorrow you have the courage to face and share your pain. Are you ready to replace the mask with a stress buddy?

4. Beware Supermom Syndrome.

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*Continued from "stress"*

Becoming the sole parent on the homefront is pressure-packed: "Everything is on me." Of course there will be times when you have "double duty," however, day in and day out beware trying to play the role of both parents. Also, don't try to become someone who you are not. Better to bring out who you are, that is, you're genuine "task and touch" skills and talents (as well as accepting flaws and foibles; none of us are perfect) as a person and a parent. Finally, be careful not to overload your children's activity schedule as a way to divert them (or yourself) from your own feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger or anxiety. There's a problem when distracted quantity subtracts from quality time, that is, from truly being present. I'd rather see you be imperfectly present with your family than be heroically flying around, saving everyone else. You'll be more valuable to yourself and to loved ones back down on earth.

### More Homefront Strategies

Now that we've identified key homefront stress traps with some coping suggestions, how about additional separation stress survival strategies.

1. Down Range-Down Home Clarification. It's often a "peace of mind" saving measure to clarify beforehand what you want and what you don't want your soldier to tell you. Knowing the entire grizzly (yet not essential to know) details is not helpful; you're just inviting info-emotional overload. And this angst directly or indirectly spreads to the kids and other family members.

2. Develop Routine and Ritual without Becoming Rigid. As much as possible, get you and the family into a routine regarding chores, timelines – meals, homework, extracurricular activities, etc. An effective and efficient routine helps everyone feel a little bit more in control of their day, strengthens emotional muscles

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 "I want the buddy also to provide the Stress Doc variety – 'Tender Loving Criticism'"  
 ~~~~~



and affirms a sense of performance competence as well as personal responsibility. Don't be afraid to exercise firmly and empathically your authority role. Kids want and need the parent to be a solid, truthful and trustworthy presence and good listener more than they need the parent to be a friend or buddy.

Also, I think it's possible for the single parent and kids to create a home team. One dad shared with his family that he was feeling some anxiety about being a single parent. He called on his girls to help him run the house, to take the lead in certain activities, etc., while his wife was down range. The team effort helped them bond even more as a family.

Also, if your spouse/soldier isn't home during the holidays, or for a birthday, etc., include him or her symbolically – with a favorite dish or a favorite holiday activity, for example. (And such hands on activity may still be of value even in our era of video clips.) Of course it won't be the same. Initially, this ritual may evoke some sadness. But embracing such sadness is a sign of courage. And ritual honors and affirms the spirit of the person overseas while helping that spirit-memory-energy burn more brightly within you and the family.

Finally, one area especially important to avoid rigidity is expecting a fixed phone call schedule. The soldier's world/schedule can change on a dime. Of course, there may be some anxiety initially, but with time you both will adapt.

3. Find a Battle Buddy. First and foremost, during this period of challenge on the homefront, find a "stress or battle buddy." However, choose wisely. I want this buddy to be able to provide TLC,

but not just the traditional kind. I want the buddy also to provide the Stress Doc variety – "Tender Loving Criticism" and "Tough Loving Care." In other words, choose someone who will both lend a shoulder and provide objective feedback, that is, someone who is not afraid to speak truth to you, but does this in a caring manner.

4. Network, Network, Network. Also, either develop or participate in the "battlefield buddy" network, by establishing phone trees and help lines, peer, social and support groups, family outings, etc. The Family Readiness Group (FRG) is an invaluable resource. The BLUF ("Bottom Line Under Fire, not 'Bottom Line U Fool')": "Don't suffer alone in silence!"

5. Spouses Night Out. I recall one Ft. Hood spouse singing the praises of a weekly "ladies night out" group. The good times and camaraderie clearly demonstrated that, "Laughter is the best medicine." You might even need to rotate children sitting, but it's worth it.

6. Develop Financial Interdependence. If the spouse at home really does not know how to drive the family financial wagon, it's important that dialogue and coaching occur, even when soldier and spouse are apart. A spouse who feels more confident in money matters is a more resilient and supportive spouse. In addition, consider conferring with a homefront "mentor"; a more senior or experienced spouse may provide invaluable "how tos." Please, don't be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. You are not lowering yourself; you are being a "learner not a loser." And with the act of asking for assistance-guidance (as opposed to having someone simply take over for you) you are setting in motion a gift – allowing another person to have the meaningful experience of giving to you.

7. Take a Class. Developing a new and valuable skill is a great way to affirm self and refocus angst. How about a car maintenance/minor repair course? Or maybe, there's a dance or computer graphics class that has been whispering to you. And this coping-new learning strategy works just as well with the kids.

8. Become a Volunteer-Mentor. I recall a spouse in her fifties who spoke of depression and a sense of no longer

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*Continued from "stress"*

feeling needed when her husband deployed, especially as her kids became more independent and left home. She finally took the step that turned her mood around – she volunteered both on the base and with a favorite charity.

9. Keep a Journal. Try writing down your spontaneous ideas and emotions and then take the time to make sense of the jumble through more dispassionate recording and reflection. Research shows this form of “r & r” is a significant stress management tool. In addition, if you review your journaling at three or six month intervals you have a record of emotions and events unfolding, that is, of the progress you and your family have likely made in surviving if not thriving on the homefront.

10. Develop Natural SPEED. Finally, try this daily formula for natural stress inoculation:

S = Sleep. Don't be cheap with your need for sleep. Less than six hours a day for most folks dulls cognitive sharpness, a critical faculty for firmly grounding those fear factors and exploring problem solving opportunities. And sleep deprivation is being linked to eating disturbance and diabetes.

P = Priorities. One example: distinguish “the urgent” (which must be handled immediately) from “the important” (which can be prioritized). The second approach when it comes to establishing priorities: “learn to say no.” Remember, burnout is less a sign of failure and more that you gave yourself away. Consider these Stress Doc maxims: “A firm ‘No’ a day keeps the

ulcers away, and the hostilities, too” and “Do know your limits and don't limit your ‘No's.’”

E = Empathy. Have a stress buddy; someone with whom you can both give and get support. As I once penned: “E” is for the empathy found in a caring shoulder. But all give without take is a big mistake for now you shoulder a boulder!

E = Exercise. Not only does aerobic level exercise stimulate the mind-body's natural mood enhancing chemicals, but walking two miles or a 30-minute workout at the gym provides a beginning and endpoint for a tangible sense of accomplishment and control. In uncertain times, success rituals definitely strengthen psychological hardiness and resilience.

D = Diet. This is not the time to use food to numb your angst. High fats and simple sugars along with excess alcohol dull the brain in the long run and can even trigger moodiness and depression. A conscious healthy eating regimen will be another self-control component in your strategic plan for mind-body safety and personal-professional integrity.

No doubt, you have a challenging task ahead. If I can capture the challenge in a phrase that for me has spiritual overtones: to both give of yourself and give to yourself. Hopefully, this article has raised some questions and outlined some steps and strategies for meeting this challenge; for positively managing and responding to separation-homefront trials and tensions...and has provided words to help one and all Practice Safe Stress!



Spc. Anika Alcala, a 395th supply specialist with the 395th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, reads at her desk in the supply office here. Alcala, from Brooklyn, N.Y., is pursuing a degree in criminal justice through an online university.

## Education a priority for 395th CSSB

Story by Staff Sgt. Rob Strain

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq – Despite being far from a classroom, Soldiers of the 395th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion place a priority on furthering their academic studies.

With the help of tuition assistance and online access, Soldiers can continue their academic careers throughout deployment. And that is the choice several studious Soldiers from the 395th have made – after all, the early bird catches the worm!

The majority of the students in the 395th are pursuing degrees from a university located in Waterbury, Conn., close to the unit's reserve center in New Haven, Conn.

“It's very strenuous, but in the long run it's for my personal develop-

ment,” said Spc. Ransome Cuffy of his online academic endeavors. Cuffy, a New Haven, native, is pursuing a degree in business administration.

Both Spc. Lydia Vidzro, a human resource management major from Conn., and Cuffy agree that studying in a classroom would be easier and more ideal, but with the support of each other and their fellow student-Soldiers they continue to hit the textbooks after hours and dedicate free time to their academic enrichment.

“Right now it's like serving two masters at one time ... it takes a lot of ... self-discipline,” Cuffy said.

Though it can be a challenge to juggle work and school many 395th Soldiers have accepted this challenge, knowing that their efforts toward self-improvement will be a reward in and of itself in the years to come after deployment.



**Problem?**

**Suggestion?**

**You have a voice!**

Use the commander's hotline on [www.supporttheaction.net](http://www.supporttheaction.net)

Click “**CDR's Hotline**”

**Recommendation?**

**Help us ... help you.**



# Newly opened Iraqi cigar shop at Q-West shows local economy strengthening

Story and photos by Capt. Murray Shugars  
2-198th CAB

CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq — An Iraqi-owned and operated cigar shop celebrated its grand opening Oct. 14 at Contingency Operating Location Q-West, Iraq.

Costing the owner more than \$40,000 in renovations and merchandise, the Abbas Cigar Club represents a continued Iraqi investment in this remote logistics base in Northern Iraq, said Capt. Allen Legere, officer in charge of the IBIZ retail section, with 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms, Mississippi Army National Guard, out of Senatobia, Miss.

"In an effort to strengthen the local economy by supporting stability through commerce, the Iraqi-Based Industrial Zone retail section assisted Iraqi National, Ahmed Abbas, with the opening of the Abbas Cigar Club," said Legere.

Located on Eighth Street near the Troya Shopping Mall, the store sells cigars and other tobacco products as well as accessories like hand-carved pipes, leather pipe cases, glass hookahs and lighters.

Ahmed Abbas of Mosul said he opened the store because he supports the U.S. forces in Iraq.

"We are happy that the American military is here because life is better now than before," said Abbas through an interpreter. "We want to show our appreciation by offering quality tobacco products at reasonable prices."

Abbas said he has worked at Q-West for seven years, first as an independent general contractor and then as a contractor for a Turkish-owned retail center.

Legere, a Gulfport, Miss., native, said the opening of the business is good for U.S. forces.

"Soldiers have told me that they wanted to shop at a store offering luxury tobacco products," said Legere. "Mr. Abbas has been easy to work with and has complied with all levels of Q-West policy and procedures that demonstrate his willingness to operate with Coalition forces here in Iraq."

The first customer in line to purchase a cigar, Staff Sgt. Tony T. Ware, the noncommissioned-officer in charge of Q-West's Department of Public Works and a Grenada, Miss., native, said he was pleased with the store.

"I was first to buy a Cuban cigar on the grand opening," said Ware. "Next time I shop here, I might get one of these pipes. I give this store a thumbs up for the quality of their products, especially for a cigar smoker."



Lt. Col. William B. Smith, Jr., Q-West Mayor, 2-198th CAB, from Hattiesburg, Miss.; Ahmed Abbas, cigar shop owner; and Command Sgt. Maj. Perry T. Campbell, command sergeant major of 2nd Battalion, 198th CAB and Senatobia, Miss., native; cut the ribbon for the grand opening of the Abbas Cigar Club at COL Q-West Oct. 14. Costing Abbas more than \$40,000 to renovate the building and stock the shelves, the Abbas Cigar Club represents continued Iraqi investment in this remote logistics base in northern Iraq.

One shopper was less interested in cigars than in other tobacco products and accessories.

"I bought a cigarette holder with the two-headed Byzantine eagle on the lid," said Capt. Correy K. Elder, the officer in charge of the Department of Public Works and a Jackson, Miss., native. "I think it's pretty good to give a variety of products to the Soldiers, give the guys more options."

Shopper Staff Sgt. Anthony M. Douglas, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the mayor cell help desk and native of Cockrum, Miss., said the store offers Soldiers a unique way to relax.

"I'm glad the store opened because sharing quality cigars is a great way for Soldiers to kick back and relax at the end of the day," said Douglas. "I've been smoking cigars for nine years, but I have never had a Cuban cigar to put in my humidior. I am looking forward to smoking a real Cuban cigar."

Encouraging Iraqi commerce is an important part of the strategic effort here, said Lt. Col. William B. Smith, Jr., the Q-West mayor and a Hattiesburg, Miss., native.

"Supporting local business is important, and it becomes more important as our mission transitions," said Smith. "When multi-national forces return COL Q-West to the Iraqi military, we will leave them a better base than when we arrived, one with a military and economic infrastructure able to help support a sovereign, self-reliant Iraq. One way to define our level of success in Iraq is by how well we have nurtured Iraq's developing economic capacity, for this will significantly improve the country's long-term stability."



Hand-carved pipes and Cuban cigars are among the products for sale at the Abbas Cigar Club, an Iraqi-owned and operated cigar shop that celebrated its grand opening at Contingency Operating Base Q-West Oct. 14.

# Mississippi Guardsmen prepare for drawdown



During an Oct. 11 excess property inspection, Lt. Col. Kerry Goodman, a native of Meridian, Miss., and commander of 2nd Battalion, 198th CAB headquartered in Senatobia, Miss., stands flanked by Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Conner, native of Greenwood, Miss., and 2nd Platoon sergeant; and 1st Sgt. Michael Ginn of Itta Bema, Miss., both members of Company B, 2/198th CAB, out of Greenwood, Miss. The inspection was in preparation for a drawdown of forces and equipment in Iraq.

Story and photos by Capt. Murray Shugars  
2-198th CAB

**CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq** — In preparation for the drawdown of U.S. forces and equipment from Iraq, the commander of a Mississippi Army National Guard battalion conducted an excess property inspection Oct. 11 at Contingency Operating Location Q-West, Iraq.

Lt. Col. Kerry Goodman, the commander of 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms out of Senatobia, Miss., inspected four company areas, including motor pools and maintenance shops, scattered across the base.

"We have to get all non-mission-essential equipment off our property books to support a responsible drawdown of personnel and equipment in Iraq," said Goodman, a native of Meridian, Miss. "We're turning in over seven years' worth of accumulated equipment and vehicles, which the Army can redistribute where it's needed most, such as in Afghanistan."

The excess turn in is an added duty for a busy battalion. The 2/198th CAB provides Q-West with a force protection company that runs the main entry

control point, fields a quick reaction force and secures off-post missions, said Goodman. The battalion also staffs the base defense operations center and the mayor cell that oversees basic life-support needs. Additionally, the Mississippians provide three convoy security companies, said Goodman.

These convoy security companies will become much busier as the transportation of equipment and supplies increases during the drawdown, so it is important for the Mississippians to turn in their own excess property as soon as possible, said Goodman.

Moreover, Goodman said he inspected his companies to place command emphasis on their responsibilities for the drawdown. He said many of the veterans of a previous, 2005 deployment to Iraq needed to readjust their thinking to current realities here.

"This inspection was partly to help change their mentality," he said. "During the last deployment, companies had trouble getting vehicle parts and equipment, so they got in the habit of hoarding. There is no longer a shortage; parts and supplies go through the system

in a timely manner."

Goodman did an initial walk-through with the commanders two weeks before the inspection, during which he issued his guidance — company areas needed to meet Army sanitation standards and all excess property had to be identified, he said.

"The companies spent every spare hour since then preparing," said Goodman. "There's been great improvement. The companies have identified 100 percent of the excess vehicles and 90 percent of equipment that they need to turn in. The first turn in of more than \$3.7 million worth of excess vehicles and equipment starts immediately."

Capt. Drew Clark, commander of A Company, 2/198th CAB, out of Hernando, Miss., said his force protection company was well prepared for the inspection.

"We drafted a plan, and the platoon sergeants and motor sergeant began implementing that plan weeks ago," said Clark, a Madison, Miss., native. "The Soldiers worked hard, and we had extra time to get ready. In fact, when the colonel did his initial walk-through, he didn't have many issues with us. So we were just waiting for battalion to pull the trigger and inspect us."

Capt. Jeremy A. Allen, commander of B Company, 2/198th, out of Greenwood, Miss., said the excess equipment turn-in and inspection changed his perspective on the mission.

"This inspection made us focus

— "The more we can do  
with less, the better  
we can help the bigger  
mission. - Allen —

on what we need to keep for the mission and what we can do without," he said. "The more we can do with less, the better we can help the bigger mission. We're doing a sustainment mission for the short term, but the long-term mission in Iraq is the drawdown."

*Continued on 13*



*Continued from "stress"*

Allen, a Memphis, Tenn., native, said preparing for the drawdown has even influenced changes in how he organizes his company's tasks.

"Preparing for the drawdown, we streamline the company mission, decreasing the number of troops necessary," said Allen. "For example, we cut the company headquarters section by nearly 50 percent, and we moved those Soldiers to the

convoy security and maintenance platoons. That allows us to add truck teams to handle more security missions, because we expect the number of missions to increase as bases across Iraq begin to turn in vehicles and equipment for redistribution to Afghanistan and other key battlefronts."

Capt. Jeff Mallard, Jr., commander of C Company, 2/198th CAB, out of Oxford, Miss., said his convoy security company will see an increased operations tempo in the coming months, as they begin to haul equipment out of Iraq.

"We anticipate playing a significant role in providing security to convoys during the drawdown," said Mallard, a Bay City, Texas, native. "Therefore, we are doing all we can to minimize our property now in order to stay focused on our mission ahead."

Mallard praised the effort of his Soldiers in preparing for the inspection.

"Soldiers like to stay engaged, and this has kept them busy for the last two weeks," said Mallard. "I am proud of my Soldiers and all the hard work they have put in. The credit for the drawdown

rests on the backs of the young Soldiers. This is hard work and they are making it happen."

Capt. Bradley S. Hollingsworth, commander of A Company, 106th Brigade Support Battalion, headquartered in Magee, Miss., said he sees a lot of work ahead but feels confident that his company is prepared to meet the challenge.

"There will be many more hours spent on this project, but the work we have already done will set us up for success when the order comes to begin drawing down large numbers of forces in Iraq," said Hollingsworth, a native of Florence, Miss.

"It also helps create a safe work place by eliminating clutter."

The excess equipment drawdown shifts focus from core missions, but Goodman said he believes it is a high priority.

"The sooner the battalion completes its own excess equipment turn-in," said Goodman, "the sooner it can focus on securing the convoys that transport excess property out of Iraq to our brothers in Afghanistan."



Seen through the tow ring of an Armored Security Vehicle, Lt. Col. Kerry Goodman (left) takes notes during an excess property inspection Oct. 11. Goodman is flanked by Sgt. 1st Class Gary L. Tillman (middle), battalion motor sergeant, 1st Sgt. John Moyer, of Company C, 2-198th CAB.

## Truly an American Soldier

### *Gaining citizenship while deployed "easier"*

Story by Staff Sgt. Rob Strain

CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq – "I am an American Soldier."

It is the first line of the Soldier's Creed and something that many Soldiers take for granted.

According to Spc. Yochanah Best, a paralegal specialist with the 395th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, the words really stuck out in her mind when she first joined the Army.

When she got to basic training and learned the Soldier's Creed, she thought to herself, "I am a Soldier – serving in the American Army, not an American Soldier."

Best was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and eventually moved to New York, but she didn't become a U.S. citizen until 2008.

"Once I became a citizen, I could truly say 'I am an American Soldier,'" Best said.

Most people who come to the United States want to improve their lives and chase the American dream, Best said.

"We want to be a part of the American dream," Best said.

According to 2nd Lt. Felix Perez, the plans and operations officer for the brigade personnel section, the process for

Soldiers is a lot smoother and faster while deployed.

"It's easier and faster [than applying in the States],"

Perez, a Lajas, Puerto Rico, native, said.

The whole process can take up to a year from the time you submit the paperwork, he said. The average amount of time is six months, said Best.

According to Perez, there is no time-in-service requirements for deployed active-duty Soldiers, however, Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers must have at least one year of service in order to apply.

There are a number of benefits to citizenship, said Best, including social security, a U.S. passport, and it is even required for some scholarships. Many military occupational specialties or advanced schools require a security clearance, Perez said, and without citizenship, a Soldier is unable to get a clearance.

Besides the tangible benefits, there are other, more personal reasons, including pride, said Best.

"It's a pride thing," she said. "It was a big step to the next part of my life."

Best encouraged every Soldier interested in becoming a U.S. citizen to apply while deployed, especially since the normal processing fees, which are nearly \$600, are waived.

For more information on becoming a U.S. citizen while deployed, see the unit personnel or legal office.



# Operation Clean Sweep

## “Wagonmasters” save taxpayers millions



Spc. Phillip Sword, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms Brigade, supply specialist and Blue Springs, Miss., native, carries empty extra fuel jugs to separate excess equipment as part of Operation Clean Sweep here Oct. 23. (Cooley)

Story and photos by Sgt. Matthew C. Cooley  
Photo by Staff Sgt. Rob Strain

**CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION Q-WEST, Iraq** – The 15th Sustainment Brigade “Wagonmasters” began Operation Clean Sweep here in mid Oct. by finding \$2.9 million in excess equipment to place back into the military supply system for reuse.

Army and Air Force personnel came together for the kickoff of the 15th’s program to rid Multi-National Division – North’s units of unneeded equipment while saving the military time and money, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Adkins, the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary)’s clean sweep representative for the 15th Sust. Bde., said.

The 15th Sust. Bde., which is in charge of sustainment operations in MND-North, actually began operation clean sweep at their home station, Fort Hood, Texas, Adkins said.

“We brought our program from Fort Hood to Iraq to support responsible

drawdown,” Adkins explained.

The program also helps units to reduce their footprint, he said, which should make it easier for them to leave Iraq when the time comes.

“We’re getting ahead of the waterfall,” Adkins said. “[Clean Sweep] takes weeks out of the process ... of moving.”

The Clean Sweep team is made up of smaller teams that are assigned to individual companies. These teams help the company commanders to identify items that the unit didn’t bring with them and aren’t essential to the current mission, Adkins said.

“Basic supplies, components of items, repair parts, local purchase items – anything a unit has that’s not required for their mission,” he said.

“Everything here was used at one point in time, but [the] mission changes and it becomes excess.”

The extra equipment is separated by whether or not it is working or serviceable and then sent to Kuwait for further processing or to another unit in Iraq that requested the particular item, the chief explained.



Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms Brigade, a Mississippi National Guard unit, load a broken dryer into a truck as part of Operation Clean Sweep here Oct. 23. (Cooley)



Sgt. Maj. Charles Wells, with the 15th Sustainment Brigade Support Operations, and 1st Lt. Meghan Flynn, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company executive officer, discuss disposition of equipment during the company’s turn in of non-essential equipment. (Strain)

Adkins also mentioned that the team processed 7,000 items during its first week on Q-West alone, though there was no way of knowing how many items will be placed back into the supply system or how much money will be saved when the operation is complete.

“We never know how much excess a unit has moved in on until we open the containers,” he said.

Even Soldiers at the lowest levels have a basic understanding of the importance of Clean Sweep.

“[We] make sure it gets back to the states and gets put back to use,” Spc. Cody Sharp, an A Company, 2nd Battalion, 198th Combined Arms Brigade, force protection Soldier, and Thompson Falls, Mont., native, said.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-198th, a Mississippi National Guard unit, had \$270,000 worth of excess to turn in, according to Spc. Phillip Sword, an HHC, 2-198th supply specialist and Blue Springs, Miss., native said.

Much of the excess was left by the previous unit and is no longer needed.

“We fell in on this ... and now we’re trying to clean the place up,” he explained. “This makes it easier for another unit to close down this [base] when they come in.”



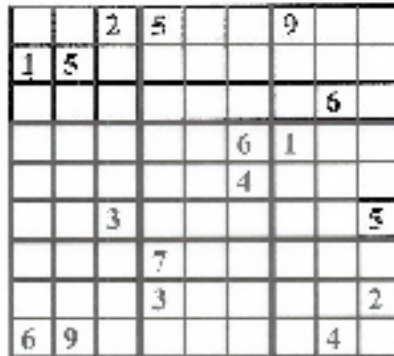


# Wagonmaster Fun

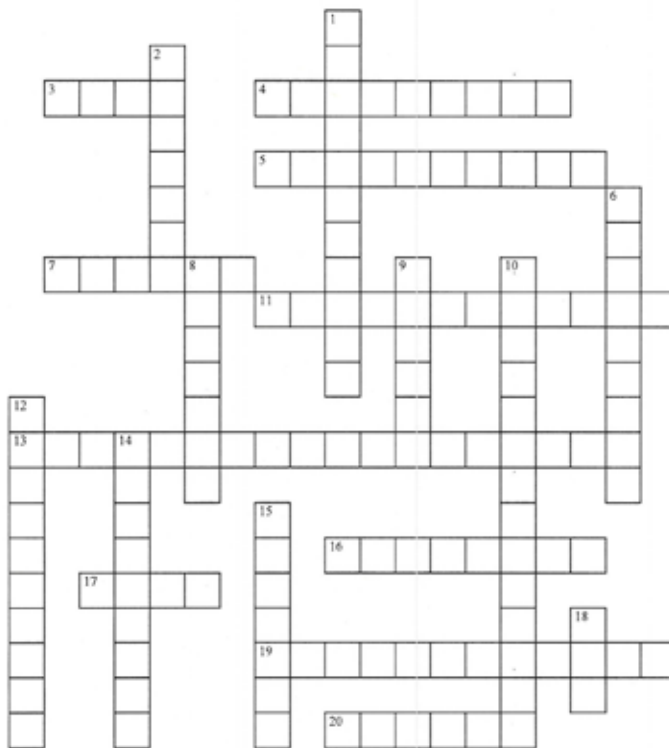


Answers to puzzles available in next month's issue.

Have a funny or interesting deployment related story you would like to see in the Wagon Wheel? Email it to [matthew.cooley@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:matthew.cooley@iraq.centcom.mil).



## Brain Picker



### ACROSS

- 3 Extinct
- 4 Sounds like "fallen tree" + "stats"
- 5 "All strength" ancient sport
- 7 Smoke break
- 11 The real joker
- 13 A 64th note
- 16 The "Italian --"
- 17 Opposite of "you walk"
- 19 Snap, crackle, pop, boom
- 20 K10 - 1

### DOWN

- 1 Wooden vehicle's leader
- 2 "the slings and arrows of outrageous --"
- 6 Red sky
- 8 Name was a tribute to Buddy Holly and the Crickets
- 9 Buried alive
- 10 Before Istanbul
- 12 Famous cryptid
- 14 The kind you can't drink
- 15 Unthinking or shady character; a city in Texas
- 18 Red and dead

