



NAVY MED NAVIGATOR

Marines Awarded Purple Heart

In World News:

U.S. military leaders said Sunday that coalition air forces had clobbered Iraq's elite Republican Guard sites in the previous 24 hours and that they had "largely eliminated" Baghdad's air defenses. The strikes, characterized as "shaping the battlefield," came as ground forces heading toward Baghdad regrouped, refueled and reinforced supply lines in advance of anticipated engagements with Republican Guard units surrounding the city.

Officials at Central Command told NBC News Sunday that it had been the "most intense night of the war" for air assaults against Iraq's Republican Guard forces. As one official put it: "They are getting ... smacked out of them."

In Navy News:

ABOARD USS KITTY HAWK, At Sea (NNS) -- America's military presence in the Arabian Gulf has attracted the attention of media from around the world, and in an effort to support a Department of Defense-wide public affairs plan, nearly 30 members of national and international media outlets currently are embedded with USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63).

Media coverage of military operations will shape public perceptions of the national security environment now and in years to come, according to Kitty Hawk Public Affairs Officer Lt. Brook DeWalt. "It's important for the world to know what we do in support of national policy and how much hard work we put forth on a daily basis fighting for freedom," he said.

According to DeWalt, Kitty Hawk is in a unique position being America's only permanently forward-deployed aircraft carrier.

In Sports:

March Madness continues its run to the final four. Marquette and Kansas have already advanced to the final four, which is scheduled for next weekend. Texas, Michigan State, Oklahoma, and Syracuse continue elite eight play this weekend, with hopes of claiming one of the two remaining spots in the final four. The basketball championship game is scheduled for April 7 at the Superdome in New Orleans.

*Story and Photos by
JOSN Erica Mater
Comfort Public Affairs*

Nine Marines were awarded the Purple Heart today aboard USNS Comfort. U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Commander Lt. Gen. Earl B. Hailston came on board to present the decoration personally to each Marine.

The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to any member of the armed forces who, while serving, has been wounded or killed. The Ma-



Marine Cpl. Jacob Hobkins (Above) sits with Marine Forces Central Commander Lt. Gen. Earl Hailston after being awarded the Purple Heart Sunday. Hobkins was also promoted to the rank of sergeant during the presentation.



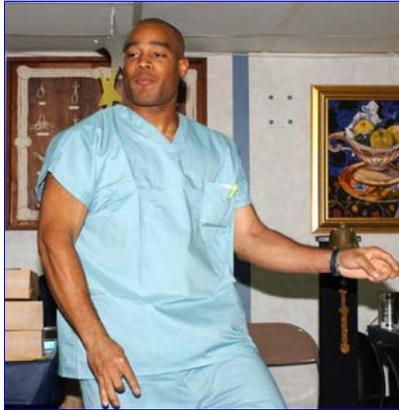
Commander of Marine Forces Central Command Lt. Gen. Earl Hailston expresses his appreciation to Cpl. Michel Mead of Newberry, Mich., for his efforts in Operation Iraqi Freedom, for which he was awarded the Purple Heart.

rines on Comfort were among the first to receive the award in recognition of their actions during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Five Marines are from the 2nd Force Service Support Group (FSSG) 1st Battalion Charlie Company. They are Pvt. Jason Keough from Buffalo, N.Y.; Sgt. Jose Torres of Lorain, Ohio; Cpl. Jacob Hobkins from Columbus, Ind.; Cpl. Michael Mead of Newberry, Mich.; and Cpl. Manuel Espinoza of Weslaco, Texas.

Other Marines awarded the Purple Heart include Gunnery Sgt. Robert Hladik, Headquarters, Camp Pendleton, from Hemet, Calif.; Capt. Harry Porter, 2nd Battalion 23rd Marines, of West Chester, Pa.; Pfc. Brian Nickes, 1st Marine Division 2nd Battalion, of Camben, N.J.; and Staff Sgt. David Oravec, Marine Light-Armored Helicopter Squadron 269, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Battalion, from Hubert, Fla.

The Gong Show



Photos by JOSN Erica Mater



MWR hosted The Gong Show Saturday. The show featured several talents including singers, and comedians. In true Gong Show tradition, the "celebrity" judges scored the participants based on the performance. The 1st place winner, HN Christina Brooks, took home 200 dollars in ship store gift certificates.



Chaplain's Corner:

At Work

By LCDR Mark Koczak
Comfort Command Chaplain

Well, shipmates, Comfort has been a part of the great drama here in the Middle East for the last few weeks. All of us have experienced long days and long nights. Full of caring for others and supporting the caregivers doing the ship's mission.

This is what we are here for. But there are emotional and physical traps waiting for each one of us. We all possess a wonderful gift from God, a reservoir of energy, skill and talent to do our work to the fullest. One of the parts of my job, as the command chaplain, is to look at the individual person, each one of you. It may be as simple as asking how are you doing after one of those 15+ hour shifts, you know the one that was only supposed to be only 12 hours. Or in the case of one very special group of folks, members of our crew that have a different uniform, who no longer have shifts. The security folks are here to protect us and guard our special patients. Father Ernestain and I pray for you all as a whole crew every night. I also pray for those of the crew that keep the watch.

Last Friday we had a great privilege returned to us. It was hard for all of us to do without the email messages and the phone calls. We have no control over that part of our lives here nor do we have control over the quantity of our work. What we do have control over each and every day is the quality of what we do. Remember the questions I have asked over the past 12 weeks, Who, What and Where?? They were directed towards each individual crewmember. Ask them to yourself every time you go to work.

Our families, loved ones, friends, and our country know we are here to provide care. They are proud of us. We are unique as a command which is rather comforting (no pun on the name of the ship). Remember our mission each day. I do....

I have spent an entire career advising senior, middle level and junior folks in four different services about leadership. Look after each other and the people that work with you. The chain of command in any military command always goes up and goes down.

Take advantage of the places, the things that will help you to rest and relax. Talk to each other. Avoid isolation and fatigue. Many of you have heard me ask my two favorite questions, have you eaten today? And have you slept today? Without them the quality of your work and your life will diminish, no matter who you are or how well trained and qualified you are.

Lastly and most importantly, we as the crew of Comfort are in this together. Look around, there is someone there that you can help or that can help you.

CO's Privilege

by MS2 Emilio Padulese
Comfort Galley

I was stationed onboard USS Osprey (MHC-51), which is a coastal minehunter with a crew of only 46. In October 2000, we were off the coast of the Carolinas on our way to the Great Lakes for four months of electronic ordinance disposal operations and some Midshipman training. That same month, my wife Kelly and I were expecting our second child. I tried to do anything to get left behind or at least delay my departure until after my son was born. However, since there were only two mess specialists for the entire crew, I was told I would not get to stay behind. So off we went.

As the days went by, the due date got closer and closer. The CO of the ship would let me come up to radio and use the satellite phone once a week, so I could talk to my wife and see how she was doing. In between phone calls, all I could do was wait – there was no e-mail at the time- and I become more and more anxious. I had already missed the birth of my daughter to a Mediterranean cruise and now I was going to miss my first son! I felt defeated to say the least.

October 17 I received a page to go to the CO's stateroom. At first, I thought I was in trouble or that Kelly had our baby. The CO sat me down and told me a story about a young LT that was waiting for his wife to give birth to their first child. The LT was onboard USS Wisconsin, which was 100 miles or so from the unstable USSR during the Cold War. The LT's CO knew of his situation and after the "old man" mulled about it for a while, the CO let the LT go home to Arkansas to see his baby be born. That CO made his LT promise that when he was in command he would help one of his shipmates out. Now CO of USS Osprey, CDR Stewart's wife reminded him of this point in their lives and told him to hold true to his word. He did, and off I went.

I called my wife from the first payphone I could find to tell her I was on my way. It was going to be a 40-hour journey by bus from North Carolina to Ingleside, Texas. I told my wife to sit still for as long as possible. When I got to Little Rock I called again and my mother-in-law answered. At 9:00 p.m. Oct. 17 Emilio Robert-Nicholas Padulese was born. I was happy and sad at the same time. During the trip, I bought bubblegum cigars and passed them out to all the strangers on the bus. The next day, I met my son for the first time. After spending two weeks with my new tax deduction I met back up with Osprey in Anapolis, MD.

At my CO's change of command, my family and I stood up and my wife thanked him in front of the entire chain of command.

My family will never forget that CO and that ship.

Pictures from Around the Ship



Photo by HM2 Michael Duff



Photos by JOSN Erica Mater



Bush Praises Vets, Lauds New Generation of Troops' Performance in Iraq

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, -- President Bush today praised military veterans for their past service and saluted the current generation of troops for their bravery and performance so far in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

America's veterans have "set an example of service and an example of sacrifice for future generations," Bush declared to veterans group leaders gathered at the White House.

And today's soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen "are not letting us down," the president pointed out. "Today's Armed Forces are upholding the finest traditions of our country and of our military."

U.S. troops "are making great progress in the war in Iraq," he said. "They are showing great courage and they are making this country proud."

Operation Iraqi Freedom is being fought in the interests of world peace, Bush remarked, and to make the United States and other nations more secure. "And, we're

going to free the people of Iraq from the clutches of Saddam Hussein and his murderous allies," he declared.

The United States and its allies, Bush noted, "will not submit to a future in which dictators and terrorists can arm and threaten the peace without consequence."

The war in Iraq is also being fought to enforce United Nations' resolutions for Saddam's Iraq to jettison its weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, Bush pointed out.

The United States and 48 coalition partners are united in taking down Saddam's regime. When the war in Iraq is won, Bush noted, "All of who have joined this cause will be able to say to the Iraqi people: 'We were proud to fight for your freedom.'"

After a week of hard-fought battles in and around places named Nasiriyah, Najaf, Basra and other Iraqi towns and cities, U.S. and coalition forces are 50 miles from the capital of Baghdad.

Coalition troops have secured the key port of Umm Qasr, paving the way for humanitarian aid that began flowing off ship today. Air attacks have damaged Iraq's command and control capabilities.

Bush noted Saddam's regime now only controls a small portion of Iraq. Meanwhile, he said, U.S. and coalition air, ground and maritime forces continue to inflict severe damage on enemy forces.

The days and weeks ahead "will demand further courage and further sacrifice," Bush declared, as U.S. and coalition forces face off against Hussein's Republican Guard divisions deployed in and around Baghdad. In the end "the Iraqi regime will be disarmed ... and removed from power," he emphasized.

Hussein and his minions truly have proven to be creatures of evil, having killed outright innocent Iraqis opposed to the dictator's regime, the president asserted. Additionally, he noted, members of Hussein's paramilitary units are suspected to have brutalized and executed a number of American and British prisoners of war, and committed a number of other violations of the rules of war under the Geneva Convention.

"Given the nature of this regime, we expect such war crimes, but we will not excuse them," Bush declared.

Any war criminals "will be hunted down relentlessly and judged severely," he concluded.