

# Remembering Iraq

## U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command members Journal their support to OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

By MAJ Michael Willis, MSG James Bunch, SSG Brett Mills and SGT Winston Delgado, Army Space Support Team 12

**B**aghdad, Iraq – Few people are ever close enough to world-shaping events to make a difference. Army Space Support Team 12, a cell from the 193rd Space Battalion, U. S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command not only witnessed such events, they were instrumental in shaping their outcome. At the beginning of their journey to Iraq, Team 12 was faced with the war's reality in Baltimore.

“Planes arriving at the base were bringing the bodies of our comrades from action in the war,” said MAJ Michael Willis, the Team 12 leader. The team touched down briefly in Moron, Spain, and was impressed with the similarity of it to home.

“I expected it to be extremely hot but it was similar to the hot August days we get in Colorado,” Willis said.

Then it was on to Baghdad.

### Life at the Palace

The bleakness of Baghdad was not alleviated by the team's first accommodations.

“We stayed for the first few weeks in a hallway on the north side of the presidential palace,” Willis said. “It was nice to be in the air conditioning but the noise from the snoring was deafening. Two British men staying in the same area competed to see who the chainsaw-snoring master was.”

SGT Winston Delgado played the national sport — football — also known as soccer. The magic of the sport and the power of the football were easily noticed. The route from the palace to the football field was about a half-mile long. The eyes of the Iraqis — adults and children — shined when Delgado walked toward the playing field with his football. Everyone wanted to play. It is

a favorite sport in this part of the world — inexpensive in America, but could be costly for many people here. A half-hour game was not just a physical challenge; it was also immeasurably satisfying to play what is called the ultimate sport.

“Eventually we were given rooms in the Al Rasheed Hotel. As a group we were a bit leery of the place as a target, but we decided it was better than the palace hallway,” Willis said. The team's feeling about the place turned out to be prophetic.

### Attack on the Al Rasheed

“On Oct. 26, 2003, around 6:20 a.m., the hotel was attacked by a homemade rocket launcher that was mounted on a generator with forty 120 millimeter rockets,” said MSG James Bunch. “Nineteen rockets hit the west side of the hotel.”

“The first rockets that struck the building woke us up,” said Mills. “They left the floors covered with broken glass and a dark, heavy cloud of dust and smoke in the hallways.” An immediate search began to locate all team members and to help anyone in need.

There were also two members of the Spectral Operations Resource Center — SGT Sean Moudy and Gene Walacavage — staying in the hotel.

In the pandemonium of the smoke- and debris-filled building, the team located Walacavage, who had been seriously wounded in the eyes by flying debris and had a chunk of concrete embedded in his arm. Walacavage and Moudy were extremely lucky that day; one of the rockets entered the window of their room, flew directly over their heads as they lay in bed and penetrated the bathroom wall where it fell into the sink — a dud.

While Willis and CPT George O'Neil, a Team 12 member,



Left, members of the Civilian Provisional Authority pick out shoes and clothes donated by friends and family members of Army Space Support Team 12. Below, MAJ Michael Willis pulls a map from the map cabinet.

gave Walacavage immediate care in their room, Bunch carried a woman to the medics. Her arm had been nearly severed by one of the blasts. Team 12 member SSG Brett Mills' room was on the 10th floor. A rocket blew out almost every door in that part of the building. Mills, wearing his jeans, a Harley long sleeved shirt, his armor vest and his loaded pistol calmly strode out of his room and immediately began moving people off the floor and out of the hotel to safety. His room-to-room search led him to the end of the hallway where he found a room with the door jammed shut. He could hear a woman screaming inside. Unable to knock the door down, Mills went out the window of an adjacent room and slithered along the outside of the building until he was able to enter her room. He helped the woman out by retracing his steps and once she was on her way to safety, he cleared the rest of the rooms on the floor with the help of a Marine, who was the chief of hotel security.

The Marine and Mills moved to the 11th floor and found the room of LTC Charles Beuhring, whose room had been hit by a rocket. The injured officer was lying back on a chair when they found him. Mills attempted to administer first aid but Beuhring was not doing well.

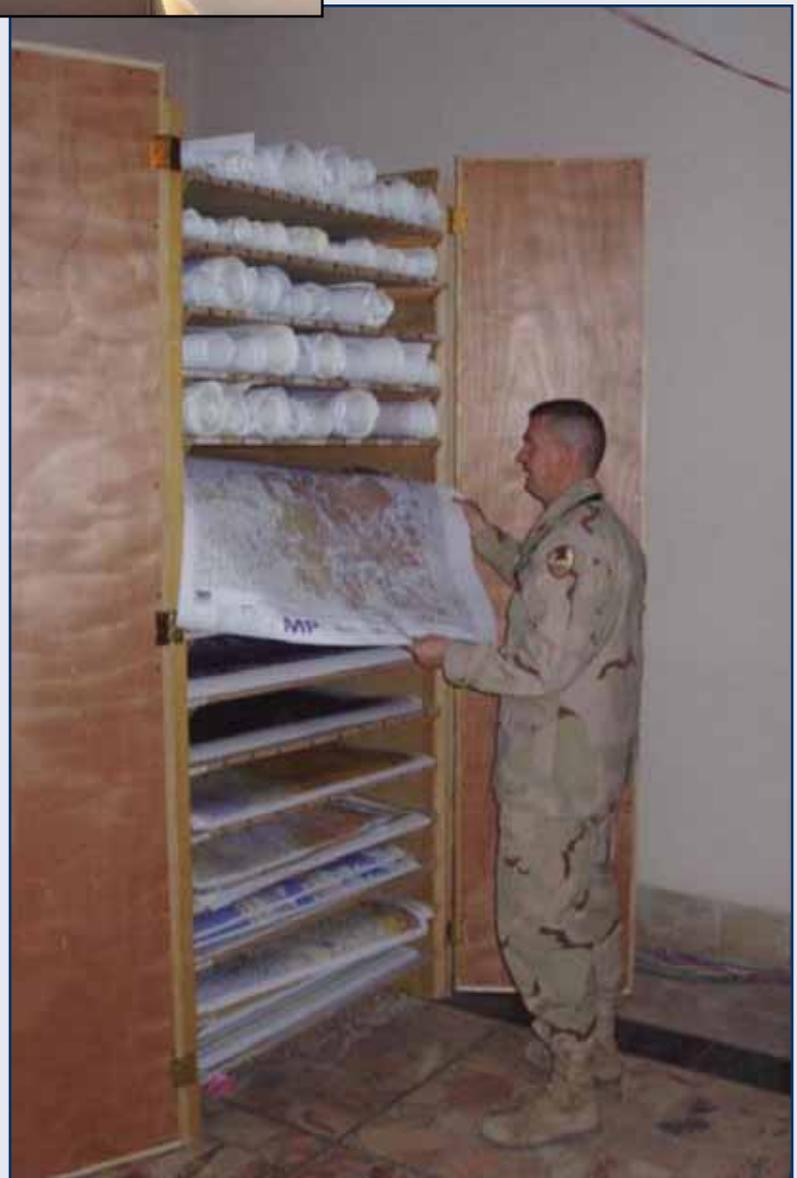
"When the medics arrived they could not start an IV because his veins had collapsed," Mills said.

Mills, the medics, and Bunch carried the wounded man to the lobby. The medics did all they could to stabilize Beuhring, but he later died.

During the time that the Marine and Mills were working on the evacuation of the building, the rest of Team 12 was caring for Walacavage. Their rescue was captured on national television as they carried the wounded civilian to an ambulance.

## Saddam's Capture

Sunday, Dec. 14, 2003, brought an early Christmas present  
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for everyone stationed in Iraq. It was the day Saddam was captured in a hole in the ground. BG Mark Kimmit, deputy director of operations, Command Joint Task Force-7, tasked the team to produce data and imagery for the press release.

“The team did many jobs like that for the general during its tour of duty, including capturing images of the deaths of Uday and Qsay Hussein, the apprehension of terrorists and wanted posters for high-ranking Baath party members and terrorists,” said Willis.

### Holidays in Baghdad

“Being far from home at holiday time is not the most pleasurable thing,” Willis said. “But with the British around, there is always time for a celebration.”

The team discovered that the Christmas party at one of the official British residences in Baghdad was a blowout. Another party New Year’s Eve was also fun, although both parties were punctuated by mortar and small arms fire nearby.

### Visiting Babylon

One of the highlights of the Team’s time in Iraq was a visit to Babylon. It was not long after their arrival in country that the team went to deliver Space products to the Coalition Provisional Authority’s south central headquarters. Babylon “was one of the sites where Saddam wanted to begin his climb to become the modern-day Nebuchadnezzar by rebuilding Babylon and the hanging gardens,” Willis said.

He added that the site had been picked clean over the centuries and that the best artifacts now reside in museums in Germany, England and Baghdad.

“The Great Gate of Ishtar, minus the arch, still stands. The lions and dragons are still visible, imbedded in the brickwork. This gate has seen an untold number of people of all kinds pass through over the centuries. The archaic script that dedicated the gate being built by Nebuchadnezzar can be clearly seen today,” Willis said.

The SMDC/ARSTRAT Space Support Cell in Iraq consisted of both military and civilians. They supported the CPA in the planning, reorganization and reconstruction of the oil, gas and electrical grids. They also supported efforts to rebuild the water grid, the prison system, schools, government buildings, sports complexes, local neighborhood housing areas, roads, museums and historical ruins. The team’s efforts also included support to rebuilding and refurbishing hospitals, police stations, airports, seaports, the rail system and anything that a modern society might have. Space cell products were also used to fight and

find insurgents, former Baath party members, weapons caches and terrorist safe houses.

SMDC/ARSTRAT members also showed ordinary Iraqis some of the marvels of modern technology — such as a digital camera that became an instant hit. Under Saddam Hussein, photos of ordinary folks had been forbidden. Bunch made copies of photos for Iraqis he supervised on a work detail and became an instant hero. The Iraqi foreman on the detail told him that the small gesture of printing some photos was an immeasurable gift to those Iraqis present.

The team also gave shoes and clothing sent by people from the U.S. to the workers at the CPA compound; many of them had the chance to pick some for their families.

Bunch summed up the Iraqi experience in mission-oriented terms. “We went through many difficult challenges, both personal and technical. Poor power service and a congested communications network caused the technical issues. However, with perseverance, trouble-shooting skills, and the assistance of everyone supporting our team — we were successful.”



CPT George O'Neil of ARSST 12 creates a map. *Photo courtesy of ARSST 12.*