

## A Word from Colonel Miyamasu

December 07, 2004

Family and Friends,

Through the course of this deployment we depend on the support of our family and friends. In fact, back at Fort Hood, Texas, from where we deployed, the support network is very elaborate. Every week our Battalion commander, Colonel Miyamasu, updates the families back at Fort Hood. Undoubtedly, Colonel Miyamasu will be a prominent General in the Army one day after leading our Battalion through rigorous battle in Baghdad, Najaf, and Fallujah. With his permission, I share with you his last letter to our families.

I thought you may enjoy another person's perspective of life out here. In the letter he touches on our Thanksgiving meal, our everyday missions in conjunction with the Marines in Fallujah, and our living conditions. As you may have recently heard, our Brigade has been extended and will not likely return until the 16th month after our deployment. The length of our Brigade's tour is unprecedented and will be the longest one since World War II. In his letter he touches on the ups and downs of our morale.

The letter is more lengthy than my past emails to you, but again, this is written for the families who want all the details. I have added the parentheses to help decode some of the military "lingo." Enjoy!

Hello everyone! Welcome to another edition of the TF (Task Force) 1-5 weekly update. This week officially starts the holiday season and we hope that you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving! We were lucky enough to be treated to a special "turkey day" meal ourselves. The food was good, but not as good as home of course, but it was hot, plenty of it..so it was good!

The next thirty days are a special time of year where being with loved ones and friends is most important. Although we will be separated from you this holiday season, know that our love for you is a constant that keeps our morale up and a goal for us to get back home too! Also know that we are not alone out here. We are a very close-knit group who has really taken to caring for each other like brothers. We've been together a long time (11 straight months) and truly do care for one another. So think of us, but don't feel bad for us. We're doing OK! Now YOU guys go on and have a happy holiday season, enjoy the school break, and enjoy the festivities that only this time of year can bring! With that being said, I know what you came for so. LET'S GET TO IT!

In the last ten days MNC-I (Multinational Corps-Iraq) Forces have made tremendous progress in stabilizing the city of Fallujah. Elements from the 1st Marine Division have been relentless in their attack on the city. Resistance has been reduced from large groups to only small pockets of enemy fighters. The large number of insurgents killed or captured during the retaking of the city has reduced what used to be an insurgent/terrorist sanctuary to a city that has seen war, but is relatively cleaned out of these rogues. Recent offensive operations consisted mostly of clearing buildings and residences on a house-to-house basis. The phase of operations that we are currently in, "shaping and clearing" is meant to flush out all remaining enemy elements. Not only are we accomplishing that, we have also uncovered several large weapons caches consisting of IED (Improvised Explosive Device) making material, rockets, mortars, artillery rounds, TNT and plastic explosives, and small arms weapons. The capture of these weapons has saved an untold number of U.S. and MNC-I (Multinational Corps-Iraq) Soldiers' and Marines lives. We will continue to conduct these counter insurgency operations in Fallujah and its smaller surrounding towns where intelligence reports show insurgents may have fled.

Let me give you a brief overview of what happened. On 8 NOV 04, the 1st Marine Division began to employ indirect fires and close air support to reduce known defensive positions as well as clearing routes into Fallujah. Two regimental combat (RCT) teams formed the attack force into Fallujah. Both RCTs would attack from north to south. RCT-1 was on the west and contained 2-7 CAV. RCT-7 was in the east and they contained 2-2 IN, 1ID. On the outer cordon was 2BCT (2nd Brigade Combat Team), 1CD (1st Cavalry Division) containing 1-5 CAV, 1-5 IN (STRYKER, 25ID), 2 Marine Recon Battalion, and the 759th MP Battalion. The 2BCT essentially established the cordon around Fallujah from Baghdad to the Euphrates River on the west. To the west of the Euphrates, 2BCT, 2ID prevented the enemy from crossing the river, and the 3 Marine Light Armored Recon Battalion prevented crossing of the river to the southwest. For our part, 1-5 CAV had the north and northwestern portions of Fallujah, 1-5 IN had the northeast, 759th MP had the east and all roads coming from the east, and 2 MAR RECON had the southeast and south. We also had the 6th Battalion, 3rd Iraqi Army Brigade, which we employed in cordon and search missions around our perimeter. Who best to find a bad guy than an Iraqi, right? Within two days, both RCT's had pushed to the mid-point of Fallujah and began clearance operations to their rear as the numerous tunnels and basements contained caches and insurgents. There were three Iraqi Army Battalions that also did clearing operations with the RCTs and from all accounts, these units are indeed maturing into regular Army units. The attack continued for about 6 more days when both RCTs were able to break through the southern outskirts of Fallujah and chase the enemy into the kill zones of 2 MAR RECON. The RCTs are pulling some forces out of Fallujah that have cleared their zones, but there are still some Marine and Army units in contact with small enemy elements. Because it's a built up urban area, the advantage goes to the defender, which is the enemy in this case. However, with our firepower, so long as we can see the enemy, goes to us. They fire an AK-47, we fire 120mm tank or 25mm Bradley cannon. Seems fair to me.

Our mission was to secure Route MOBILE, a six-lane highway that runs from Baghdad to Ramadi, and circumvents Fallujah to the north. In securing this highway, the men had to control both sides of the highway out to 2 kilometers on each side of the highway. By keeping insurgents from leaving, and insurgents from reinforcing the ones caught in Fallujah, this established a cordon for the 1st Marine Division forces entering the inner city of Fallujah. In our zone, Commando was sealing off from the Euphrates River to a position known as the Vehicle Control Point 1 (VCP1). Mad Dogs held the line from the VCP1 to a bridge south along the Euphrates, and the area known as the Joint Coordination Cell (JCC). The Bushmasters held from the JCC to checkpoint 84. All the forces were designed to keep civilians from crossing either out of or into Fallujah across a major highway called Route Mobile. Our sector at that time was 27 kilometers long, or about 16 miles long. When 1-5 IN was called out to move to Mosul to reattach itself to its parent Brigade, we picked up their sector as well. However, we were fortunate to get the Marines of Alpha Company, 2nd Light Armored Recon (LAR) Battalion commanded by Capt John Griffin. The "Apaches" took over defending our east near the town of Kharma and did an exceptional job utilizing a Marine tank platoon (the same one that fought with us in Najaf) and a Bradley Platoon from Bushmasters. This was a superb unit, and they did an outstanding job. This brought our total frontage to about 60 kilometers of area we had to cover, and the men did an outstanding job. In fact, our cordon was so tight, the Marine Division Commander had to order us to loosen it up so that "innocents" could leave the area. The men were slightly upset that we had to do that, but we took solace in the knowledge that our cordon had done its job.

Since the last FRG (Family Readiness Group) letter we have made some great improvements to our living conditions here on Camp Baharia. By hiring trusted Iraqi nationals to make the desired upgrades we were able to improve our standard of living while gaining the trust and respect of some of the honest and hard working people of Iraq. When we first arrived at Camp Baharia we were shown a barren field and instructed to make ourselves at home. After the tents were erected and we took a look around, we immediately started finding ways to improve our new home. We have recently added wooden floors inside each of the living tents so that Soldiers and their gear are not in direct contact with the ground. We also had an electrician install multiple light fixtures in each tent so the Soldiers can see without the use of flashlights. We have brought in several heaters per tent as the night temperature is now beginning to dip into the forties. These changes may sound very basic but believe me they have made a vast improvement on Soldiers' opinion of the FOB (Forward Operating Base). I should know, I am living in the same tent with thirty other HAWG Soldiers! This gives those Soldiers the opportunity to chill out from the front line living conditions which are still rough. Most guys know how the settlers lived back in the late 1800s on the plains of the Midwest now. The Soldiers have erected huts, lined with sandbags and dirt, wooden floors, and makeshift showers. Aside from naming the mice that run in and out of the shacks, the guys are doing okay. We were able to get some portable heaters that take some of the chill out of the night air. Building up Baharia has helped let them take a break, when they can, which is something they need.

We are all accustomed to eating the standard military MRE (Meal Ready to Eat...ie. Boxed meal), but we have arranged to receive at least one hot contracted KBR meal a day. This meal usually comes as an early dinner and contains a very healthy and delicious variety of food, at least in comparison to an MRE! Our thanksgiving meal consisted of turkey, roast beef, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, waxed beans, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, tomato pasta, stuffing, and gravy. We also had over three types of deserts such as pecan pie, apple pie, and angel layer cake. Gatorade, water, sodas, teas, coffees, and other drinks were also available. We had the meal served during daylight hours instead of our usual night hours so that the food would stay warmer on our plates. I think the men really enjoyed eating their food. Leaders served the chow whether they were out on the front lines or back in Baharia. It brought a bit of civilization back to each of us, and took the sting out of being apart from our families. We were able to sit with a friend or brother and share in the meal. In light of our circumstances, we still have much to be thankful for. We have our families, our health, and each other. Like many of the guys say now, "it could be worse". I am thankful that I have these men to command, and the families that support their Soldier. With CSM (Command Sergeant Major) Steve Frennier as my battle buddy, we have weathered many events as a unit. There are more things in store, but I am thankful that I have experienced these events with these men.

The improvements have all scored big hits with the Soldiers, but the biggest improvement has to be the Army showers. Showering facilities were not available to us for our first few weeks here and we had to make do with whatever means we had to include baby wipes, soap, shampoo, and a bottle of water! Our supporting Quartermaster Company built and runs our new shower for us. Not only are the showers close and convenient, they are also warm, hot even (most of the time until the generator runs out of gas)! The Quartermaster Company that built us the shower is from a reserve unit and has done an outstanding job of providing support for us while we have been here. They weren't doing anything back at Camp Fallujah, so an enterprising NCO (Non Commissioned Officer) asked them to come on over to our area and this unit jumped at the chance to do their job. The opportunity to take a hot shower has improved the morale of the men by leaps and bounds. At least that stops us from being creative with using deodorant. We were using it to try and suppress our manly smells, but after awhile, even the deodorant was losing out. We did figure out that you could put a little under your nose at night and you didn't smell yourself so much before you fell asleep. Heck, Einstein invented the theory of relativity; we invented the relative use of deodorant. I also think during reunion and reintegration training, you all will have to remind us that there is no water shortage in the United States, and taking baths is a normal, everyday event for most people living in the US of A.

Things were relatively quiet for us this week from an operations side. Contact with any hostile elements was almost non-existent. Companies worked in their sectors and everything went smoothly. But we've come to expect the unexpected as far as challenges are concerned. With our job, you never know what situation may arise that requires immediate attention in a moments notice. Sure enough, when things were just about too quiet, we got a report from a BUSHMASTER element that one of their HMMWVs (humvee vehicle)) had rolled onto its side. It was immediately assessed that no one was injured in the incident. All we had to do now was deploy a recovery asset to pull the vehicle back onto its wheels. The catch? It had been raining for the last few days and the ground was extremely soft. We couldn't very well leave the vehicle on its side, so off went the ten-ton "wrecker" to recover the vehicle.

A few hours go by, and we get another call but not the call we expected. You guessed it; the ten-ton is now stuck in the mud! When it was all said and done three days had passed and three recovery vehicles, two Bradleys, one bulldozer, one 10-ton wrecker, and one HMMWV had to be unstuck! The upside to this episode is that no one was injured. Some intel (intelligence) we did find out about the canal system (some very obvious): The canals are deep in some places (at least three guys fell in); there are fresh water eels in the canal; the water is very cold; the banks are very slippery; and the canals are multi-purpose, from irrigation to drinking to pooper mover. In any case, the guys that fell into the canals took a shower when they were done with that mission. The downside is that someone is surely going to be the butt of some ribbing at the next BLACK KNIGHT Ceremony!

The companies have done a great job of being flexible, as usual. They have accomplished all additional tasks assigned to them and continually meet and overcome a variety of challenges along the way. Recently the COMMANDOS have been tasked to conduct a mission with a Marine Corp element. The mission will keep MNC-I (Multinational Corps-Iraq) forces in pursuit of insurgent leadership into the surrounding areas of Fallujah. This is just one of the many ways that the presence of Task Force 1-5 and other 2BCT (2nd Brigade Combat team) elements has added to the overall flexibility and combat effectiveness of MNC-I forces during recent combat operations in Fallujah. All the companies have come under one form or another of enemy contact whether it has been small arms fire or mortar fire. In all instances, the men have done an outstanding job of keeping their composure, and getting their jobs completed. Your Soldiers are battle tested, and there isn't much that they haven't seen before. I am very proud of them.

With the heaviest fighting of Fallujah behind us, we are subject to move to another area of operation in support of the disruption missions assigned to the Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC- I). Along with 2BCT, our TF (Task Force) is part of the Operational Reserve force (OPRES) which is subject to the taskings of MNC-I. Essentially, we go to the trouble spots that units in contact are having difficulties suppressing. There are many reasons why units in contact could have this problem, but the 2BCT is the Corps' answer to filling the shortfall in combat power. There has been an unintended cost of having done well in the past. In many discussions of future operations, our TF comes up as one of the solutions. It has become a badge of honor for the men. We don't necessarily like the fact that we are subject to moving around Iraq, but we do feel good about being known for our ability to get the tough missions accomplished. There are several areas that we could go to, to include moving back into Baghdad. However, as we get sent to new places, we'll get word back to where we are located. Currently, both the 1st Cavalry Division and the 1st Marine Division are trying to keep us, or get us, under their control. We'll see how that works out, and that will determine how much longer we stay in Fallujah, and where we go next. Interestingly enough, the Commanding General and Command Sergeant Major of the 1st Marine Division came by and visited us before the big fight and talked with some of the Soldiers. At the end, they turned to me and CSM (Command Sergeant Major) Frennier and remarked what a pleasure it was to meet our guys. None of them asked for anything, and they were ready to do their mission. They said that so many other units were asking for so many things and stating their challenges. They felt very confident that we would get our mission done, and we did.

I'd like to talk about the recent redeployment news that caught some by surprise, and frustrated many. I can honestly say that all of us, to a man, were extremely disappointed when the announcement was made that we were extended till mid-March 2005. Interestingly enough, the FRGs (Family Readiness Groups) found out about this announcement before the leadership did through a VTC (Video Teleconference), an attempt by the senior chain of command to get the information into the hands of the FRGs as soon as possible. The FRG Leaders then did what they are designed to do, inform the FRG members, by putting out a pretty good notice about the announcement. I commend the FRG Leaders for getting the information out as soon as they did since we've always been in the position to put out the information we had, good or bad, as soon as we had it. I in turn made a radio announcement over the Task Force Command net to let the units and Soldiers know what had happened. As disappointing as the news was, what was interesting from my perspective was the fact that the men came up to me and said they felt this was going to happen only because they knew going into this operation that we might be here this long. They weren't happy, but they were ready to continue their mission. I won't lie. Some of the men were angry, some were sad, and three guys were happy they were getting an extra \$1000 a month (I will send them to psych eval after we redeploy). As the CSM and I get out on the ground with the guys, I think they've weathered the storm of the information and are ready to move on with whatever missions come our way. Our role in the elections hasn't been defined for us yet, but I don't expect that to be clear until the agency coordinating the elections briefs their plan to the government and to our military leaders. It could take awhile before we hear anything on that. In the meantime, there are probably some moves within Iraq that we will make prior to the elections occurring. Like I mentioned before, we'll let you know where we are once we get there.

I cannot sugarcoat the news. I tend to be a "glass is half- full" type, but it did take my breath away for a minute. Brenda (Colonel Miyamasu's wife and head of the Family Readiness Group) told me that the response back at home ran the gamut of emotion, and interestingly enough, some supporters rallied to help those who were angry. I told Brenda that the men probably reflected emotions back home for awhile, but I also know that many of us know that the harder tasks in life are being accomplished back at home. You see, even though it is dangerous here, we are trained to deal with the events that happen here. Our equipment is good, our NCOs (Non Commissioned Officers) are the best, and the officers are doing their best to keep us moving in a positive direction. We don't have many distractions here in Iraq, even less when we're on missions like Fallujah and Najaf. We have learned to help one another to get through things, fix things, and accomplish tasks together. But, we know that there are a myriad of tasks that you must complete on a day-to-day basis that challenge you and the kids, and the distractions to your time are plentiful. I think the knowledge that we are not able to fully assist you in getting these things done is the foremost reason that the men were sad. We know that you all are doing your very best to make things work back there, and we are so very, very proud of you. We know that it isn't easy, and the sacrifices you are making are immeasurable. Yet, when our deployment is over, and we can all look back on what each of us has accomplished, all of us will have become much better people because of it. It is a tough price to pay to become the people we are, but it is something that so many citizens in the United States will be grateful for. Yes, they will be grateful for your actions as well as ours. Only the finest families can deal with this type of adversity, and they reside with us.

So, I ask that all of us hang in there. I gave the men 24 hours to complain about the news. Some took 36 hours; some took 12. I think we're all focused again on getting the mission done, whatever the mission may be. Your Soldiers have built a reputation on being a no-nonsense unit, ready to fix any problems that may occur. They don't pound their chest and brag about themselves. They walk with a confidence that only fighters have, ones that have seen the worst that life can throw at them, and win.

EML (Leave to the U.S) has restarted and we're sending 60 guys home in DEC leaving 19 more that haven't taken EML or emergency leave. These Soldiers will go back in JAN. I have put in place a policy that prevents officers and senior NCOs from being back on EML over the Christmas Holidays. Those slots are going to the Soldiers. We are looking at putting some guys who arrived to the theater after we arrived, and those that took early emergency leave, as possibly going on EML too. We'll let you know what that decision is when it is approved. In regards to the extra \$1000 per month, we still don't know how that will be paid to us whether it starts the month that it takes affect or we have to file for this after we redeploy. We will find out and let everyone know as soon as we know. Finally, where we will fly out of back to the states will probably be from Kuwait. There are plans that allow some Soldiers to fly from Baghdad to the states, but most of us will go out of Kuwait. It's too early to even speculate about the redeployment flights, but once we're in Kuwait, it'll become much more clear.

As for me, I look forward to coming home and helping Brenda with raising the kids, maintaining the household, and changing the oil of the cars. Yes, Brenda is trying to set an endurance record for engine oil, so we'll have to fix that when I get home. I also have the additional duties of cleaning hairbrushes, picking up dog poop, and cleaning the kitty litter. I have much to look forward to when I get home!

Well, that concludes another wrap up of the latest actions and activities of the TF 1-5 BLACK KNIGHTS. Thank you for all that you are doing to keep the home fires burning, and please be safe during this holiday season. Have a great month leading up to Christmas!!!! We're hoping Santa makes an appearance over here too. Hopefully he will bring us something other than Beef Stew MREs. We love you and are thinking of you all! See you next week.

**BLACK KNIGHTS!!!**

LTC Myles Miyamasu and CSM Steve Frennier



Colonel Miyamasu briefs us prior to mission.



Colonel Miyamasu and Command Sergeant Major Frennier award the Combat Medical Badge earned for “participating in combat operations under enemy hostile fire to liberate Iraq.” Standing on my right is my partner in crime, physician assistant, Lieutenant Dean Stulz.