

101st Combat Aviation Brigade

Official Publication

No Mercy Eagle Assault Shadow Of The Eagle Trouble Shooters Out Front



Hellcats Dragon Killer Spades Arctic Cowboys Buccaneers

OIF 05-07

WINGS OF DESTINY MAGAZINE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE 101ST COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE

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From the Editor

Air Assault and welcome to another edition of *Wings of Destiny* magazine. This issue focuses on Operation Iron Triangle, another large Air Assault operation conducted by the 101st Airborne Division, which was planned by 5th Battalion. It also features stories from throughout the brigade.

1st Battalion ran wild at the first-ever Camp Speicher Half and Full Marathon, with CPT Scott Harrington winning the half marathon and MAJ Marc Cummins placing third. The issue then profiles CW3 Scott Moore, a Chinook pilot in 6th Battalion who has flown numerous Army airframes during his 14 years of service as a pilot. In 96th ASB, the excellence of maintenance Company B is profiled, as is Chaplain Rajmund Kopec, who left Poland to pursue his dream of becoming a Catholic priest. Finally, some of the Soldiers in 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment and their handywork are showcased. And don't forget to check out our Parting Shots!

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Wings of Destiny* and we are pleased to do our best to keep family and friends informed while their loved ones are away. Air Assault!

SGT Ryan C. Matson, Editor

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NEWS

Running in the desert

1st BN, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade dominates first-ever COB Speicher Marathon

Story by SGT Ryan Matson and SGT Dallas Walker
101st Combat Aviation Brigade/Division PAO



Best of the best

CPT Scott Harrington, 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation, was the overall winner of the first-ever COB Speicher half marathon (which actually measured 15.1 miles) April 29 with a time of 1 hour, 34 minutes, six seconds.

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, IRAQ -- In January, CPT Janet Tye, 47th Combat Support Hospital, and 1LT Latasha Floyd were talking at a Morale, Welfare and Recreation meeting when they came up with an idea.

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Tops in her age

LT Susan Raglin, Company C, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, runs the final stretch of the half marathon. Raglin ran the race in 2 hours, 5 minutes, 31 seconds, good for first place in the female 25 to 29-year-old age group.

Troops Battalion, who finished with a time of 3 hours 32 minutes, 1 second, good for fourth-place overall.

The second place female finisher in the full marathon was 1LT Sage Norton who came across the finish line in 3 hours, 35 minutes and 7 seconds. In third place was SPC Torey Lassater, who came in with a time of 4 hours, 44 minutes and 43 seconds.

“We were talking about how we wanted a big event to train for other than the Army Physical Fitness Test, while we’re out here in the deployed environment,” Tye said. “We had heard of other marathons being done out here for Soldiers who usually run them in the states, like the Honolulu Marathon and the Boston Marathon. We thought, why don’t we have one at Speicher?”

Tye’s vision became a reality at 5:45 a.m. April 29 when 355 runners lined up outside the COB Speicher Main Gym and to run the first-ever COB Speicher Marathon and Half Marathon, (13.1 and 26.2 miles, respectively). A total of 308 runners completed the half marathon while 47 gutted out the full marathon. Actually, the course was a bit longer, meaning the half marathoners actually ran a distance of 15.1 miles and the full marathon runners ran around 28.2 miles.

When all was said and done, the top male finisher for the full marathon was CPT Chris Hallows, who finished with a scorching time of three hours, 7 minutes and 27 seconds. Second place went to LT CMDR. Matthew Simms, Multi-National Force – Iraq, who ran the course in 3 hours, 12 minutes and 14 seconds.. The third place finisher was 1LT John Shaffer, 501st Military Intelligence Detachment, who finished with a time of 3 hours, 30 minutes and 39 seconds.

Seven females ran the full marathon. The top finisher was CPT Renee Vigilante, 501st Support

Lassater, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 159th Aviation Brigade, traveled from Forward Operating Base Anaconda to compete in the race.

Two Apache pilots from 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade claimed the first and third-place finishing times in the half marathon. CPT Scott Harrington, Company C, 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, took home first place with a time of 1 hour, 34-minutes and six seconds. Right behind him was CPT Nick Clark, who ran the half marathon in 1 hour, 35-minutes and 58 seconds, took home second place. MAJ Marc Cummins, also of 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, claimed third with a time of 1 hour, 41 minutes, and 27 seconds. Harrington, who was a member of Fort Campbell's Army 10-Miler team in October, said the main difference between this race and others he had won was that he flew afterward.

"Training up was a little harder, just consistency wise, but overall it was the same as anywhere else," Harrington said. "I had to hop in my chopper and fly a mission right afterward, so that was a little different. I was pretty pleased with my finish."

The top female finisher in the half-marathon was 2LT Amy Swiatecki-McCabe, 501st Support Troops Battalion who ran the course in 1 hour, 53 minutes and 47 seconds, good enough for 12th place overall. She was followed by TSGT Lisa Johnson, 732nd Expeditionary Mission Support Group, who finished in 1 hour, 56 minutes and 55 seconds, and 1LT Susan Raglin, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, with a time of 2 hours, 5 minutes and 31 seconds.

It was the first half-marathon for Swiatecki-McCabe and she said the atmosphere made her forget about being in Iraq, at least partially.

"It was a lot of fun and had I not known I was in Iraq, I would have thought I was running some race through Arizona or some other state that had a lot of sand (of course with the exception of bunkers and HESCO barriers and tactical vehicles passing by)," Swiatecki-McCabe said. "The weather held out for an awesome day for running."

"It's always nice to win, but I was just happy to have been able to experience and participate in the whole thing. I was pleased with the finish as it set a target time for future races. It gives me a goal for the next time I run and something to work towards."

Prizes were awarded to the top two finishers in 15 age groups for the half and full marathon. A complete list of these finishers and the top ten overall finishers in the half and full marathon follows this story.

Soldiers came from bases throughout Iraq to participate in the race. At COB Speicher, 101st CSM Frank Grippe was one of the runners in the half marathon.

Throughout the course, which began behind the gym and ended with a lap around the track outside an old Iraqi soccer stadium, units from throughout the COB manned eight different water points. Each water point had its own special theme, ranging from beach parties and tropical themes to an 80's car wash theme. The fire station also had their own water point. Volunteers at the points passed out Gatorade, water, oranges, cookies, and power bars and gel. Civilians from the COB were also on hand to volunteer to support the event, helping pass out numbers to entrants, hand out water, and prizes at the end.

"Kellogg, Brown and Root, Morale Welfare and Recreation, the garrison command and the Army Air Force Exchange Service program has been so supportive of this event," Tye said. "AAFES helped us get the T-shirts and donated quite a few gift certificates. We even got support from back at Fort Campbell. The MWR there donated 40 medals for winners. Running, Racing and Relaxing, from Clarksville, was also very supportive, sending over 150 T-shirts, goody bags and runner foot care supplies. We had a retired Army nurse who drew up her own finisher T-shirts for us and donated I-

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Pods for the first, second and third place winners of the half and full marathon and even decorations, which was really something else.”

The finish line had the feel of a big-time race. Fellow Soldiers applauded and cheered as entrants entered the stadium area to complete their final lap. The division band played. Two tables were set up offering finishers free massages. The runners had bananas, oranges and many refreshments to chose from as they stretched their weary muscles at the finish.

“It was a big finish line festival,” Tye said.

The race also marked the only time that civilian attire was approved on the COB, meaning many units designed and wore their own T-shirts to the event and listened to music while running.

But perhaps the most unique thing about this race, Tye explained, is that while many people can say they’ve run a marathon, how many can say they’ve done it in Iraq?

“That’s one of the nice things about this,” Tye said. “There are a number of people out here who have never run a marathon before, maybe never run a half marathon before, and that’s one of the unique things about doing it is actually doing it in Iraq rather than stateside. Then there are people who have done two, three, maybe even ten marathons before, but never in a different country. It was definitely special for the Soldiers out here.”



SSG William Werden, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, competes in the marathon.

Half Marathon

Top 10 finishers (overall)

- 1) Scott Harrington
- 2) Nick Clark
- 3) Marc Cummins
- 4) Carlson Igwacho
- 5) Brian Dubroff
- 6) Scott Steele
- 7) Jason Bothwell
- 8) Bobby Sattazahn
- 9) Michael Hammer
- 10) Dan Marques

Half Marathon Male Under 20

- 1) Dakota Wolfe
- 2) Antony Hobbs
- 3) Aaron Carlson

Half Marathon Male 20 to 24

- 1) Dan Marques
- 2) Kelvin Miles
- 3) Rafael Arroyo

Half Marathon Male 25 to 29

- 1) Scott Harrington
 - 2) Nick Clark
 - 3) Carlson Igwacho
- ### Half Marathon Male 40 to 44

- 1) Jim Daniel
- 2) David Newberry
- 3) Samuel Nieves

Half Marathon Male 30 to 34

- 1) Marc Cummins
 - 2) Scott Steele
 - 3) Jason Bothwell
- ### Half Marathon Male 45 to 49

- 1) Skip Larsen
- 2) Neil Horden
- 3) Charle Welles

Half Marathon Male 35 to 39

- 1) Brian Dubroff
 - 2) Conception Reyna
 - 3) Todd Keenan
- ### Half Marathon Male Over 50

- 1) Ernest Warren
- 2) Richard Harvey
- 3) William Dyer

Half Marathon Female Under 20 Half Marathon Female 20 to 24 Amy Swiatecki-McCabe

- 1) Elizabeth Ballesteros

- 1) Amy Swiatecki-McCabe
- 2) Stephanie Davis
- 3) Wendy Lopez

- 1) Susan Raglin
- 2) Joleen Pangelinan
- 3) Amy Gorman

Half Marathon Female 30 to 34 Half Marathon Female 35 to 39 Half Marathon Female 40 to 44

- 1) Mary Kate Hannon
- 2) Athanasia Austin
- 3) Demechel Robinson

- 1) Heather Ann Simas
- 2) Giovanna Morales
- 3) Marni Barnes

- 1) Lisa Johnson
- 2) Monique George
- 3) Terry Green

Half Marathon Female 45 to 49

- 1) Sandra Stevenson

Marathon

Top 10 finishers (overall)

- 1) Chris Hallows
- 2) Matthew Simms
- 3) John Shaffer
- 4) Renee Vigilante
- 5) Amit Bhavsar
- 6) Sage Norton
- 7) Brad Owen
- 8) Steve Adams
- 9) Jar Aldykiewic
- 10) Patrick Stich

Marathon Male 20 to 24

- 1) John Shaffer
- 2) Ken Segelhorst
- 3) Bruce Parker

Marathon Male 25 to 29

- 1) Blake Saksa
- 2) Chris Palizza
- 3) Bobby Webb

Marathon Male 30 to 34

- 1) Chris Hallows
- 2) Amit Bhavsar
- 3) Patrick Stich

Marathon Male 35 to 39

- 1) Matthew Simms
- 2) Jar Aldykiewic
- 3) Neal Loidolt

Marathon Male 40 to 44

- 1) Brad Owen
- 2) Steve Adams
- 3) Scott Lubag

Marathon Male Over 50

- 1) Mike Yarman

Marathon Female Under 20

- 1) Tory Lasater

Marathon Female 20 to 24

- 1) Renee Vigilante
- 2) Sage Norton
- 3) Allison Capozza

Marathon Female 40 to 44

- 1) Elizabeth Shockley

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NEWS

“Eagle Assault” takes lead for Aviation forces on Operation Iron Triangle

Story and photos by SGT Ryan Matson
101st Combat Aviation Brigade



Hawks circling

A pair of Blackhawk helicopters from 5th Battaion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, circle over Soldiers from Company A, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, during Operation Iron Triangle May 9 Southwest of Balad, Iraq.

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**Apache on the river
An Apache attack helicopter from 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, flies along a canal during Operation Iron Triangle.**

Operation Iron Triangle, which boasted the second-largest initial Air Assault of the 101st Airborne Division's (Air Assault) deployment to Iraq, took place from May 9 to 11. The operation focused on three objectives – Objective Murray, an island SW of the Muthana Chemical Complex, a safe haven for foreign fighters, Objective Angel, a set of farmhouses believed to be a terrorist training camp Southwest of Balad, and Objective Ling, a suspected terrorist meeting place centered within the Complex. When the operation was complete, numerous High Value Targets had been questioned and detained, several small caches were uncovered, and material, computers, money and intelligence were also acquired. For the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, who supported infantry units from the 101st Airborne Division on the mission, 5th Battalion took the lead role on Operation Iron Triangle.

"The entire battalion played some role in this mission," MAJ Landy Dunham, 5th Battalion Operations Officer, who planned the aviation side of the mission, said. "Our HHC planned, briefed and tracked the operation, our assault companies, with the addition of 5 UH-60s (Blackhawk Helicopters) provided by B/1-207th (Icy) flew the mission, Company E set up a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) here on Speicher to help facilitate the second turn of the mission, Company F, the battalion's Pathfinder Company was in charge of setting up and controlling both the heavy and light Pick-up Zones (PZs). And of course Company D, our maintenance company, played a huge part, with 22 Blackhawks flying at once in the mission. Everyone was involved."

Besides a huge Day One Air Assault, in which hundreds of Iraqi and U.S. Army Soldiers were Air Assaulted into the three objectives, Dunham said 11 follow-on Air Assaults were conducted during the mission, focused around the islands of Objective Murray, where most of the action took place, and where Soldiers needed to be lifted on and off. Dunham said 5th Battalion also provided an Aerial Reaction Force in the event additional troops were needed in a conflict. 5th Battalion alone logged a total of 157.1 flight hours over the three-day mission.

“The initial Air Assault was a little different this time,” Dunham said, “This was one of the few missions we’ve done with multiple lifts and slingloads under night vision goggles. Our Tactical Operations Officer and lead planner, Chief Warrant Officer Christopher Hinkle and the aircrews did an excellent job with that.”

Numerous High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) were slingloaded onto Chinook helicopters from 6th Battalion and transported to the three objective landing zones. Both single and shotgun (two HMMWVs) slingloads were used on the mission. The loads were inspected by 5th Battalion’s Pathfinder Company prior to the Assault. Dunham said the Pathfinders also provided security to refuel vehicles that were transported between Forward Operating Bases Speicher and Remagen prior to the mission.

While the Blackhawks and Chinooks transported Soldiers, vehicles and equipment to the objectives during Iron Triangle, two Apache helicopter weapons teams from 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, were busy covering the North and South during the operation.

CW2 Christopher Stewart, Company C, 1st Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, is one of the pilots who flew on the mission in the Northern section of the Area of Operation. He said the Apaches provided Air Assault security during the operation, meaning they made sure everything was clear on the ground before the Soldiers were inserted.

CW3 David Peveto, an Apache pilot who co-piloted the mission with CW2 Michael Nelson, said the mission was similar in nature to Operation Swarmer, except that Swarmer covered a much larger area of ground. Peveto and Nelson were part of the weapons team that flew in the Southern section of the AO. Like the teams in the North, he said he sealed the area off, so nobody could enter it once ground forces were inserted, and no enemy forces could leave it. He added that Apaches are able to stop approaching suspicious vehicles easily from the air.

“With the intelligence we were able to obtain from this operation, the operation was definitely a success,” Dunham said. “It was a lot like Operation Katrina (a previous Air Assault) in that respect.” LTC Don Galli, commander of 5th Battalion, stated, “101 CAB is the force of choice for the TF Band of Brothers when it comes to speed, surprise and mobility on the battlefield.”



NEWS

One day in Iraq: Chinook pilot

Story and photos by SGT Ryan Matson

101st Combat Aviation Brigade

** NOTE: This story is the third in a series of four articles about the pilots of the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade and the aircraft they fly. This article focuses on a Chinook pilot, his story, and typical day flying this helicopter in Iraq.*

He's flown 'em all

Chief Warrant Officer Three Scott Moore, Company B, 6th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, gets his flight gear ready for another night mission out of Contingency Operating Base Speicher transporting passengers to various locations in Iraq. Moore has been a U.S. Army pilot for 14 years.



You name it, Chief Warrant Officer Three Scott Moore, Company B, 6th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, has probably flown it during his 14-year military career.

He started with UH-1s in 1992, immediately after he had graduated from college and then from flight school, while serving in the Missouri National Guard. During this time, Moore also flew Cobras. From 1998 until 2001, Moore was an Apache attack pilot. Since then, Moore has settled into the cockpit of his newest, and quite possibly last, Army aircraft, the CH47D Chinook helicopter.

“I envisioned myself as one of those guys who spent 20 years flying the same aircraft,” he said. “I didn’t plan on flying several types of helicopters, it just kind of worked out that way.”

In fact, of the four types of Army helicopters in the aviation brigade he’s deployed with (the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade), Moore has flown two: Apaches, and Chinooks. He has not flown Kiowas and Blackhawks. During his career, Moore has also flown every type of Army mission: he has flown attack missions with Apaches, Air Assaults and troop and cargo transport with Chinooks, Medical Evacuations (MEDEVACs) with Hueys, and just about everything else in between. And while he said he has loved flying the three different airframes he has flown so far, he said the Chinook is a particular favorite.

“The Chinook is the most awesome airframe I’ve ever flown in my life,” Moore said. “It’s the best instrumented, the best total package, it virtually flies itself. It really is the nicest airframe to fly in the Army.”

Moore affectionately refers to the Chinook as “the workhorse.” It is capable of lifting a combined gross maximum weight of 50,000 pounds, and up to 26,000 pounds on the center hook of the three cargo hooks attached to the bottom of the helicopter. Each one of the blades on the two rotors of the \$23 million aircraft weigh 350 pounds and turn in opposite directions, powered by two engines, which each operate at 50 percent of their total potential power output (if a helicopter is to lose an engine, the other will operate at 100 percent capacity to compensate.)

Besides its tremendous power and lifting capacity, the Chinook is also known for its troop and cargo hauling ability in the cabin area (inside the helicopter). The aircraft has seats for 32 Soldiers and more can be carried if necessary.

He said a good example of the lifting capability and spaciousness of the Chinook is the fact that a High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicle can be driven up the ramp into the cabin area of the helicopter, while another can be carried underneath it.

To the people who knew him growing up, Moore said it is no surprise he ended up an Army helicopter pilot.

“It was always a dream for me,” he said. “If you would have talked to my parents when I was little, they would have told you ‘Oh Scotty, he’s going to be in the Army. He wants to fly helicopters.’”

Moore’s passion for flying is so great that he turned down more money and higher rank to continue doing it. He was a captain when he went to Panama as a staff officer, and every day that he was sitting at his desk instead of in a cockpit, Moore said he was miserable and longed to get back in the air.

“When I entered the Army, I really didn’t understand what warrant officers were, and that they were the pilots who flew all the time,” he said. “My dream was to fly. If you have a dream, you have to go for it.”

So Moore went to Warrant Officer School and in May of 1998, he became a Warrant Officer One and climbed back into the cockpit, and hasn't looked back since.

Now on his second deployment, Moore said his primary mission in Iraq is to fly battlefield circulation missions throughout Iraq on a mission known as the Eagle Express. If you name a town in Iraq, Moore said he's probably been there. He takes passengers around the country and flies on a constant basis, usually several times a week. In addition to these missions, Moore also flies combat missions, primarily Air Assaults, in which troops and equipment are moved through the air to a combat area.

Though the actual flying mission may only take a few hours, hours of preparation for the crew and on the aircraft take place before the helicopter takes off. If one is to follow him through his daily routine, one would find Moore starting to prepare for a flight at 7 p.m. around 3 p.m. as he did for his flight Feb. 5, an Eagle Express Mission. On this night, Moore, the co-pilot, would be flying with Chief Warrant Officer Four Gary Brackmeier, a veteran pilot who had been flying Chinooks since the Vietnam War era. The rest of the crew was comprised the flight engineer, crew chief and door gunner.



Beautiful bird

The sun sets on a CH-47D Chinook helicopter sitting along the 6th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade flight line at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

When he arrived at the battalion headquarters, already in his tan flight suit, the first thing Moore did was receive the mission, which indicated where he would be flying and picking up passengers throughout Iraq on this particular mission. At this point the crew had already conducted daily flight inspections. By 4 p.m., Moore had received the brief on the weather for the flight. Next he and Brackmeier got the intelligence report, which

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detailed enemy activity within the last 24 hours as well as possible points of concern along the route. During this time, the pilots from all aircrafts on the evening's mission paid close attention to Brackmeier's wisdom as he suggested methods of avoiding certain threats in the area. By 4:15, the pilots joined their crews for the evening's flight brief where all the people involved in the evenings mission were informed of its details and last minute details, questions and concerns were addressed. The crew then grabbed some quick chow and met at the aircraft at 6:15, giving them 45 minutes to do some pre-flight inspections, a run-up and communications check before departing at 7 p.m.

"You can always give time back, you can't get it back," Brackmeier advised.

From 7 to almost 11 p.m., Moore and Brackmeier picked up and transported Soldiers throughout Iraq, before returning to COB Speicher for post-flight inspections and the end of the mission. He said the typical Eagle Express mission usually runs between three and six hours, meaning the workdays of the pilots and crew often last 12 hours or more.

The mission was flown entirely under night vision goggles, which is something Moore said he enjoys.

"As soon as you fly with them once, you realize you're either a night vision guy or not a night vision guy," he said. "I love flying with them."

After all these years of flying, Moore is about to reach yet another milestone in his career. Already a certified UH-1 instructor pilot, Moore is about to be evaluated to become a PC (Pilot in Command). When a pilot starts flying, he starts as a PI (pilot), with a certain readiness level based on the amount of hours they have flown and the level of proficiency they demonstrate to the standardization pilots. Moore will once again make the jump to PC level in yet another aircraft, meaning his senior pilots have enough confidence in his knowledge and ability to operate Chinooks that they will give him a comprehensive flight test for the chance to become a PC. A PC is in charge of the aircraft.

After 14 years of flying, there is one more flight Moore is looking forward to – the flight home at the end of this deployment. Back in Tennessee, he and his wife Cynara have two daughters, Megan, 15 and Alexa, 13, and a son, Scotty Jr., 6.

Want some Moore?

Chief Warrant Officer Three Scott Moore, Company B, 6th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, conducts some pre-flight inspections prior to a night mission in his CH-47D Chinook helicopter. Moore, a pilot for 14 years, has flown UH-1s, Cobras, Apaches, and now "the workhorse," the Chinook.



NEWS

Spreading the word

Army Chaplain, priest crosses the ocean for religious freedom

Story and photos by SGT Ryan Matson

101st Combat Aviation Brigade



Have a blessed day

CHAP (MAJ) Rajmund Kopec (left), Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, greets Staff Sgt. Yvette Malpartida, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 6th Battalion, 101st CAB, following his service the first week of Easter April 23 at Destiny Chapel, Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.. Kopec left his native Poland while it was still under Communist rule to become a Catholic priest in the U.S.

It has been a long time since a then 22-year-old Rajmund Kopec, Headquarters and Support Company, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, arrived in New Jersey from his native Poland with \$10 in his pocket, not knowing a word of English.

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“That was a little bit of a bumpy ride,” Kopec recalled, “The Polish government and myself had a difference of opinion.”

Kopec, who grew up in Nisko, Poland, said he had always known God would be part of his life. About the time he was finishing up high school, Kopec said he went on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary in Czestochowa, Poland, that would change his life. It was on this journey that he said he realized he wanted to devote himself fully to serving the Lord.

“I didn’t see any bright lights or anything crazy like that,” Kopec recalled. “But I was 17 years old and it was a great spiritual experience. It was at that point that I knew.”

So at 18, Kopec broke up with his girlfriend and joined the Franciscan monastery to begin his quest to become a monk and a priest.

“When growing up in Poland at the time, by 18, you really needed to know what you wanted to do with your life,” he said. “My generation had to mature a little faster.”

He had studied four years when it was rudely interrupted. At the time, Poland had a communist government. Religious freedom and the Catholic faith were frowned upon, even though a large percentage of the country’s population has always been Catholic.

“We were considered suspicious,” Kopec said. He recalled the time that the SB, the Polish version of the KGB, came through his high school, looking for “dirt” on him. It soon became clear to Kopec that if he was going to continue pursuing his religious goals, Poland was not the place to do it. So he left.

“It wasn’t really a problem getting out, since they didn’t really want me there,” he said with a smile.

With \$10 in his pocket, Kopec headed to Newark, N.J., where he arrived June 21, 1988. There he reunited with his mother, who had come to the U.S. a couple years prior.



Blessings

CHAP (MAJ) Rajmund Kopec, presides over a Catholic service the first week of Easter April 23 at Destiny Chapel, Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

“I wanted to continue to study to be a priest, so the first thing I did was started to learn English,” Kopec remembered. He took classes five days a week for six hours a day for three months while living at the Rectory of The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Wallington, NJ.

“Some priests from the Polish Immigrant Parish looked after me,” he said. “They took care of my food and gave me a place to stay.”



Songbird

A Soldier sings a hymn during Catholic service the first week of Easter April 23 at Destiny Chapel, Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

By December, Kopec had already learned enough English to apply to college and continue to pursue his religious dreams and become a Catholic priest. Becoming a priest is a lengthy endeavor. In the United States, a priest must have a 4-year bachelor's degree, then pass a psychological test and apply for major seminary. Seminary is an additional four to five years of graduate school, to become an ordained Catholic priest.

Kopec was accepted to Seton Hall University and worked two part-time jobs in addition to taking 24 credits a semester. Still, after having taken 12 to 15 subjects at a time in college in Poland, Kopec said he had "a blast" in college. He secured loans to help pay for his education, and on May 30, 1992, Kopec was ordained in Newark, N.J.

Once ordained, Kopec said he was working in a Catholic parish when he heard about Army chaplains. He did some research and the idea of providing ministry in the Army excited and interested him, so he decided to give it a try. That was nine years ago. He was 31 when he entered the Army.

"I decided it would kind of be a pay-back for all the opportunities this country has given me," he said.

Kopec, who serves in Headquarters and Support Company, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, is one of only 98 Catholic priests in the Army. He said working as a priest in the Army has enabled him to learn more about and respect other religions, and also give him a stronger love for the tradition of the Catholic religion. He said he looks forward to working with and discussing the faiths of other Army chaplains and rabbis. He enjoys being in the Army but also said that every time he meets a new commander he tells them he is first and foremost a priest.

"I will stay in the Army as long as I am able to continue to serve as a priest," he said.

During this deployment to Iraq, Kopec, who was recently promoted to Major, has presided over Catholic services to Soldiers throughout the 101st Airborne Division, and has even got a chance to work with members of the Polish Army.

Kopec said when he was growing up in Poland, he never thought he would ever live in the United States, much less be a Catholic priest and an Army chaplain.

"The United States seemed like such a far away land, I never thought I would live there," he said.

But now that he is serving as an Army Chaplain, Kopec said there is nothing he would rather be doing.

"I am having so much fun in ministry right now, I couldn't think of doing something else," Kopec said. "This is one of the greatest blessings in my life."



NEWS

Better than 100-percent

Work orders come in and work orders leave Company B, 96th Aviation Support Battalion

Story and photos by SGT Ryan Matson
101st Combat Aviation Brigade



Getting 'Er Done

SGT Lee Christie (left) and SPC Jason O'Dell (right), both engine mechanics from Company B, 96th Aviation Brigade, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, work on a Blackhawk helicopter engine to be installed in a helicopter installed during a maintenance reset at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

Company B, 96th Aviation Support Battalion Maintenance Company is responsible for repairs on all four of the airframes flown by the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade – Kiowa Warrior, Chinook, Blackhawk and Apache helicopters

“I’ve never been in a unit that’s been over 100-percent on all their work orders, and this is the fifth month in a row this company has done it,” SSG Steve Dickson, a Quality Control Noncommissioned Officer who signs off on the mechanics work, said.

The company is consistently exceeding 100-percent on its production index, meaning that every shop in the company has not only completed their work orders in the allotted amount of time given by Army standards, but ahead of time. The company takes on more than the usual workload of an aviation maintenance unit while still eliminating any backlog tasks awaiting special parts or procedures.

The feat is especially impressive considering the high number of flight hours the brigade has flown over the course of the deployment, Company B commander, MAJ Joseph Crocitto, said. The brigade is on pace to fly roughly three times the amount of flight hours it did during the last deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom One in 2003. As of May 1, the Brigade had already logged over 65,000 flight hours. These massive flight hours generate a tremendous workload for B Company.

Since December, the company has kept its production index above 100-percent, peaking with a 106-percent rating in December. In January, the company posted a 102-percent rating, in February it climbed to 104-percent, March 101-percent and in April 102 percent.

“Ninety percent is the Army standard,” 1SG Vernon Brown, Company B first sergeant, noted.

So how did B Company get above 100-percent on its work orders? “We started in the hole,” Crocitto, said. As the unit was preparing to deploy, it received about 250 work orders on various helicopter components throughout the brigade, and brought those work orders with them to Iraq. As the company began working here at Operating Base Speicher, it progressively cut into that backlog through the efforts of the various mechanics and technicians. Crocitto said a typical job for the company would be for a team of avionics repairmen to fix a helicopter radio, or for a sheet metal specialist to patch a damaged piece of the airframe. The company receives an average of 22 work orders a day, or about 680 each month. This means, the last few months, the company has been doing more than 680 jobs a month, each inspected by QC NCOs like Dickson, who work directly for the commander, to ensure standards are maintained.

“We have cut that original 250 work order backlog down to about 9 jobs,” Crocitto said. “The goal is to catch up and level out at 100-percent turn-around each month, perfection.”

Another factor Crocitto said has contributed to the success of the unit’s production is the unique structuring of his company. Whereas an aviation intermediate maintenance (AVIM) company would typically consist of three 100 plus Soldier platoons, (Maintenance, Component Repair and Headquarters), Company B has seven smaller platoons. The Maintenance platoon split three ways into Apache, Kiowa Warrior and Blackhawk/Chinook Platoons focused on scheduled “Phase” maintenance for their respective aircraft. Component Repair moved its weapons technicians to the Apache and Kiowa Warrior platoons, then divided into Shops and Avionics platoons. Headquarters remained essentially unchanged, other than increasing the supply room staff to support the over 320 Soldiers in the company. The addition of the specialized Aviation Support Equipment and Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (ASE/DART) platoon, called “Aces,” makes up the seventh platoon.

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Body work

SGT Jeremiah Roman, an airframe mechanic with Company B, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, works on the aft pylon of a Chinook CH47-D helicopter to repair cracks in the airframe.

The shops platoon services all aircraft components including engine and rotor systems, transmissions, sheet metal and hydraulics systems. The avionics platoon repairs and services optical systems including Night Vision Goggles, thermal sights, intercom systems, navigation systems VHF and FM radios, and aircraft electrical systems.

Crocitto said perhaps the biggest reason his company is able to achieve such high production levels is due to the creation of the ASE/DART platoon. This platoon handles all the duties which would normally fall on the Soldiers in a three-platoon company as additional duties, causing unnecessary distractions. The “Aces” platoon maintains all of the support equipment such as aviation power units, tractors, fork lifts and the tool room. They execute aircraft recovery operations, and coordinate calibrations and petroleum issue and turn in. “They are the backbone of the company, allowing all the other platoons to focus on their specific mission, which increases the productivity of the entire company,” he said.

According to CSM Mark Herndon, the 96th Aviation Support Battalion Command Sergeant Major, “B Company does genuine multi-functional missions including providing

over 50 Soldiers to guard the entry control point each day, and battalion and brigade material handling missions. When you add in over 30 additional Soldiers on leave on any given day, their aviation maintenance efficiency and production is even more exceptional.”

Another area the company has excelled in, Crocitto said, is fast and proficient phases on aircraft, which they pull on Blackhawk, Chinook, Kiowa Warrior and Apache helicopters. After every 360 and 720 hours flown, Blackhawk helicopters go through scheduled maintenance phases. During these phases, the Blackhawk mechanics, Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 15T, will do the majority of the overall work while the mechanics who are specialized in a certain area, such as the sheet metal and engine mechanics, tend to specific problem areas. The 360-hour phases are not as in-depth as 720-hour phases, and must be done within 15 days. Mechanics have up to 30 days to complete the 720-hour phase.

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The Blackhawk phase teams in Company B, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, have been completing Phase I maintenance, including test flights, in less than 14 days, with Phase II taking an average of 21 days, Dickson said. The phases may take longer when additional, more severe problems are uncovered during the course of the maintenance, but Company B is still well ahead of the standard timeline. Crocitto said the company and brigade complete phases about two days faster than the average.

SPC Christopher Ashley, Company B, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, is one of the 15Ts who works on a phase team. He discussed what happens when a helicopter goes into phase.

“Basically we have the preventive maintenance instruction manual to go by,” he said. “We take off the doors, engines, the main and tail rotors. We’re looking for cracks either outside or inside the aircraft and checking the torque of all the moving parts. This is Phase number Eleven for us on Blackhawks since November.” When the phase work is complete, the aircraft is taken up by a test pilot and evaluated.

LTC Joseph Jellison, the 96th Aviation Support Battalion Commander said, “The Soldiers of B Company jumped right into triple the amount of work they had at Fort Campbell, supporting every phase in the brigade, with no civilian contractor support, and exceeded every maintenance performance measure. I couldn’t be more impressed.”

The mechanics have worked 12 to 14 hour days since they arrived in Iraq eight months ago. With the workload, and the Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities on hand, Dickson said the time has passed quickly.

“These guys give 110-percent when it comes to aircraft,” Dickson said.

The mechanics have continued to perform at their high rate of productivity, and Dickson said the numbers are not something they worry too much about. “We just get work in and get it out.”



NEWS

Staying Flexible

Soldiers from Company E, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, as adaptable as they come

Story and photos by SGT Ryan Matson
101st Combat Aviation Brigade



Shining spurs

PV2 Josh Brady (left), E Troop, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, of Selma, Ala., and SPC Nicole Brummond (right), E Troop, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, of St. Paul, Min., put the finishing touches on some of the Cav's trademark spurs they welded at Forward Operating Base Warrior, Kirkuk, Iraq.

No matter what is needed in 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, it seems as if E Troop is there to provide it, even if it means making it.

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“They love it, especially the welders,” Company E 1SG John Hendricks said. “They get to be creative and you wouldn’t believe the things these Soldiers make.”

SPC Nicole Brummond, E Troop, 2-17 Cav, a native of St. Paul, Minn., and the troop’s only welder by Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), came up with a design for some turrets with two other Soldiers, PV2 Josh Brady of Selma, Ala. and SGT Gary Cheeseman, of Trenton, N.J. They used two the doors from two High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) as the sides of the turret, and welded to other steel pieces to make movable .50 caliber machine gun turrets for up-armored HMMWVs and Light Medium Tactical vehicles for use in convoy ops. Once the design was complete, Brummond said it took them about a day and a half to make each turret.

The Troopers considered many things during the design process and decided on using HMMWV doors so that the gunners would still have visibility through the up-armored windows while remaining at eye-ball defilade when scanning their sectors and gunning.

“I never expected to be able to create this many things,” Brummond said. “It’s a lot of fun and I stay busy as long as my welder is operational.”

The Soldiers craftiness did not end with the turrets. They also constructed a ramp for the back of a Palletized Loading System (PLS) flat-rack, which is one of the vehicles used by the Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (DART). The ramp can be lowered when the bed is raised in order to allow vehicles to be driven or recovered onto the back quickly. Additionally, the welders have been able to make modifications to some of the vehicles they maintain. The troop is responsible for maintaining all of the squadron’s vehicles, plus 20 of the vehicles of the infantry company attached to 2-17 Cav, Company C, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment “Cold Steel.” On some of their vehicles they added platforms so Soldiers could scale walls on operations. The Troopers have also made flagpoles and guide-on holders, as well as, welding, of course, spurs for their Cav boots.



Brummond, left, and Brady, right, with a specialty turret they designed and welded.

“I enjoy it, being one of the few and far between female welders,” Brummund said. “It’s fun to make things and I get to meet a lot of different people. But what I really like is the history behind the Cav, it’s really something different and special.”

Some of the Soldiers ideas may be adopted by higher levels. SPC Nicholas Lenahan, a native of Virginia Beach, Va., recently made modifications to the Warlock LX systems inside vehicles. Usually these systems sit in the passenger seat, in a tight area where the radios are mounted. The Troopers created a system where the systems are moved to one of the rear passenger seats areas and mounted there where there is more room and more functional. Then, so as to allow the machine gunners more space, they raised the platform in the back. Now, Troopers can monitor these systems more efficiently and maximize the available space in the vehicle. Representatives from Electronic Warfare (Warlock LX) company have been impressed with the changes and the design, which the Cav has proven effective through combat convoy operations in theatre this deployment, is being considered for adoption division wide.

“This frees up a lot of space around the Track Commander (TC) or assistant driver, so he doesn’t get as much of a “sensory overload” with all this equipment around him,” CPT Mike Rasco, of Birmingham, Ala., E Troop’s commander said. “I am proud of our Troopers, they have taken it upon themselves to do a lot of good things. I’d put my welders up against any in the division.”

The ability to adapt and make things work is a necessity when deployed and Hendricks said his Soldiers continue to surprise him.

“I’ve got some tremendous troopers,” he said.



Ramp

1SG John Hendricks, E Troop, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment first sergeant, points proudly to one of the ramps his Soldiers welded.

PARTING SHOTS

SFC Kevin Lewis, Headquarters Support Company, 96th Aviation Support gets acquainted with a little Iraqi girl from the village of Bil Hazim on a humanitarian mission to the town in April.



MG James Pillsbury (left), Commanding General, U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, talks with Soldiers from Company D, 6th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, who maintain the battalion's Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters during a visit to the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade May 4 at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.