



**13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command
16th Sustainment Brigade
Public Affairs Office**

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Personal security team Soldiers prepare for mission's end

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16th Sust. Bde. Public Affairs

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq — The gray Opal, on what the Army refers to as main supply route Tampa, had flipped over twice and come to rest on its wheels. An Iraqi woman was lying on the ground next to the vehicle and her husband was sitting on the ground behind it with head injuries. Iraqi villagers had gathered around the vehicle trying to help.

Staff Sgt. Michael Shaw, personal security team medic, 16th Sustainment Brigade, and Sgt. David Miller, combat lifesaver, treated and stabilized her while other members of the team provided security.

“It was obvious that she sustained a head injury during the rollover, so they put a neck brace on her to prevent further damage,” said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Garcia, PST non-commissioned officer in charge, 16th Sust. Bde. “From a tactical position, we did not have the advantage; we had high ground all around us with pretty thick vegetation, so I knew time on the ground had to be limited. My medics then put her on a spine board and we transported her to a nearby Iraqi police checkpoint where she could be transported to a medical facility for treatment.”

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PST/2-2-2

The Soldiers of the 16th Sust. Bde. personal security team were on a mission to Joint Base Balad in May, and were about 20 miles north of JBB, when they came across the accident.

“I was stabilizing her head and neck when I noticed blood around her mouth,” said Miller, a native of Sacramento, Calif. “We then performed a jaw thrust to visually access her injuries and noticed that she had bitten through her tongue during the rollover.”

The mission was just one of more than 70 missions for the members of the 16th SB PST. The 23 Soldiers on the team have traveled more than 15,000 miles from Habur Gate on the northern border of Iraq to Victory Base Complex in Baghdad.

“These HOOAHs have performed exceptionally well covering over 20,000 miles on some of the most dangerous roads of Iraq,” said Command Sgt. Maj. James E. Spencer, command sergeant major, 16th Sust. Bde. “The brigade command team would not have been able to travel the battlefield and make timely decisions without this team’s efforts. Bottom-line, this team has been a combat multiplier for the 16th Sustainment Brigade and our mission would have been greatly degraded without them.”

The Soldiers of the security team all heard the same warning when they originally joined the team in Bamberg, Germany, in March 2008.

“I intend to put you in harm’s way five days a week,” said Spencer. “If you don’t want to be here, get out.”

The active-duty logistics brigade, based out of Bamberg, Germany, was preparing for its 15-month deployment to Iraq, and leaders were beginning the process of building a personal security team for the brigade commander and command sergeant major.

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PST/3-3-3

Soldiers from different units and different vocations — including welders, truck drivers, supply clerks, fuelers, radio repairers, machinists, air conditioning repairmen, mechanics, ammunition specialists and others — competed for slots on the brigade team.

Candidates were selected in April, after a month-long training process.

“A sustainment brigade doesn’t doctrinally have a personal security detachment assigned, so all of the Soldiers were pulled from units within the brigade; each bringing their own unique specialty to the table,” said Spencer. “When forming the team, I knew it needed to be heavy with mechanical skills, but also a medic, supply sergeant, and a communications expert would be critical.”

Spencer said 28 candidates remained after the initial month of training and testing.

“The initial screening criterion was simple; a focus on the basics, which included weapons, Combat Life Saver, and physical fitness proficiency,” said Spencer. “Initially, I had about forty Soldiers who competed for a spot on the team. After first the APFT (Army physical fitness test), six-mile ruck march, IV training, range, and additional weapons training there were 28 Soldiers remaining. Eventually, 24 Soldiers were selected to be on the team for the Knights’ first combat operation.

The 24 candidates that were selected were outstanding Soldiers, said Garcia, a native of Davenport, Iowa.

“I think it speaks volumes that the brigade command sergeant major would select a Soldier to provide security for him and the brigade commander (Col. Martin B. Pitts),” said Garcia. “Let’s face it; their lives are at stake when they go outside the wire.”

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PST/4-4-4

Serving in security is an opportunity for some Soldiers to refresh or improve their Soldiering skills, or to just get away from routine, said Sgt. Shawn Burton, who volunteered to leave the 21st Theater Sustainment Command to join the 16th Sust. Bde. PST.

“I don’t function well in the rear,” said Burton, a native of Bakersfield, Calif. “I function better in a deployed environment. Things are so much simpler here.”

Deployments have cost Burton, though. His wife left him during his first deployment in 2005, and he was subsequently diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder.

During one humanitarian mission in December 2008, PST Soldiers took time to spread some goodwill in Iraq.

PST Soldiers took it upon themselves to take candy, clothes, toys and a homemade swing set to Iraqi children at a nearby village.

“The first time we went out there to Jaddilah Soflih, those kids had nothing” said Garcia. “I called my wife in Germany and told her about the kids and how I wanted to do something for them. My wife immediately started a donation box in my daughter’s third grade class. Before long, the entire third grade followed suit and donated several boxes of toys and clothing.”

“We did it for the kids,” said Sgt. Nicholas Nipitella, PST vehicle commander, during an interview in December. “They don’t have much and we’ll do anything we can do to put a smile on their face for a little bit.”

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PST/5-5-5

The team has been responsible for escorting several VIPs during battlefield circulation missions including Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, command sergeant major, Multi-National Force – Iraq.

And the team has made an impression on Army leaders in Iraq and Europe.

Sgt. Evan Fay, vehicle operator for the brigade's command sergeant major, developed several modifications to the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle that have been implemented throughout MNF – I. Gen. Carter Ham, commanding general, U.S. Army Europe, visited Q-West and was given a detailed brief about some safety and efficiency improvements to the MRAP that Fay developed.

“It's about improving your foxhole and thinking outside the box,” said Fay, a native of Milpitas, Calif.

Training has been the driving force behind the team's success. Prior to deployment, the team members were certified in Modern Army Combatives Program level 1 and 2, combat lifesaver, executive protection, weapons training, battle drills, convoy operations, and convoy live fire exercise.

“This has been a very challenging, but fulfilling, assignment for me,” said Spc. Brandon Tillery, PST communications specialist. “It has given me the opportunity to do and see things that I would have never had the chance to do before I joined the team.”

Tillery, a native of Mount Vernon, Ill., is responsible for insuring the team can communicate while on missions.

The security mission is important to the team members.

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PST/6-6-6

“I made a promise to my grandfather about three months before he passed away,” said Spc. Jeromy Westphalen, a vehicle operator and recovery specialist. “I told him that I would serve my country and I enjoy working with the team. We have a bunch of good guys.”

Garcia said that he and his Soldiers have formed lasting bonds over the last 18 months.

“I have had the pleasure of watching these guys develop not only as a team, but into men,” said Garcia. “A lot of my men aren’t your standard ‘poster boy Soldier’ in garrison, but they excel in a combat environment. If I have to leave the wire, it will be with my men. Our motto speaks for itself, ‘We’re all we got!’”

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Spc. Abdur Khan pulls security as 16th Sustainment Brigade leaders meet with Iraqi Army leaders from 7th Brigade, 2nd Division, at FOB Hawk, an Iraqi Army compound within Contingency Operating Base Q-West, Iraq, Nov. 29. (Courtesy photos)