



## Finish strong and think teamwork—Our Fourth Quarter Motto

*A Charge to the Troops from Rainbow Division Commander MG Joseph Taluto*

Soldiers of Task Force Liberty:

It seems like far too much time has passed since I last wrote you.

Since my last commentary, I and many other Rainbow Division leaders returned to Iraq. Once again the trip paid huge dividends. The CSM is returning yet again with other senior NCOs later this month. These recons provide our division leadership with insight of the mission ahead. They allow us to visualize the battlespace and better direct our actions and decisions. We will continue to practice these actions during our command post exercises and our Mission Readiness Exercise in September.

I will tell you once again that the environment in Iraq is harsh, especially in the summer months from June to October. November is the rainy season and that too brings some difficult conditions.

If we keep ourselves in good physical condition and maintain our safety standards, we will do fine. Speaking of safety standards, I wish to impress upon all of you the importance of safety, especially as we approach deployment. Historically, safety risks during this time are very high. Now is not the time to lose Soldiers to accidents. It is incumbent upon all of our leadership to emphasize safety practices and for each of us to maintain self discipline on and off duty. Break the chain of an accident sequence now.

Our time for post-mobilization training is flying by and much of our individual training has been completed, but more of our collective tasks remain to be done. I have directed additional leader training for our convoy operations. Remember that every vehicle movement is a Combat Patrol! ALL LEADERS must be proficient in convoy ops.

I liken our remaining post-mobilization training time to the fourth quarter of a football game. We are building

momentum, building people and building confidence.

I am proud of our focus and the way our Soldiers have applied themselves in meeting high training standards. There is no doubt in my mind that this is going to be a very powerful organization. It is now, however, that we must renew our commitment to excellence and find the energy to finish strong!



*MG Joseph Taluto, 42nd Infantry Division Commander*

We are fast approaching our Mission Rehearsal Exercise which will determine our readiness to execute our mission ahead. Your division staff leadership and I are confident of success. Building our team means each of us must learn to play our positions with more confidence and aggressiveness.

Finally, we must continue to emphasize DISCIPLINE in all we do. Take pride in yourself, and display it in everything we do.

Finish strong and think teamwork—it is our fourth quarter motto! We will then take some time for a well deserved rest. This will bring us to the end state of our post-mob training, with CONFIDENT, MOTIVATED and WELL RESTED Soldiers ready for deployment.

**RAINBOW...NEVER FORGET!**

**RAINBOW 6**

## Switch Exercise Validates Rainbow Division's Communication Capabilities

*Story by SSG Raymond Drumsta, 42nd Infantry Division*

Lt. Col. Lori Thomas, 250th Signal Battalion commander, has her own definition for 'wiredog'—slang for the United States Army signal soldier.

"A wire dog is one of my Soldiers that works really hard," she said.

Since early August the wire dogs of the 250th Signal Battalion have been working hard...validating their equipment and themselves for Operation Iraqi Freedom 3 through a switch exercise, or SWITCHEX—a crucial part of the 42nd Infantry Division's preparation for deployment.

"Not only does the SWITCHEX check the equipment, it validates the personnel who operate the equipment," said 250th Signal Battalion CSM Eloyd Britt.

The unit, which is based in New Jersey, validated three-quarters of its personnel and all but one company's equipment through the SWITCHEX. The exercise took place at Fort Bragg, which is the Signal Corps depot for maintenance and parts, and tested the unit's Integrated System Control (ISYSCON) and voice connectivity equipment.

"We provide a common user system for voice and data

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## SWITCHEX (continued from page one)

communication," said Thomas. "We are the means by which the commanding general commands and controls his division."

ISYSCON is a means of managing networks digitally, measuring network capacity and finding network deficiencies.

"The ISYSCON is the command and control system of the entire signal network within our area of operations," said Maj. Sal Abano, 250th Signal Battalion S3.

The validation process continues at Fort Bliss, Texas, and ensures the division will have reliable communications in Iraq.

"The commander has to communicate on the battlefield," said Britt. "He has to do this instantaneously. The battlefield is so fluid, you need information instantaneously."

"We have to be able to provide communications to the division, wherever the division needs to be," said Thomas.

Iraq's dust may cause problems with signal equipment, warned Abano, unless 'soft cleaning'—the opposite of deep cleaning—is done every shift change.

"If continuous PMCS isn't done, there will be a potential for significant network outages," said Abano.

All signal issues are wrapped up in the term Mobile Subscriber Equipment, or MSE. Abano explained that MSE is shorthand for signal's 'piece' of the battlefield—voice and data connectivity in all mobile and fixed location signal equipment, from satellite dishes to laptop computers.



*VIC-1 and VIC-3 Microwave vans at Fort Bragg during the 250<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion's recent switch exercise, or SWITCHEX.*

"When you pick up the phone and make a phone call, it's because our network is operational," said Abano.

Though the battalion has been divided between Fort Bliss, Fort Drum, and Camp Shelby, Mississippi for the post-mobilization phase, Thomas said they kept the unit's strong, seasoned signal teams together. She added that the battalion's Soldiers have the dedication to make older equipment work.

"They know it's critical for key people to talk," she said. "They know they have to get it right."

National Guard Soldiers from Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota have filled battalion shortages. Thomas said they expect more Soldiers from the Indiana and California National Guard.

"We have to make them part of the team," Thomas said.

Abano said he is looking forward to working with the new personnel.

"I assume that these individuals will bring additional technical talent that will assist in managing and operating the network," Abano said.

Britt said the mission of the wire dogs is demanding, and that the Soldiers of the 250th Signal Battalion have a great deal of civilian expertise.

"The talent among them is unbelievable," Britt said. "Our Soldiers have to be smart Soldiers."

Some signal MOS training takes nearly two years to complete, Britt added.

## Linking the Troops to Families

**WASHINGTON** - A non-profit organization is building a communications network dedicated to keeping deployed troops in touch with family back home—all at no cost to the troops or their families.

Freedom Calls Foundation has helped military parents in Iraq attend graduations and meet new children. It has even allowed a couple get married, despite the fact that he was in Colorado and she was in Iraq. It also allowed troops in Iraq to cheer the Philadelphia Flyers Hockey team live during game 6 of the 2004 NHL playoffs—all via videoconferencing.

Founded by John B. Harlow II and Edward Bukstel on Aug. 12, 2003, after military personnel requested assistance in setting up a communications network for troops overseas, FCF is supported by private and corporate donations. The foundation began operating Sept. 26, 2003.

"The foundation was formed as a public charity because we believe family is important, particularly in wartime, and that this is the least that the American people can do to show their appreciation for the sacrifices being made by our Soldiers and their families," said Harlow, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation.

FCF has been operating in Iraq at Camp Cooke for about five months, said Bukstel, the FCF operations director. Daily, 1,500 troops file through the FCF facility and are able to chat briefly with their loved ones.

They may only get 15-20 minutes, Bukstel said, but it can make all the difference. Having attended several of the stateside Internet videoconferencing events arranged by FCF, he said the events are very emotional.

"Obviously, it's the whole range of emotions," he said. "You have to see it. The American people have to see it."

One servicemember spent 15 of his 20 minutes singing "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" to his months-old infant son, Bukstel said. When his wife asked if he was going to talk to her, he told her he'd saved the best for last.

Families have traveled great distances to attend a videoconferencing event. And, Bukstel said, there is no reason to believe that the two upcoming events will be any different.

On Aug. 21, FCF, the Family Readiness Group of Headquarters Company, 980th Engineers, and SBC Communications will provide secure Internet videoconferencing at a military installation in Austin, Texas. Troops based at a camp in Iraq's Baathist Triangle will get a chance to talk with approximately 300 family members that are expected to attend.

Bukstel said SBC donated communications technology to link the facility to the Freedom Calls Network and has provided SBC Pioneers volunteers to help with mission.

"This is a very meaningful way for families to connect with their loved ones deployed in Iraq. We have families—moms and dads, sisters, brothers, wives and kids—that are coming from all around Ohio," said Crystal Lybarger, 706th Transportation Family Readiness coordinator.

"The technical side of their training is overwhelming," said Britt.

The 250th Signal Battalion performed homeland security, guarding major crossings into New York City such as the George Washington Bridge and the Lincoln Tunnel. These missions put signal training on hold for a year and a half, according to Abano.

"We needed this exercise," Abano said, referring to the SWITCHEX.

*RAINBOW READY NEWS is a Command Information product of the 42<sup>nd</sup> ID (M) PAO for division's post-mobilization training program.*

*MG Joseph Taluto*

*Commanding General*

*MAJ Richard Goldenberg*

*PAO*

*MSG Corine Lombardo*

*PA Chief*

