



Serving the Soldiers and Civilians of the 7th Signal Brigade

the Desert Wire

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Battle handoff

▣ Battalions change hands in transfer of authority ceremony

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP VIRGINIA, Kuwait – Soldiers stood their ground in the midst of a sandstorm during an April 5 ceremony here that marked the end of one tour and the beginning of another. The 151st Signal Battalion cased their colors for redeployment after a year in theater. They are transferring their authority to the 319th Signal Battalion, who uncased their colors for the first time in theater.

“It is truly a historic moment,” said Col. Jennifer Napper, commander, 7th Signal Brigade.

Napper was the guest speaker for the ceremony, which saw a National Guard unit being replaced by an Army reserve unit. In theater, the units fall under the operational control of the 7th Signal Brigade, an active Army unit from Mannheim, Germany.

“I’m glad to be here to witness the transfer of authority from one great unit of citizen-soldiers to another,” said Napper.

The 151st Signal Battalion, from Greenville, S.C., mobilized in February 2003 and arrived in theater last April. They successfully completed missions throughout theater, in Iraq and Kuwait, and made history in the process.

“We have endured and excelled,” said Lt. Col. Heather Meeds, commander, 151st Signal Battalion.



Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Belanger and Lt. Col. Curtis Mattison raise the 319th Signal Battalion colors.



The color guard braves a windy sandstorm during the ceremony.

“The 335th Signal Command, the 11th Signal Brigade and the 7th Signal Brigade incorporated us into the largest network in signal history. This deployment has been a huge success for the Signal Regiment, again proving we are one Army.”

Napper commended the battalion for their performance, remarking on the difficult conditions under which they had to work.

“They’ve done the hard jobs since the first day,” she said. “(Their) companies in Baghdad faced daily mortar, rocket and small arms fire – all while providing solid communications support. For six long months they enabled commanders to command and control their units and sustain and protect the force. The critical communication services provided were nothing short of outstanding, and are a true testament of the teamwork, professionalism and pride of the 151st Signal Battalion.”

As the sandstorm continued to kick up dust, the desert-worn colors of the 151st Signal Battalion were cased. Lt. Col. Curtis Mattison, 319th battalion commander, and Command Sgt. Maj.

Paul Belanger, battalion command sergeant major, then raised the colors of the 319th Signal Battalion.

“I want to thank the 151st Signal Battalion for providing us with a good start,” said Mattison. “We will do (our best) to live up to the standard they established.”

The battalion arrived in theater this March and will work out of a variety of locations, including Camp Virginia and Camp Victory in Kuwait, and Camp Bucca in Iraq.

“The 319th Signal Battalion arrived with a reputation as a hard-charging, get-the-job-done unit. Thus far they’ve shown it,” said Napper.

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Col. Jennifer Napper speaks at Women’s History Month celebration, *page 8*.



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Photo of the month



The 72nd Signal Battalion prepares to roll out in a convoy.
Photo taken by SSG Brett McIntire, 72nd Signal Battalion.



Col. Jennifer Napper
Commander



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Williams
Command Sergeant Major

the Desert Wire

A publication of the 7th Signal Brigade
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald
Editor

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Word on the street ...

A look at what soldiers on deployment are saying

The question: What are your R&R plans?

By Spc. William Garreans



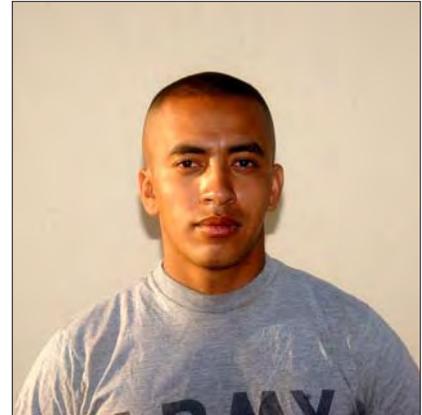
"My dad is from Thailand, so I plan on going to Thailand to visit him and get back to my roots."

Spc. Bonnie Lekrisawat
HHC, 72nd Signal Battalion



"I plan to go home, spend some money and generally have some fun."

Spc. Paul Binder
HHC, 319th Signal Battalion



"I don't plan on taking R&R. I want to save my leave days, so when I go back, I can take 30 days of leave and spend more time with my family."

Pfc. Alberto Nava
A Company, 72nd Signal Battalion



"My husband and I plan on going back to Germany to see our babies, Buddy and Sasha."

Staff Sgt. Lorrena Roeder
HHC, 7th Signal Brigade



"I plan on going home to Germany, spending time with my husband, and taking a trip to Garmisch"

Pfc. Kelly Jacobson
A Company, 72nd Signal Battalion



"I would like to go to Africa to visit my mom's side of the family."

Sgt. Monique Horsley
HHC, 67th Signal Battalion

KROC gets connected by 72nd Soldiers



Photo by Capt. Thomas Hooper

The team assembles the antenna on the KROC roof.

LOS teams make adjustments, get shot in

By Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

KUWAIT CITY, Kuwait – Moving convoys throughout the theater of operations requires the coordinated efforts of several entities. In order to keep convoys moving, communication between these entities is vital.

"Without good, stable communications, we can't do movement coordination," said Lt. Col. David King, Coalition Forces Land Component Command C9 staff officer and the officer in charge of the Kuwait Rear Operations Center (KROC).

KROC personnel arrange escorts for U.S. convoys moving throughout Kuwait. Working with the Kuwait Ministry of Defense (KMOD) and the Kuwait Ministry of the Interior (KMOI), they help get personnel and equipment to the right places. KMOD officials organize bus escorts, establish checkpoints and provide area security, while KMOI personnel escort wheeled vehicles and help facilitate route management.

Helping these entities communicate is where the 7th Signal Brigade comes in. Recently, the brigade was tasked with providing a voice and data link for KROC.

"We needed to get connectivity between KROC and Camp Arifjan," said King. "The solution was to get a tactical shot to provide secure communications and bring stability to our communications."

Soldiers from the brigade's C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, stepped up and took on the mission. Two line-of-sight antenna teams set up the shot that provided the communications link.

"It's a good mission," said Staff Sgt. Michael Virtue, LOS team chief, C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion. "It gets us out here doing what we were trained to do in a real-world environment."

No longer in a training situation, the Soldiers had to contend with real-world challenges. At the KROC site, the Soldiers had to hoist an entire antenna up to the rooftop and get in grounded.

"We're used to setting up in the field. Here we have an urban environment on top of a building. It slowed us down a little, but we got it done," said Spc. Ryan Folkmann, transmission systems operator-maintainer, C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion.

Once the antenna was up, the teams worked to bring the shot in. Their first attempt didn't work and the Soldiers from the outlying site had to make a jump to another location.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

Soldiers work into the night to get the shot in.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

(From left): Chief Warrant Officer 2 James Riedmueller troubleshoots with Spc. Ryan Folkmann at the KROC site.

"A jump happens in the field, and it happens in the real world," said Virtue. "Out here we have to adapt and overcome."

Staff Sgt. D.J. Roeder, mission noncommissioned officer in charge, C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, said the initial shot met with difficulties because they had to shoot through the city. Once they made their adjustments, however, the shot came in.

"The shot is solid," he said. "We had a lot of saturation going through the city, but now we have a direct line of sight. It's a lot more reliable."

Roeder credits his Soldiers for their perseverance in getting the shot in and enabling KROC to communicate.

"The brigade never had a configuration like this," he explained. "This is the best group of Soldiers I've had. They're very knowledgeable and (KROC) is definitely glad to have them out there."

319th Signal Soldiers set foot on Camp Bucca

□ Battalion takes over signal mission from departing 151st

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP BUCCA, Iraq – They may be a long way from Sacramento, but Soldiers of the 319th Signal Battalion here are excited about the opportunity to serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"It's good to put into practice what I learned at AIT (Advanced Individual training)," said Spc. Lily Ruiz, cable systems installer-maintainer, B Company, 319th Signal Battalion.

Back at home, Ruiz worked as a preschool teacher. Deployed in support of OIF2, she is part of a cable platoon for the 319th, a reserve unit from Sacramento, Ca. The battalion arrived in theater in March and began working in various sites throughout theater, including Camp Virginia and Camp Victory in Kuwait, and Camp Bucca in Iraq.

"So far it's been a good adjustment," said Ruiz. "This is a good place compared to some of the other sites I've seen."

Camp Bucca is the site of enemy prisoner of war operations. The signal unit provides communications for the military police and medical services Soldiers located there. They also support operations at the Iraqi port of Um Qasr and the border control point located at Navistar.

"We're the communications link for Southern Iraq and Northern Kuwait," said Capt. Renato Medina, B Company commander.

The unit took over operations from the 151st Signal Battalion, a National Guard unit from Greenville, S.C. In theater, both units fall under the operational control of the 7th Signal Brigade. Over the past month, they have been engaged in changeover operations. To make the transition smoother, the 151st provided the incoming troops with lessons learned from their deployment.

"Maintenance is a key issue out here," said 1st Lt. Harry Tomlin, A Company executive officer, 151st Signal Battalion. "Dust control of equipment like power generators is critical, especially in the hot months."

With the benefit of 151st's experiences, the 319th Signal Battalion got right to work on their mission.

"We've been busy with the changeover," said Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Wallen, platoon sergeant, cable platoon. "We took what we learned from 151st and have been adapting it to our system and how we operate."



Staff Sgt. Jonathan Mason works to hook up his power cables.



Staff Sgt. Harry Roman and Staff Sgt. Eduardo Rosa inspect the lines.

Wallen said his platoon has been actively clearing the area, policing up cable and identifying active and inactive lines.

"It will make troubleshooting easier if something goes down. We'll know where to look," he said. "This has been good for my soldiers because we're finally getting to do what we were trained to do."

Quickly adapting to active-duty status, the Soldiers understand they have a new roles, far removed from their civilian lives. For Medina, bringing Soldiers together from all walks of life to accomplish one mission is a challenge he is looking forward to.

"It's a special unit," he said. "The reservist mission dramatically changed with the Global War on Terrorism. We're making history here as reservists and as Army Soldiers."



Sorting out this bundle of wires is no problem for Spc. Lily Ruiz.

Top Signal NCOs visit troops in theater



(From left): Command Sergeants Major Ronald Desjardins, Michael Terry and Kenneth Williams at the Marble Palace NCO Induction Ceremony.

NETCOM, Regimental Command Sergeants Major take part in NCO Induction ceremony

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMDOHA, Kuwait – Top noncommissioned officers from the Signal Corps paid an April visit to Soldiers serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Terry and Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Desjardins had a chance to meet with troops, tour facilities and even take part in an NCO induction ceremony during their visit to the theater of operations. Both leaders expressed their appreciation for the work being done by signal Soldiers and said they were impressed with what they've seen.

"I can say the state of the Signal Regiment is very healthy. These Soldiers are doing amazing things. They're accomplishing things they weren't even trained to do," said Terry, Signal Regimental command sergeant major.

Terry and Desjardins, command sergeant major, Network Enterprise Technology Command, were able to see troops in action at sites in Kuwait and Iraq, including several sites where 7th Signal Brigade Soldiers are deployed.

"It's early in the deployment, but I'm really proud of what the 7th Signal Brigade has done so far," said Desjardins.

The two senior leaders were also able to attend an NCO induction ceremony where Desjardins was the guest speaker. NCOs from a variety of units were welcomed into the Corps



Sgt. Melvin Gonzalez joins the NCO ranks.

of Noncommissioned Officers at the Marble Palace in Kuwait.

"It was a nice ceremony," said newly-inducted NCO Sgt. Melvin Gonzalez, armorer and supply NCO, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 7th Signal Brigade. "It means a lot to be a part of the NCO Corps, and to get this recognition."

Desjardins expressed his pride in the job NCOs are doing in the Global War on terrorism, and thanked them for their sacrifices and their families' sacrifices. He also reminded them that the war is ongoing, and that continued NCO leadership was vital.

"Our Soldiers need your leadership now more than ever," he said. "Remember, every Soldier and leader in the unit looks for noncommissioned officers to do their part – as leaders, as trainers, as role models and as standard bearers – to instill and uphold good order and discipline in the unit ... This means that your Soldiers will watch everything you do, and all that you do must set the example, the standards for others to follow and emulate."

Gonzalez said he appreciated the message delivered by Desjardins.

"It's about taking care of soldiers and accomplishing the mission. It's about being proud of what we are – NCOs," he said.

Terry and Desjardins said they would take back a lot of useful information from their visit to continue to improve the Signal Corps and further its mission. They will also take back the message that Soldiers here are doing an excellent job in representing the Signal Regiment and the Army.

"These soldiers are smart," said Desjardins. "They're learning systems they've never seen before and they're providing the best communications the world has ever seen. We have, by far, the best regiment in the Army and we're proving it right here in the desert."



Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Desjardins delivers his message at the ceremony.



Leaders take questions during a special NCO breakfast.

Soldiers report

Quarterly board tests brigade troops on deployment

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait – Appearing before the board, Spc. Mary Lynn Villafane was very clear about her long-term goals.

"I want to become the first female Sergeant Major of the Army," she said. "If I'm going to do something, I want to go all the way to the top."

Villafane was named Soldier of the Quarter for her successful performance at the 7th Signal Brigade Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter Board held at Camp Doha April 16. The NCO of the Quarter was Sgt. Chad Burkett, a UHF radio systems team chief with B Company, 67th Signal Battalion. Villafane is a satellite communications operator-maintainer with B Company, 72nd Signal Battalion.

"It feels pretty good to represent the battalion," said Villafane.

The board featured Soldiers and NCOs from units under operational control of the 7th Signal Brigade, including the 319th Signal Battalion and the brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company. Soldiers faced challenging questions from a seven-member board on a variety of topics,



Sgt. 1st Class David Hays looks on as Sgt. Chad Burkett evaluates casualty Spc. Darrin Schreck.



Representing the brigade (from left): SGM Alphonso Burnett, CSM Paul Belanger, CSM Nicolino Parisi, CSM Kenneth Williams, CSM Paul Rodriguez, SGM Ortega Fletcher and 1SG Stacy Picciano.

from common Soldier skills to current events. An added feature was a hands-on portion where participants had to evaluate a casualty and perform a functions check on an M16 rifle.

"It's one thing to answer a question before the board, but another to do something hands-on and performance-based. It gives the board a better picture of the 'whole soldier' concept," said Sgt. 1st Class David Hays, communications and electronics maintenance NCO, HHC, 7th Signal Brigade.

Hays was one of the evaluators for the hands-on portion of the board and said he was impressed with the knowledge the Soldiers displayed.

"Some of them were nervous, but they all performed well under pressure," he added.

Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Williams, brigade command sergeant major and president of the board, said the board was meant to challenge Soldiers, test their knowledge and help them prepare for survival in theater.

"The standards are the same as we have in the rear. But we wanted to keep the topics relevant to what they need to know here in theater," he said.

Williams added that he was very pleased with the Soldiers' overall performance.



Spc. Mary Lynn Villafane goes over some last minute points with her mentor, Staff Sgt. Joseph Alba.

"They were outstanding, especially the reserve Soldiers who don't have the benefit of daily training," he said. "The competition was really tight."

Villafane said her preparation paid off because the questions were tough.

"I was studying non-stop, before and after my shift, at lunch – anytime I had a second," she said.

Staff Sgt. Joseph Alba, a single shelter switch chief with B Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, helped Villafane prepare for the board as her mentor. He said he wasn't surprised by her success on the board.

"She's very competitive, and she's also an all-around total soldier who's dedicated and committed," he explained.

Williams added that he's encouraged that Soldiers, even while deployed, have taken the time and shown the dedication to prepare themselves so well for the board.

"In this forward location, it's important that we continue the professional development of our future leaders," he said.

For Villafane, becoming a future leader is just what she's got in mind.



Staff Sgt. Jeff Lee demonstrates a functions check on the M16 rifle to Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey McClendon.

Military women inspire 'Hope and Possibility'

□ Soldiers observe Women's History Month in Kuwait

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait – Speaking before a Marble Palace crowd, Col. Jennifer Napper took the lead in March's observance of Women's History Month. As guest speaker for the event, the 7th Signal Brigade commander discussed historical achievements of women, highlighting the contributions of women in the military.

"Today's military women are a group of professional, hardworking, strong and able individuals who bring great credit upon this country," she said.

Noting the sacrifices women have made to earn distinction in the military, Napper focused on this year's theme of "Women Inspiring Hope and Possibility."

"The entire history of women in the military can be told using that phrase, for it is a history of continual breaking of new ground by pioneers who then inspire follow-on generations to push the limit even further," she said. "Until a short time ago, we could only serve as nurses, clerks and secretaries. It makes me proud to know that today 91 percent of Army jobs, 96 percent of Navy jobs, 93 percent of Marine Corps jobs and 99 percent of Air Force jobs are open to women."

The ceremony also featured a slideshow presentation of women's achievements, along with a number of personal testimonials by Soldiers. Speakers had a chance to discuss and share stories about women who inspired them in their lives.

Staff Sgt. Lorrena Roeder, administrative noncommissioned



Col. Jennifer Napper is welcomed as the event's guest speaker.



Women in the lead (from left): Lt. Col. Heather Meeds, 151st Signal Battalion commander, Col. Jennifer Napper, 7th Signal Brigade commander, Lt. Col. Jeannie Tibbetts, 72nd Signal Battalion commander.

officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 7th Signal Brigade, paid tribute to her mother, who recently passed away.

"It meant a lot because I was able to say things I never got to say to her. It felt good to give her the recognition," said Roeder.

Attendees found the ceremony moving as well instructional.

"It was a nice event, very informative and very emotional," said Sgt. 1st Class George Abbey, administrative section NCO in charge, HHC, 7th Signal Brigade. "It reinforced my appreciation for women. These events are important because you may know these things, but it helps to be reminded."

The need to be reminded of all the contributions women have made and how those contributions paved the way for today's military women was exactly the message Napper delivered at the ceremony.

"At every level and in several occupational specialties, the strength and leadership of the U.S. military's females is manifested in the image of those women past," she said. "As I move about throughout this theater observing my Soldiers, and even many who are not in my brigade, I am impressed at their proficiency, fortitude and overall warrior spirit. I salute them, and all of our Soldiers and leaders who continue to contribute so strongly to the success of our profession."



Staff Sgt. Lorrena Roeder pays a special tribute to her mother.



Sgt. Karen Derrickson offers her testimonial at the ceremony.

Working like a 'Cable Dawg' at Camp New York

▣ 67th Signal Battalion soldiers get communications lines in

Story and photos by
2nd Lt. Kenneth R. Bulthuis

67th Signal Battalion

CAMP NEW YORK, Kuwait – On Jan. 22, 2004, Alpha Company entered Camp New York, Kuwait, an area with no communications infrastructure. The mission tasked to the cable platoon of A Company was to install all the cable and fiber optics necessary for communications to support the staging area on Camp New York. The unit, part of the 67th Signal Battalion from Fort Gordon, Ga., had the support of the 69th Cable Company from Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

An average day for a member of the cable platoon at Camp New York is anything but typical compared to past training missions. The most significant changes being the amount of new commercial equipment they have had to learn to use and, perhaps more importantly, the huge emphasis that has been placed on customer service.

"The majority of the day is dedicated to customer service. To meet customer needs my soldiers have processed over 300 work orders from the units they support," said Staff Sgt. John Martin, 26, the cable platoon's platoon sergeant.

The work orders require them to do jobs ranging from terminating fiber optic cable and Category 5 computer cables to troubleshooting nearly any piece of equipment that has electrons flowing through it on Camp New York.

"Being properly trained and proficient in how to do our primary mission of installing and troubleshooting communication lines and cables, made it a lot easier to adapt and learn how to interface with the unfamiliar commercial equipment we're now using at a Camp New York," said Spc. Ken Ellis, 30, a cable platoon team chief.

When she was asked what she thought about doing work outside of their job description, Sgt. Ronnette



Getting right down to work, Pfc. Veronica Cruz, 20, from Waipahu, Hawaii, cable and wire installer-maintainer splices category 5 computer cable with help from Pfc. Ted Hurst, 23, from Augusta, Ga.

Rodgers, 22, another cable platoon section sergeant, said, "What mission we have doesn't really matter to the soldiers. We're going to get it done no matter what it takes. That's just what we do."

To meet mission requirements and work order requests, more than four miles of fiber optic cable has been installed. The cable platoon laid over 60,000 feet of WF-16 and 6,000 feet of computer cable, giving support to over 80 tactical phones and connecting all of Camp New York's computers for Internet use.

"We've been working really hard and putting in long hours," said Spc. Leilani Vaiau, 23, a cable and wire installer-maintainer. "I like how busy we've been because it helps pass time, but I just hope they appreciate the effort we've put forth."

Pfc. Veronica Cruz, 20, a cable and wire installer-maintainer, added, "It's all about customer service. We need to accomplish our mission so that the units can communicate with each other, and hopefully the soldiers will be able to stay in touch with their loved ones back home."

The morale and energy level of A Company's cable platoon is unwaveringly high after three months of deployment. The soldiers seem ready to take on any challenge the Army can throw at them.



Spc. Ken Ellis, 30, from San Antonio, Texas, prepares to roll from Camp New York in his LMTV.

Rolling into Baghdad

□ Platoon leader reflects on convoy mission North

By 1st Lt. Gemma Ferrick

A Company, 72nd Signal Battalion

Ammunition: "Check." CLS Bags: "Check." Flares: Roger!" IED markers: "Hooah!" "Synchronize your watches. SP time is in 10 minutes."

BAGHDAD, Iraq - The A Company Renegades are ready to roll out to Baghdad. The soldiers made the convoy possible with hard work and determination. As the serial commander, I watched a hasty mission to Baghdad come together piece by piece with the help from soldiers who were focused on the mission and knew what had to get done for us to be successful and safe.

The convoy consisted of A Company's "2nd to None" Platoon Heavy Data Package, A Company's 1st Platoon 93 team, and B Company's 85 team. We were our own serial within 57th Signal Battalion's seven serial convoy. Our gun truck, a deuce with "Ice Cream 50 cents" spray-painted on the side, took the lead. With four M-249 squad automatic weapons and a ".50 cal" machine gun, everyone knew this convoy was ready to rock.

The first day we drove about two hours before stopping at Navistar, where we slept on cots alongside our vehicles. Navistar is right at the border of Iraq and Kuwait. We only drove a short distance so we could get a good feel for driving on the foreign roads and have time to conduct a thorough after-action review.

Our next day started at 0100 hours. We got our briefing from the security officer at Navistar and we were ready to go. They call it "crossing the berm" when you go into Iraq. There is an actual berm that you cross, and when you do, weapons are readied. The jolt of adrenaline that went through our bodies is something none of us will ever forget. All of our training and hard work was going to pay off right here. It would pay off these next two days of driving, ensuring every single person made it safely to Victory Base in Baghdad.

The border of Iraq has a barrier on the road (which satirically reminded me of a toll booth on the New Jersey Turnpike) and it is covered with signs that say, "You are now in a war zone" and "Watch out for children in the road." What I couldn't stop thinking about was the soldiers who first entered Iraq a year ago and what it must have felt like for them. But now we, my platoon, were becoming a part of that history.

It was a long drive into Baghdad. My driver, Spc. Jones, broke up the monotony by singing some Johnny Cash songs. And Spc. Chen in the back seat (who I designated as my map man) was intensively studying the maps, down to details like the terrain around us. I had radio communications with my noncommissioned officer in charge, Staff Sgt. Said, who was controlling the back and also driving the Renegade SSS. I also had a radio with my rear



Spc. Flores gets right to work inspecting the communications.



The convoy rolls by one of Saddam's former palaces as it makes its way to Victory Base in Baghdad.

vehicle, the Renegade mechanics, who were ready to expeditiously recover any breakdown that might occur. They had SPC Richard mounted on the deuce with his M-249 ensuring and informing me that the convoy was all together. A huge asset was my lead soldier in the front, Pfc. Rawlings, who was my eyes on the entire convoy. He kept me informed of all civilians and suspicious acts he saw, and therefore I was able to give my rear vehicles a "heads-up."

Each and every person was imperative for the overall success of the convoy. Everyone pulled together as a team, and from that we will always have that bond with each other. Each vehicle that drove passed our convoy knew we meant business. We had our weapons pointed down and we were ready to react to any attack that might have occurred. We were successful because our heads were in the game; we took care of each other and watched our buddies' backs.

During the convoy many people came to the roadside to watch us drive by. They came out of their small clay huts to watch us. Some people were happy to see the U.S. Army. They were waving to us and dancing so freely. They gave us the peace sign, thumbs up and, most of all, they blew kisses. It seemed like all the young children came out to greet us and blow us kisses.

They weren't thanking me, 1st Lt. Ferrick. They weren't thanking my driver, Spc. Jones. They were thanking the entire United States military for what we have done and how we freed them from the tyrant who ruled them for so many years. For the first time I experienced real world gratification for the U.S. Army. Then and there we learned what true pride felt like.



The tactical satellite shelter set up at Victory Base.

Journey to Kuwait

□72nd Signal Battalion Soldier looks back on his platoon's first few months of deployment

By 1st Lt. John Atwell

C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion

CAMP UDAIRI, Kuwait - Deployments in today's Army are very challenging and stressful for any Soldier. As Vin Diesel says, "It is a small price to pay to kick butt for your country!" However, being versatile and easily adapting to change is the key to success. I will elaborate on my personal experiences deploying with C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom-2 as a data and cable platoon leader, specifically focusing on pre-deployment, arrival in Kuwait, and living conditions.

The pre-deployment traditionally is viewed as the most difficult time during any unit's deployment due to the countless tasks at hand. It seems that within a blink of an eye our battalion deployed from Taylor Barracks, Germany, to Camp Udairi, Kuwait. Unlike most units deploying for this operation, we received our deployment order within 40 days from our movement date.

During our preparation we conducted a brigade field training exercise, numerous weapons qualification ranges, live fire exercises, and 20 level technical inspections on all vehicles. In addition, we had to draw and sew our desert issue uniforms, put together pre-deployment packets, take the Army physical fitness test, ship all of the company's equipment, pack out all barracks rooms, store our privately-owned vehicles, take two weeks of block leave and then fly the company to Kuwait.

This phase of our deployment caused for efficient planning and execution to ensure all personnel completed all tasks with no failure. Along with all of the countless hours Soldiers spent completing all missions with no major conflicts, timelines were continually "moved to the left." Additionally, tensions and stress levels were high. As a result, most of the company grew and became an even more cohesive team that would not accept failure, which would prove beneficial while on the ground.

Within 48 hours of the company's return from block leave, the first chalk of 50 personnel was called forward to deploy to Kuwait. Five days later another chalk of 45 Soldiers was sent downrange. After the families and loved ones departed, all Soldiers were bused to the airport. During this phase many countless hours were spent waiting to be called forward to the airplane. With weapons in hand, all personnel were escorted to the flight deck and boarded the commercial jet with stomachs churning knowing that they would not return to Germany for at least 365 days. After a five hour flight, the plane landed in a vast, arid and deserted land otherwise known as Kuwait. Within hours, personnel were bused from Camp Wolverine to Camp Udairi, Kuwait, which continued to be my platoon's home for the next couple of weeks. Nevertheless, on Jan. 20 my data team and one tactical satellite team deployed to install, operate and maintain world-class communications for 143rd Transportation Command.



1st Lt. John Atwell of C Company, 72nd Signal Battalion.

In Kuwait, each base camp has different living conditions for both permanent and temporary parties. While we resided at Camp Udairi, temporary living conditions were adequate with hot and cold running water. Sleep areas generally consisted of around 50 people assigned to one tent sleeping on cots with air conditioning and heat. Shower and latrine trailers could be found all over the camp. By the time we departed for the seaport of debarkation (SPOD), Camp Udairi had reached maximum capacity and the population was still increasing. Needless to say, living conditions became cramped. Extremely long lines littered the camp with personnel everywhere while people choked on sand from the consistent sandstorms. However, with barracks facilities, permanent party living conditions at the SPOD were well above average. About 50 personnel live in a barracks area adjacent to the Operations Building with hot and cold running water, porcelain toilets and air conditioning in the barracks. The dining facility, PX and motor pool are located almost two miles away from the Operations Building. Additionally, the SPOD has a good mixture of flora and fauna but the air is constantly filled with a potent aroma of petroleum. Flames from the oil refineries in the distance light up the sky.

Over the past few months, 3rd Platoon, C Company, has endured many obstacles and challenges that have brought us to our current area of responsibility. Within the minimal amount of time that we have spent in Kuwait we have all learned a tremendous amount about the unit but, most importantly, about each other.

Running through the desert



The 7.2 mile course around Camp Udairi is a test of endurance for runners.

72nd Signal Battalion run draws crowd to Camp Udairi

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Peter Fitzgerald

7th Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP UDAIRI, Kuwait – The desert is a big place. Runners found this out as they braved sun, sand and wind in 72nd Signal Battalion's 7.2 Mile Run. The April 10 event featured a demanding course that took participants around the confines of Camp Udairi. Along with testing their endurance, the run brought participants from a variety of units together to enjoy a day of athletic challenge.

"It was a lot of fun, a good event," said Marine Corps Capt. Michael Johannes. "Everyone out here was great. They had tremendous support for this."

Johannes, Marine Corps Systems Command staff officer, took first place in the men's category with a time of 44 minutes, 30 seconds.

Used to training for 5K and traditional distance runs, Johannes said the 7.2 mile course was different, but enjoyable.

"It's not a standard distance, but I like running and the temperature was perfect – sunny, but cool," he added.

Pfc. Rachael Sather took first place for the women with a time of 1 hour, 59 seconds. A Soldier with B Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, Sather said it was nice to represent her unit in such an event.

"This was something different and it got a lot of people involved," she said.



Pfc. Rachael Sather on her way to taking first place for the women.

Maj. Seena Tucker, battalion executive officer and event coordinator, said she was pleased with the turnout.

"It's super," she said. "It really brings esprit de corps to Camp Udairi and lets units come together and have some fun."

A number of units participated in the event, represented in teams as well as individual runners.

Sgt. 1st Class Harry Gonzalez, platoon sergeant, C Company, 448th Engineer Battalion, said his unit was happy to take part in the event.

"We said, 'Let's participate and show everyone we're out here,'" he said. "They should have more of these activities. It helps to take the pressure off and gets different units involved."



Lt. Col. Jeannie Tibbetts and Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Rodriguez kick off the 7.2 Mile Run.



Officers from 72nd Signal Battalion take first place in the team category.



Marine Capt. Michael Johannes crosses the line first for the men.

Gonzalez's battalion entered a team that finished second. Teams consisted of three runners, with the best overall time of 52 minutes, 53 seconds, going to a group of officers from 72nd Signal Battalion. Third place went to a team from B Company, 72nd Signal Battalion.

Other top placers included Sgt. Aaron Kennedy, 368th Finance Battalion, in second and 1st Lt. Lawrence McKiernan, 926th Engineer Battalion, in third for the men. For the women it was Sgt. Debbie Lindsey, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, in second and Spc. Mary Lynn Villafane, B Company, 72nd Signal Battalion, in third.

Chaplain's Corner ...

By Chaplain (Capt.) Byung Min

72nd Signal Battalion

Making a meaningful life

God's word is fulfilled through our lives. But God's word is not fulfilled by His supernatural power to avoid the events of daily life. Rather, God's word is fulfilled through trials, fear and even innocent death.

At this point we have to think about this. Some people are confused about faith and life. They think, "If we live right, we are not going to have any problems." They say, "If we attend church every Sunday, we will not be in trouble."

How about you? Do you think so? I don't think so.

The Bible never promises a trial-free life to anyone. God never guarantees an easygoing life to His people, not even his only begotten son Jesus.

Sometimes you will face serious trouble in your life even though you are a good Christian. Your future may sometimes hold serious trials, even if you go to church every Sunday.

For example, I know one woman who was very faithful to God throughout her whole life. She liked to serve others who needed help. She liked to talk about Jesus to people who did not know Jesus. She liked to build churches for the Lord. I know she dedicated her life to the Lord Jesus. But you know what? She is fighting against cancer now. She is my mother.

Do not expect a trial-free life. God never promised that kind of life. But God wants to fulfill His word through your life. God wants to fulfill his work through your trials. That is meaningful life. That is what meaningful life is about.

Brothers and sisters! Now we can learn a precious lesson. When you are in trouble, don't be discouraged. When you face serious trials, you have to believe God is working in your life. This is the attitude for the believers. You should not ask "Why?" to God, but you should declare, "Let your word be fulfilled in my life." That is meaningful life.

Brothers and sisters! I believe God has worked through your life in 2003.



Chaplain (Capt.) Byung Min takes to the road to deliver his message.

I believe God wants to work together with you in 2004. I hope and believe that God's word will be fulfilled through each and everyone's life until the end of our lives.

Excerpt from Chaplain Min's book "11 Nonfat Messages: God's messages for Soldiers and their Families."

Making a difference

67th Signal Battalion lends hand in toy drive

By Sgt. 1st Class Dave Hays

7th Signal Brigade

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait - Few things compare to the smiling face of a young child. The children of Iraq have suffered greatly during their short lives and have a difficult road ahead. It is often the simplest of gestures that makes a difference - a wave, a smile, a gift. The Soldiers of the Lightning Force 67th Signal Battalion have helped bridge the gap between four children in Danbury, Connecticut, and Iraqi children in An-Nasiriyah, Iraq.

Joshua, Andrew, Robin, and Danielle Stea organized a toy drive for children in Iraq and Afghanistan as a way to bring happiness to less fortunate children of the war-torn countries. Their parents are close friends of Don Esry of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He is the brother-in-law of Col. Melita McCully of Network Enterprise Technology Command. Esry wrote to Col. Jennifer Napper, 7th Signal Brigade commander, in April and shared the Stea Family's wish for a good home for the toys they had collected. Napper knew the best home for these treasures lay in south-central Iraq, in a dusty, middle-of-nowhere place called An-Nasiriyah.



Command Sgt. Maj. Nicolino Parisi delivers toys to Iraqi children in An-Nasiriyah.

Local volunteer initiatives deliver supplies to the countless orphanages in the An-Nasiriyah area and the quality of life continues to improve. The 67th Signal Battalion, under the command of Ltc. Col. Paul Ladue, found a Korean field hospital at Tallil Airbase that treats local children. Here the toys from the Stea family will find a home with children who need smiles and kindness on their road to recovery.

Military News ...

Operation Freedom Lodging offers 1,000 nights to returning troops

News Release

North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. North Command
Public Affairs Office

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. — Vail Resorts in Colorado is offering 1,000 free nights to service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of “Operation Freedom Lodging.”

Service members from any branch of service who served for 30 or more days in these countries are eligible for up to three consecutive nights of lodging at Vail Resorts owned and operated hotels in Breckenridge and Keystone.

“Operation Freedom Lodging is a gesture of our appreciation for the courageous men and women who have been serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Tony Piringer, vice president of hospitality for Vail Resorts.

Qualified service members wishing to make reservations for Operation Freedom Lodging can call:

- Breckenridge 1-800 832-3694
- Keystone 1-800 270-4690

After making reservations, service members must verify their status by faxing a copy of their orders or a letter from their commander or first sergeant to Fort Carson Morale Welfare and Recreation at DSN 691-9453 or (719) 526-9453. Documents may be sent via e-mail to OutdoorInfo@carson.army.mil.

For more information on the verification process, call Fort Carson Morale Welfare and Recreation at DSN 691-2083 or (719) 526-2083.

Vail Resort representatives contacted North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command officials to discuss the possibility of such a program.

“We were excited about the opportunity to get involved with a program that honors those who’ve been fighting the ‘away game’ keeping the homeland safe,” said Michael Perini, NORAD and USNORTHCOM Director of Public Affairs.

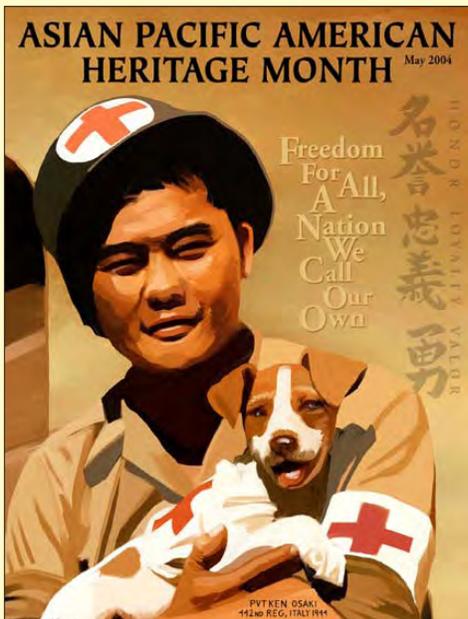
“Vail Resorts has a relationship with the military through the Rocky Mountain Blue program,” said Perini, “So it was a natural for them to contact us to see if this was feasible.”

NORAD and USNORTHCOM officials then contacted Fort Carson for assistance with the verification process.

“It’s great to see the Colorado Springs military community working together to make this national program happen.” said Perini. “It’s what makes Colorado Springs such a great place to serve.”

For more information on the NORAD and USNORTHCOM visit our websites at www.norad.mil and www.northcom.mil.

For more information on Rocky Mountain Blue at Keystone Resort visit www.rockymountainblue.com.



May is Asian Pacific Heritage Month

Asian/Pacific Heritage Month LUAU
29 May 04
Freedom For All, A Nation We Call our own

Location: Marble Palace
 Program Time: 1700hrs
 Fun in the sun...all day long, see you there!

- Games
- Exhibits
- Food Samples
- BBQ Drilling Contest
- Cultural Dance Performances
- Educational Information

Desert Wire picture pages ...

The deployment in photos



The 7th Signal Brigade takes to the streets of Camp Doha for a unit run.



A young Iraqi girl waves to a military convoy passing through the border town of Safwan near Navistar.



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Williams passes the guidon to 1st Sgt. Mark Crandall as HHC bids farewell to the departing 1st Sgt. Joseph Givens.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Bryan Westfield shows off his farewell gift at Uncle Frosty's.



The 319th Signal Battalion takes over for the 151st Signal Battalion in a sandstorm at Camp Virginia.



Staff Sgt. Rebecca Busacker stars in a Women's History Month video shot by Spc. Travis Hamilton.



2nd Lt. Jason Johnson explains his "Super Surprise Showcase" to Staff Sgt. Grover Norton.



Spc. Mary Lynn Villafane and Pfc. Rachael Sather display their trophies for placing third and first, respectively, in 72nd Signal Battalion's 7.2 Mile Run at Camp Udairi. Both Soldiers are from the battalion's B Company.



Pfc. Brad Turcotte waves to his family during a video teleconferencing session.



Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Wallen works the cable situation at Camp Bucca in Iraq.