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From man's best friend to service member's best friend K9s help accomplish mission in Iraq

SGT. RODNEY FOLIENTE
2ND BCT, 4TH INF. DIV.



CAMP ECHO – When Servicemembers are deployed and conducting patrols, they rely on their battle buddies to keep them safe and offer them companionship. Some believe there is no better battle buddy than man's best friend.

Military dogs have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and deployed to combat theaters since World War I and continue to protect Servicemembers and civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The K9 team of Marines, Soldiers and dogs attached to Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division provide an extra level of vigilance and threat-detecting capabilities to the Warhorse Brigade, as well as a level of camaraderie that helps the Servicemembers feel more at home.

Each dog is trained to find explosives and weapons caches, as well as providing force protection and threat-seeking capabilities to the mission. Their very presence also brings a level of psychological deterrence to anyone considering an attack or any other threatening actions.

These loyal dogs search roadways, vehicles, open areas and buildings for threats. They are attached to units conducting patrol missions and assist with local security at Camp Echo, said Marine Staff Sgt. Chris Willingham, Security Battalion military working dog kennel master, based out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., and attached to the STB.

"We've conducted joint dismounted patrols with the (Iraqi Security Forces), open area searches and conducted training to show how dogs can be implemented at the Iraqi check points," said Willingham.

"They have a newfound respect when they see our dogs work, the dogs in training, their obedience and see what they can do; what they bring to

See DOGS, page 3



Photo by Sgt. Rodney Foliente

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Lucca, an explosive detection dog, and Marine Staff Sgt. Chris Willingham, military working dog handler, Security Battalion, based out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., and attached to STB, 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., share a hug at Camp Echo Jan. 10. Willingham, who hails from Tuscaloosa, Ala., credits Lucca with saving his life twice on a previous deployment. The pair has been together for more than two years. Willingham is also the kennel master of the Camp Echo K9 team.

3-142 AHB mechanics help continue missions

Pfc. JASMINE N. WALTHALL
TF 449



CAMP STRIKER – For the members of Company E, 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter Battalion, a National Guard unit out of Patchogue, N.Y., the job begins well before helicopters begin their flight.

Company E is made up of heavy and light equipment mechanics, refuelers, generator mechanics and suppliers. The mechanics faced quite a challenge upon arrival in country. They were tasked to completely rebuild and repair all of the vehicles in the motor pool.

“It was a big job,” says Spc. Luis A. Lopez, 3-142nd AHB heavy construction equipment mechanic, “But we all pulled together and got the motor pool up and in working order.”

The mechanics service all types of vehicles, from construction equipment to light equipment vehicles, such as humvees.

“In a typical month we service anywhere from 15 to 20 vehicles,” says Spc. Bill A. Flaherty, 3-142 AHB heavy equipment mechanic.

“We also conduct scheduled maintenance such as technical inspections, which are annual inspections that involve tearing down the entire vehicle, removing tires, draining old fluids and inspecting the brakes.”

The mechanics also perform preventative maintenance checks and services on the vehicles to ensure they continue to work properly and maintain the mission.

The ground mechanics have the important task of working on the trucks necessary for refueling aircraft. The refuelers perform hot fueling, which involves fueling the aircraft while the aircraft is still running, and cold fueling which is done when the aircraft is completely shut down.

“We are a crucial part of the refueling mission,” says Sgt. Darryl K. Joseph, 3-142 AHB light equipment mechanic from Brooklyn, N.Y. “The vehicles that fuel the aircraft may need repair in the middle of the night, and if they are not fixed right away, the mission is impacted. It’s our job to make sure that does not happen.”

The mechanics also use their skills to assist them in their civilian careers.

Flaherty, who owns a trucking company in Long Island, N.Y., uses the skills he learned in Advanced Individual Train-



Photo by Pfc. Jasmine N. Walthall

Spc. Bill A. Flaherty, 3-142 AHB light equipment mechanic, inspects the alternator on a humvee. These routine inspections help to prevent major damage to vehicles.

ing on a daily basis.

“AIT taught me about heavy trucks and equipment and how to fix them,” says Flaherty. “My company uses trucks to deliver sand and equipment, and now when those trucks fail, I am able to cut down on time and costs because the Army taught me how to be a proficient mechanic.”

Lopez has had similar experiences in his civilian career as an employee at a local construction company.

“I learned how to drive heavy equipment vehicles in AIT,” says Lopez, a native of Long Island, N.Y. “So when I started at my job, I was already prepared to not only drive the vehicles, but fix them as well.”

Be it in the military or the civilian world, the mechanics of the 3-142 AHB are an important part of the mission. It is because of them the mission continues.

THE Mountain View

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Task Force 449



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DOGS

From page 1

the fight.”

All dog handlers and their dogs receive time to bond and get to know each other as they train together to certify as a team prior to deployment.

Each of the four dog teams consists of a dog handler and his dog. The dog and handler work together, sleep together and play together; they are always with one another.

Each team forms a tight bond, and all together, the four dogs and four handlers make up an impressive, yet companionable K9 unit. As the dog handlers say, each of the dogs appropriately outranks the handler by one grade.

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Lucca

“She’s a Marine as well. She actually outranks me. I have to stand at parade rest for her,” joked Willingham.

His dog is named Marine Gunnery Sgt. Lucca, and she is a mix of Belgian Malinois and German Shepherd. “Lucca is smart, easy to train, extremely loyal and has a lot of personality.” They deployed together to Iraq in October 2008.

Willingham said when a dog is in the front of a walking patrol and spots an improvised explosive device or other threat, he feels a great deal of job satisfaction. Willingham said he is proud of Lucca, knowing her actions and ca-

pabilities can save the lives of Servicemembers and civilians.

Willingham, who hails from Tuscaloosa, Ala., has been involved with training approximately 50 different dog handlers and dogs and has been paired with two different dogs during his career.

He has served in the Marines for 10 years and as a dog handler for nine. Lucca entered the military program more than two years ago and was quickly paired with Willingham.

“We’ve got a lot of loyalty between us. We’ve been together for two deployments now and she saved my life a couple of times, so I’ve definitely got a tight bond with this dog,” he said affectionately, scratching and petting Lucca.

She relished the attention, resting a paw upon his hand, grinning and showing off her large teeth. As he spoke, she constantly shifted her gaze between watching their surroundings and glancing at her handler.

“When you hear ‘man’s best friend’ you think of a dog that’s loyal and obedient. No matter what kind of day you might have, the dog is going to be there for you and vice versa, you’re always there for the dog,” said Willingham.

“The best part of being a dog handler is kind of two-fold. When it’s time to work, the implications of these dogs being successful means that Soldiers’ lives are being saved. On the other hand, in between missions, it’s good to just let the dog be a dog, run around and bring a piece of home to the troops that you’re supporting. The dogs act as

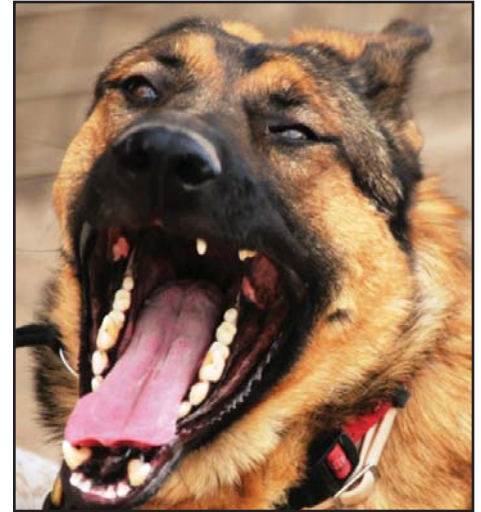


Photo by Sgt. Rodney Foliente

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Lucca, an explosive detection dog attached to STB, 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., shows off her formidable teeth while yawning at Camp Echo Jan. 10. She is a mix of Belgian Malinois and German Shepherd and has served in the Marine Corps for more than two years.

a big morale boost for the troops,” said Willingham.

To the observer, it is obvious they share a strong bond and comfortable relationship.

When asked why he became a dog handler he replied with a laugh, “If someone told you you’d get paid to play with dogs, wouldn’t you take the job?”

Editors Note: This is the first part of a series highlighting the four dogs in this story as well as other exceptional canine Servicemembers.

Savings deposit program offers options to deployed Soldiers

1st Lt. CHRIS DUNPHY
MND - C



CAMP VICTORY – Deployed Soldiers wanting to return home to a sizable nest egg can do so by investing in the federally-sponsored Savings Deposit Program. The program is open to U.S. Soldiers overseas who are receiving imminent-danger pay and Combat-zone tax relief.

The program provides a guaranteed 10 percent return on all monies invested by a Soldier up to \$10,000, according to Spc. Timothy Baker, a finance specialist within Camp Victory’s Finance Office. He said the return is compounded quarterly, and is applied to the average quarterly balance.

The interest stops accruing 90 days after eligibility for SDP stops. Unlike regular earnings, interest accrued in the SDP program is not exempt from taxes. Soldiers can contribute by submitting cash or check. Unlike regular Army Soldiers, reservists do not have the allotment option.

According to Baker, the checks are exempt from the \$200 monthly check-cashing limit imposed upon deployed Soldiers, but the contribution cannot exceed the Soldier’s monthly take-home pay. Once a contribution is made, the Soldier receives a receipt, or Cash Collection Voucher, which Baker recommends should be filed safely away. He says SDP deposits can be tracked by the Soldier on the Army Knowledge Online MyPay system.

“I also recommend soldiers making deposits attempt to do so by the 10th of each month,” Baker said. “Deposits received after the 10th won’t begin accruing interest until the first day of the following month.”

Withdrawals can be made upon termination of a Soldier’s tour of duty up to 90 days after completion of duty. Emergency-based withdrawals may also be made upon approval of the Soldier’s commander. Soldiers may sign up for the program after having served at least 30 consecutive days overseas. Contact the Camp Victory Finance Office for more information or to sign up for the Savings Deposit Program.

Staff Section Round-up

IG Corner: Cost of Living Allowance

Recently, the question of a Cost of Living Allowance for Fort Drum has come up in many forums: the Blog, the Commanding General's chat and dinners.

Many Soldiers are familiar with the COLA paid to Soldiers stationed overseas. This article will provide a few facts on the implementation of the Continental United States COLA.

The COLA was authorized in the FY 1995 National Defense Authorization Act to address non-housing costs of living.

For 2009, there are 49 areas in the Continental U.S. eligible for CONUS COLA.

COLA rates for the Continental U.S.

are updated once a year and changes go into effect Jan. 1 of each year. At that time, an area's COLA may increase or even decrease, based on the changes in the cost of living in the area.

COLA rates are based on a service member's pay grade, years of service and number of dependents.

An area is considered high cost if the cost of living for that area exceeds 108 percent of that national average of non-housing costs. COLA takes into account the availability of commissary, exchange and hospital facilities at a specific duty station, because service members without this infrastructure tend to have a higher cost of living. However, not having this infrastructure

is not enough in and of itself to qualify an area for COLA.

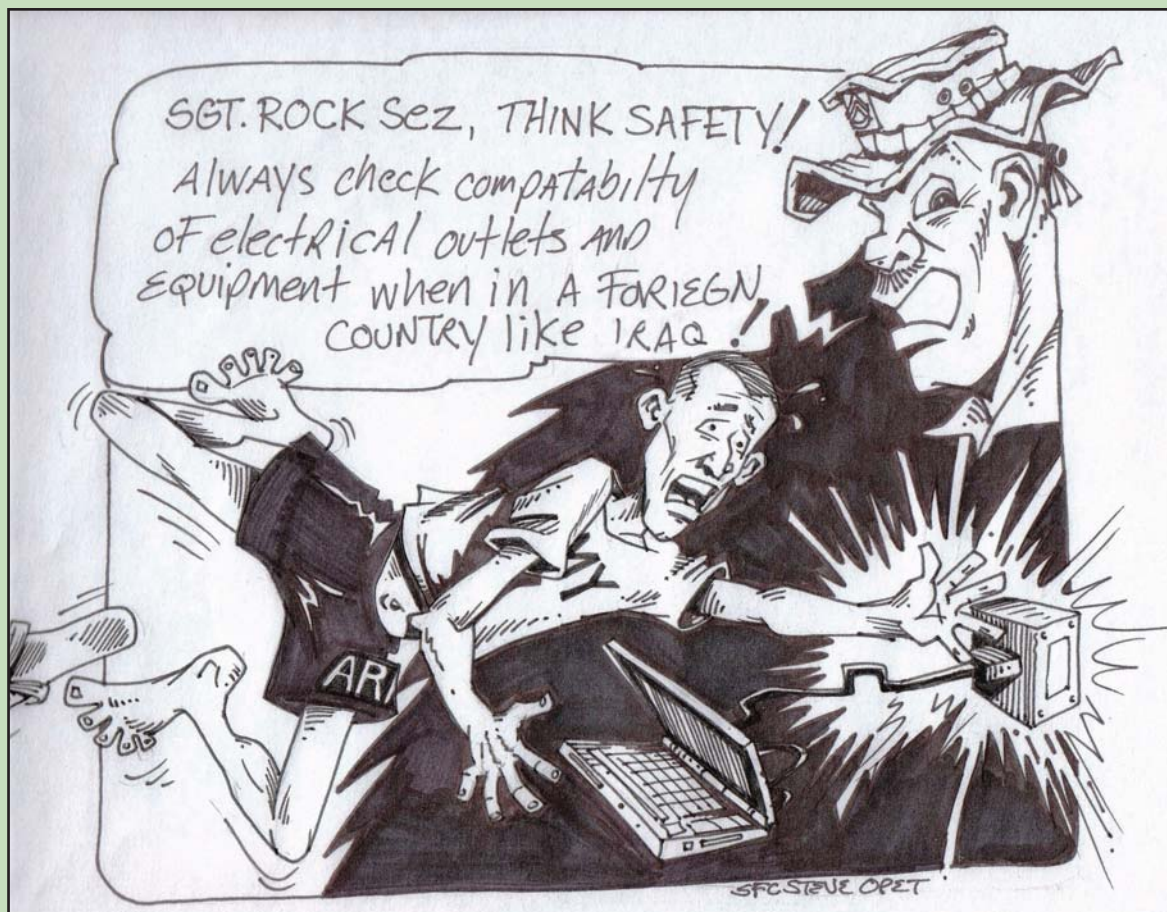
CONUS COLA, unlike overseas COLA, is taxed. To offset these taxes, CONUS COLA rates incorporate an 18 percent increase to cover the average income tax.

In cases where a service member is geographically separated from his family, he will be paid (or not paid) COLA based on his permanent duty station zip code.

There is plenty of information on the web in regards to COLA; we hope this short article at least answers your basic questions.

*Thanks,
Your IG team.*

Opet's Odyssey Classics



Headline Round-up

World News:

WASHINGTON - A CIA officer in Africa is under investigation for two separate instances in which he was accused of rape, according to court documents and a government official. Court papers filed in federal court in Washington by a State Department investigator show two Algerian women came forward separately to say they had been sexually assaulted by the man while at his home in Algiers, where he was stationed. The court documents identify the man as Andrew Warren. He has not been charged with a crime. An affidavit submitted by an investigator in November sought to search Warren's computer for evidence of past sexual assaults.

U.S. News:

BLAKELY, Ga. – Food and Drug Administration officials called for a recall of all products containing peanut butter, peanut paste and peanut oil manufactured since Jan. 1, 2007 at the Blakely, Ga., processing center operated by Peanut Corp. of America. That could vastly increase the number of recalled food and other products in the nation's consumer supply. Additional strains of salmonella also have been detected at the plant, although federal officials emphasized they have confirmed no illnesses beyond those associated with the current Salmonella Typhimurium outbreak.

Sports News:

HOUSTON - A spokeswoman for actor Mickey Rourke says he won't be taking his role as a professional wrestler into a real-life ring after all. Paula Woods told The Associated Press on Wednesday night that Rourke will not wrestle WWE superstar Chris Jericho at Wrestlemania 25 in April at Houston's Reliant Stadium. Woods wrote in an e-mail that the Oscar-nominated actor "will not be participating in Wrestlemania. He is focusing entirely on his acting career." Rourke portrays professional wrestler Randy the Ram in the acclaimed movie "The Wrestler." He made a surprise announcement about the wrestling event Sunday night on the red carpet before the Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles.

Quote of the Day

*"Keep your fears to yourself, but share your courage with others."
– Robert Lewis Stevenson*

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For the answer to today's puzzle, go to:



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AROUND THE COMMUNITY

Lion's Den

Jan. 30
Texas Hold'em @ 8p.m.
Fridays
"Gospel Hour: Moments of Joy"
@ noon

Fishbowl Gym

Jan. 30
Full Body Aerobics @ 6 a.m.
Abs class @ 7:30 p.m.

Freedom Chapel

Tuesdays
God & the Military @ 7 - 9:30 p.m. three weeks
Wednesdays
Guitar Lessons @ 7 p.m.
Fridays
Catholic Hour @ 6:30 p.m.
Sunday
Protestant (Traditional) @ 10 a.m.
Roman Catholic Mass @ noon
LDS Service @ 2 p.m.
Eastern Orthodox @ 4 p.m.
Protestant (Contemporary) @ 7 p.m.

Slayer

Jan. 31
Slayer 10k run at 7 a.m.
Assemble at MWR south by 6:30-6:45 a.m. for sign in.
Feb. 7
R & B group "FRESH" is performing on Slayer's gazebo in front of the fishbowl gym @ 7:30 p.m.

Victory

Jan. 30
The U.S. Air Force band will be performing @ 7:30 p.m.
Feb. 4
Swing Dance Lessons @ 8 - 10 p.m. Building 51 MWR

Cropper

Jan. 31
The U.S. Air Force band will be performing @ 7 p.m.