



Royal Tongan Marines change guard for Palace

Tonga continues support of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Story and photo by
Cpl. Frances L. Goch

The fourth contingent of Royal Tongan Marines to deploy to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom took control of the security mission at the 46,000 square-foot Al Faw Palace during a transfer of authority ceremony Sept 12.

The 55-man contingent will take over the 24 - hour internal and external security of the palace and its members from the previous unit of their fellow countrymen.

"As a U.S. Marine, I hold a special place in my heart for these young men," said Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Paul E. Lefebvre, deputy commanding general, Multi-National Corps - Iraq, as he addressed the departing third contingent during the ceremony. "Their motivation and dedication is unwavering and infectious."

No matter the time of day, the third Tongan contingent could be heard calling the entry control point to "attention" or "at ease" when general officers and command sergeants major entered or exited the palace grounds.

"Many times it was not my alarm clock waking me up at 0300 in the morning it was the Tonga Marines," said Brig. Gen. Nicolas Matern, coalition deputy commanding general, Coalition, MNC-I.

The third contingent was also known for its enthusiasm while performing traditional Tongan songs and dances at various MNC-I ceremonies. The fourth contingent has proven it can carry on the harmonious tradition, which appears to be the standard in the Kingdom of Tonga, as they sang a hymn with their brothers in arms.

After the ceremony came the moment for which the gathering crowd was waiting, the performance of Sipitau.

Sipitau is a Polynesian warrior's ritual performed before battle, proclaiming his strength and ability in order to intimidate the opposition. The challenge consists of fierce chanting, chest beating and stomping.

In this case, the outgoing group uses Sipitau to challenge the incoming unit to test its commitment to assuming the task at hand. Each unit's Sipitau is different.

The reputation of the Tongan's Sipitau precedes itself in Al Faw Palace. Every available viewing area on all three floors was filled with onlookers and video cameras.

The old guard performed the ritual first, challenging the new guards on their readiness. The new guards retaliate with their unit's Sipitau, showing the old guard that they are ready to take charge of the mission.

At the end of the ceremony, the outgoing contingent sang a song composed by one of the Tongan



2nd Lt. Siasikiu Kaho from the third Tongan Marine Contingent hands Tonga's National flag over to the next body of Tongan Marines to take over the mission of ensuring the security of the Al Faw Palace Sept 12. Tonga has been a supporting coalition forces since World War II.

Marines that described their experiences while serving in Iraq at the Al Faw Palace.

"We are deeply honored to be a part of this coalition," said Lt. Col Kuli Fakalolo, contingent commander, third Tongan Marine Contingent. "By doing so we have helped give the people of Iraq, and this part of the world, hope. Hope for a better life and a better future."

The first Tongan contingent deployed to Iraq in June 2004 with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. Tongan Marines have a history with the U.S. Marines that dates back to World War II in the Battle of Guadalcanal.

Petraeus final letter to Multi-National Force - Iraq

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians of Multi-National Force – Iraq:

It has been the greatest of privileges to have been your commander for the past 19 months. During that time, we and our civilian and Iraqi partners have been engaged in an exceedingly complex, difficult, and important task. And in the face of numerous challenges, we and our partners have helped bring new hope to a country that was besieged by extremists and engulfed in sectarian violence.

When I took command of Multi-National Force – Iraq in February 2007, I noted that the situation in Iraq was hard but not hopeless. You have proven that assessment to be correct. Indeed, your great work, sacrifice, courage, and skill have helped to reverse a downward spiral toward civil war and to wrest the initiative from the enemies of the new Iraq.

Together, Iraqi and Coalition Forces have faced determined, adaptable, and barbaric enemies. You and our Iraqi partners have taken the fight to them, and you have taken away their sanctuaries and safe havens. You have helped secure the Iraqi people and have enabled, and capitalized on, their rejection of extremism. You have also supported the Iraqi Security Forces as they have grown in number and capability and as they have increasingly shouldered more of the responsibility for security in their country.

You have not just secured the Iraqi people, you have served them, as well. By helping establish local governance, supporting reconstruction efforts, assisting with revitalization of local businesses, fostering local reconciliation, and conducting a host of other non-kinetic activities, you have contributed significantly to the communities in which you have operated. Indeed, you have been builders and diplomats as well as guardians and warriors.

The progress achieved has been hard-earned. There have been many tough days along the way, and we have suffered tragic losses. Indeed, nothing in Iraq has been anything but hard. But you have been more than equal to every task.

Your accomplishments have, in fact, been the stuff of history. Each of you should be proud of what has been achieved and of the contributions you continue to make. Although our tasks in Iraq are far from complete and hard work and tough fights lie ahead, you have helped bring about remarkable improvements.

Your new commander is precisely the right man for the job. General Ray Odierno played a central role in the progress achieved during the surge. He brings tremendous skill, experience, and understanding as he returns to Iraq for a third tour and takes the helm of MNF-I just seven months after relinquishing command of Multi-National Corps – Iraq. I have total confidence in him, and I will do all that I can as the commander of Central Command to help him, MNF-I, and our Iraqi partners to achieve the important goals that we all share for the new Iraq.

Thank you for your magnificent work here in the “Land of the Two Rivers.” And thank you for your sacrifices – and for those of your families – during this crucial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am honored to have soldiered with you in this critical endeavor.

With great respect and all best wishes,

Thank you!



David H. Petraeus
General, United States Army
Commanding



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“Rhino” Soldiers conduct convoy training

Story and photo by
Pfc. Eric J. Glassey

13th Public Affairs Detachment

Soldiers from Headquarters Support Company, Special Troops Battalion, XVIII Airborne Corps received convoy training with their new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles at the Udarri Range Complex near Forward Operating Base Hammer Sept. 7-8.

“This is the first time we really trained on these new MRAPs,” said Cpt. Robert Day, commander, HSC, STB, XVIII ABC. “We are building off of the training from Fort Bragg and Kuwait on the HMMWV. The main training objective is to move, shoot and communicate.”

The training included standard heavy weapons training with the M2, the .50 caliber heavy machine gun. Soldiers from 1st and 2nd platoons advanced to the convoy training on a mile-long maneu-

ver range where the two platoons would go through, react and knock down enemy targets. They continued into the night with a night-fire using night vision goggles and the MRAP driver’s visual enhancers; a thermal imaging camera mounted on the front and displayed on a monitor for the driver.

“It was a perfect opportunity for our gunners to improve,” said Sgt. 1st Class Alan Sutton, platoon sergeant, 2nd PLT, HSC, STB, XVIII ABC. “Training like this reinforces the fundamentals and keep our Soldiers sharp.”

“The training went well,” said Sgt. 1st Class Edgar Soto, platoon sergeant, 1st PLT, HSC, STB, XVIII ABC. “Gunnery got good hands on training, and got bullets on targets.”

The Soldiers fired 2,000 rounds through .50 caliber machine guns, and a total of 16,000 for both the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon

and the M240B, Day said.

The HSC got these MRAPs in July and went through the two-week driving course at Camp Liberty. The Soldiers switched over from up-armored HMMWVs to the larger trucks. In addition to a higher elevation for the gunner, it has an increased capacity of eight additional seats for passengers. When using three MRAPs to provide security for the Rhinos during their trips to the International Zone and Victory Base Complex, they double their capacity to carry personnel.

These Soldiers are in charge of transporting servicemembers and civilians between VBC and the IZ. They transport around 721 passengers a week with a total of 22,000 passengers since February.

“We have not shot a single round in anger on any of our convoys,” said Day. “We have performed very well as a team in our operations.”



Soldiers from 1st Platoon, Headquarters Support Company, Special Troops Battalion, XVIII Airborne Corps conduct a night-fire convoy run through the fire and maneuver range outside of Forward Operating Base Hammer, Iraq Sept. 7. Two of the four platoons from HSC conducted the training.

Army emphasizes junior leaders to prevent suicides

Story by
Elizabeth M. Lorge
Army News Service

With National Suicide Prevention Week, Sept. 7-13, Army officials say they are reviewing their current policies and emphasizing the help junior leaders and fellow Soldiers can provide to a team member in crisis.

This year's theme, "Shoulder-to-Shoulder: No Soldier Stands Alone," emphasizes the strength and teamwork necessary to combat suicide, said Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, assistant surgeon general for force protection. It is also reminiscent of the Warrior Ethos' "I will never leave a fallen comrade."

The announcement was made Thursday, the same day Cornum and other Army officials told reporters that the number of Soldier suicides in 2008 may exceed last year's all-time high of 115. To date, the Army has confirmed 62 suicides this year, with another 31 pending - higher numbers than at the same time last year, said Col. Eddie Stephens, deputy director for human resource policy for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, G-1.

"It is a potentially preventable tragedy and every effort must be made to



Photo Illustration by Pfc. Eric J. Martinez, 13th Public Affairs Detachment

inform Army personnel of risk factors involved and to train our Soldiers, families and civilians to actively intervene, and I think that is the biggest difference this year...We've done a lot of education previously, but this year, the idea is to actively intervene if necessary and to make sure that people are aware of what professional assets are available," she continued.

Two groups are absolutely essential in ensuring Soldiers get the help they need, officials said.

Junior leaders have the most face time with their Soldiers and know them the best, so they have to

be able to recognize risks, said Stephens.

"We're targeting our junior officers and non-commissioned officers because that's the face of the Army to those thousands and thousands of privates out there," he said. "Building that relationship allows them to listen and be heard and communicate on a one-to-one basis with the troops they are leading, and building their trust and confidence...so when (their Soldiers) have problems, they will be part of the solution."

Chaplains are also crucial to helping Soldiers find balance and hope, said Col.

David Reese, director for ministry initiatives for Office of the Chief of Chaplains. Not only does the chaplaincy's Strong Bonds program help invigorate failing relationships - one of the leading causes of suicide - chaplains provide safe places for Soldiers to go without any stigma attached.

"Our goal is to develop an approach that builds life-long resilience in our recruits, makes them successful Soldiers, as well as successful citizens, long after they leave the Army, and makes strong mental health as much of a priority as physical