DSI REVIEW

SPECIAL EDITION WINTER 2009



"Vacationing in scenic Kuwait"



"Our luxury hotel in Kuwait"



"From Iraq with Love"



"Combatives Training"



"Combatives Training"



"GM P. at a US car dealership in Baghdad"





This special print edition of the DSI Review is published to commemorate the tour of Iraq conducted by Grandmaster John Pellegrini and Master Robert Gray from November 2nd to November 16th, 2008 to train US and Salvadoran troops in military combatives.


TASK FORCE MOUNTAIN
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Presented to

GRAND MASTER JOHN PELLEGRINI

FOR THE OUTSTANDING SUPPORT PROVIDED TO THE MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION-CENTER FROM 5 NOVEMBER 2008 TO 19 NOVEMBER 2008 DURING THEIR DEPLOYMENT TO OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. YOUR EXPERTISE IN PROVIDING RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE COMBATIVE TECHNIQUES ENHANCED THE LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE AND TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY FOR THE WARRIORS OF TASK FORCE MOUNTAIN. YOU'RE A TRUE CREDIT TO YOUR PROFESSION.

Given this 10th day of November 2008
Camp Victory, Iraq 09342

JAMES W. REDMORE
Command Sergeant Major, US Army
Division Command Sergeant Major

MICHAEL L. OATES
Major General, US Army
Commanding


VANGUARD
4TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM
3RD INFANTRY DIVISION
إلى الأمام

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

IS PRESENTED TO

GRANDMASTER JOHN PELLEGRINI

FOR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE OF DUTY IN PROVIDING ADVANCED COMBATIVES TO SOLDIERS OF THE 4TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 3D INFANTRY DIVISION IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. YOUR ACTIONS BRING GREAT CREDIT UPON YOURSELF, THE 4TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION-CENTER, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

6 NOVEMBER 2008
FOB KALSU, IRAQ
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 07-09

LOUIS M. TORRES
COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR
BRIGADE CSM

THOMAS S. JAMES
COL, AR
BRIGADE CDR


41st FIRES BRIGADE
FOB DELTA
"THE FOB OF CHOICE"
Operation Iraqi Freedom

Certificate of Appreciation

IS AWARDED TO
GRAND MASTER JOHN PELLEGRINI
Combat Hapki-Do

FOR OUTSTANDING SUPPORT DURING YOUR PERFORMANCE OF THE HAPKI-DO SESSIONS HELD AT FOB DELTA, IRAQ ON 07 NOVEMBER 2008. YOUR COMMITMENT AND CARING SPIRITS COUPLED WITH YOUR PERFORMANCE HAVE SET A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE. WE GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR GENUINE COMPASSION WHICH REFLECT GREAT CREDIT UPON YOURSELF, THE RAILGUNNERS BRIGADE AND THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES.

Rail Gunners!

KELVIN A. HUGHES
CSM, USA
Brigade Command Sergeant Major

RICHARD M. FRANCEY, JR.
Colonel, Field Artillery
Commanding



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GOING HOME



"GM P. and Master Gray with Major General Oates"

As we prepared to say our goodbyes to our team and leave Iraq, strong emotions bubbled to the surface. A part of us did not want to leave our friends; we wanted to continue working with the troops, visiting more FOBs, riding the Black Hawks. We felt very much a part of this community of warriors, toiling in a far away, war-torn country. Now we were the lucky ones who got to go home and we almost felt like we were abandoning them. It is hard to explain why we felt that way but maybe the following episode will make it easier to understand. After a couple of days in Iraq, we got two news items from the US. One was that I had (again) made the cover of Black Belt Magazine. The other was theresults of the presidential elections. Strangely, both news (good or bad) had almost no impact on us and played no role in our mood, thoughts or activities. It was as if they had happened in a different world, to someone else. While living with the troops in Iraq, those far away events were unimportant, almost trivial. The here and now was all that mattered to us. That's how deeply we had bonded with our military community. But now it was time to leave.

Leaving Iraq was easy, getting back to the US was not. At 3:30am we were driven to the flightline where we boarded a C130 full of tired soldiers headed to Kuwait. Upon arrival we were informed that logistical problems would prevent us from leaving at our scheduled time. So back to the tent and another 2 miserable days in the desert of Kuwait. Finally we were able to "hitch a ride" on a 747 that was taking the 101st Airborne back to Fort Campbell, KY at the end of their 14 month tour. From there we were driven to the Nashville, TN, airport where Robert and I separated to find our way home. I experienced delays and cancellations but finally made it back. Exhausted but proud of what I had done, I rejoined my family and resumed my work, carrying with me the memories of a lifetime. Again, it had been an honor and a privilege to be of service to our military.



"CSM Redmore receives his Master Instructor of Military Combatives Certification"



"With the crews of the Blackhawks"



"Combatives Training"



"Combatives Training"



"Combatives Training"

WELCOME TO IRAQ!

By: Grandmaster John Pellegrini

ON THE ROAD AGAIN...



Traveling since 6am, I finally landed in Baltimore at 5pm (one hour late), where Master Robert Gray was waiting for me at the gate. It was Sunday, November 2 and as we were making our way to the Air Mobility Command check-in counter, we both felt a sense of déjà-vu. In fact we both had been at this exact place 2 ½ years earlier to begin our trip to Afghanistan. This time the 13 hour flight, with a 2 ½ hour refueling stop in Ramstein, Germany, took us to Kuwait City airport. From there we were whisked by Army escort to the "Ali Al Salem" American base, apx. 1 ½ hour drive away. After a sleepless night in a tent, we were ready for the final leg of the trip, but logistical problems delayed our departure by several more hours. Finally, after receiving our body armor and Kevlar (helmet) we boarded a C-12 bound for Iraq. The plane was cramped (it has only 8 seats, including the 2 pilots), noisy and hot but, mercifully, the flight took only 1 ½ hours. Excited like kids on Christmas morning, we stepped on the tarmac of Camp Victory in Baghdad and saw our "team" waving at us. As we hugged and shook hands all around, CSM James Redmore boomed "Welcome to Iraq!", as if we had just arrived at a luxury resort for a tropical vacation. The weather was actually pretty nice: a sunny, dry afternoon with the temperature at around 75 degrees. Soon we all piled into a couple of SUVs and drove to our quarters, a small trailer type box with 8 bunk beds. My hopes of sleeping in one of Saddam's 70 palaces dashed by military reality. Fortunately the latrine was "only" 100 yards away.

Our "team" consisted of CSM Redmore, Sgt Gaylord, Sgt Duerr and "Ray" our Arabic speaking cultural attaché. They provided for all of our needs (transportation, security, access, logistics, etc…), satisfied our curiosity and patiently integrated us into the military way of doing things in country. What a great team…. I cannot thank them enough! They will always have my friendship and respect.



A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON

Most historians and archeologists agree that Iraq is one of the cradles of Western Civilization but modern visitors to this country would find it almost impossible to make that connection. Today's Iraq is a country of 29 million people in an area a little larger than California. With an incredibly rich history dating back more than 5000 years, Iraq was once know as Mesopotamia (the land between 2 rivers) and was the site of powerful kingdoms such as the Sumerians, the Babylonians and the Assyrians. The 2 rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, provided a fertile land, the waterways for commerce and the hospitable environment necessary for the development of a thriving, sophisticated culture which extended into Western Persia (modern Iran). During their successive rules, the above mentioned kingdoms built many important cities described even in today's history school books: Ur, Kish, Babylon, Nimrud and Nineveh. However, the ancient splendor of that civilization is now gone and even its archeological traces are neglected and unprotected. Most people today think of Iraq in the context of the current political and military events covered and reported (often superficially and inaccurately) by the media. So a little background on this restless country will be helpful in understanding the present.

The recent modern history of Iraq is steeped in turmoil, intrigue, violence and destruction, setting the stage for things to come. In 1958 Abdul Karim Qasim, an Army officer, staged a coup, executed the king and slaughtered the entire royal family, including women and children. He then declared Iraq a Republic. In turn, Qasim was executed in another coup staged by the Baath party in 1963. The victors tortured and executed thousands of opponents and this is when Saddam Hussein first appeared on the scene. As leading member of the "Intelligence Committee" of the party, Saddam was in charge of (surprise) torture and interrogations. In 1968 after yet another Baathist purge, Saddam was appointed head of National Security and began to build an extremely brutal police apparatus. In 1979, at the age of 42, Hussein finally took power, establishing himself the absolute despot over the Iraqi people for the next 25 years. A ruthless and conniving manipulator of international politics, Saddam, within months, attacked Iran unleashing a war that would last 10 years, cost $200 million and over 500,000 human lives. The war was a disastrous, useless failure for both sides, accomplishing nothing. But Saddam was not satisfied. Coveting Kuwaiti rich oil fields, on August 2, 1990 the Iraqi Army invaded Kuwait and began a campaign of rape, torture, murder and pillage of that small country. On August 28th, Saddam announced that Kuwait no longer existed, it was now the 19th Province of Iraq. As we all know, things did not go Saddam's way. On January 16, 1991 a coalition force of 29 nations, over 800,000 strong, launched "Operation Desert Storm" which ended on February 24 with the liberation of Kuwait and the collapse of the Iraqi Army. Once again the imperialistic dream of this cruel, delusional tyrant had been crushed but at a cost of over 45,000 Iraqi lives and $200 billion. The coalition forces lost 540 lives and spent $82 billion. The cost in Kuwait lives and property had also been staggering.



"Saddam's tank graveyard"



"Saddam's palace remodeled by US Tomahawk missile strike"



"CSM Redmore presents us with Certificates of Appreciation"



"GM P. and Master Gray with their rental SUV"



" Go ahead... Make our day!"



"I love the smell of Blackhawks in the morning!"



"Combatives Training"

PLAYING TOURISTS



"The new ICHF Branch Office in one of Saddam's palaces"

The "work" part of our tour over, we enjoyed 2 days of R & R at the sprawling compound comprised by the 3 American bases: Camp Victory, Camp Liberty and Camp Slayer. Over 20,000 troops and civilian contractors populate this incredibly large complex located apx. 20 miles west of the center of Baghdad. Under Saddam Hussein's rule, this area was home to the Abu Ghraib presidential grounds, the Republican Guard and the Iraqi Military Academy. There are also "recreational" palaces, an artificial lake, the Baath Party convention center, the "Victory over America" palace and other grandiose displays of Saddam's megalomania. Some of the buildings had been hit by bombs and missiles, and now stand in gaping ruins, others are mysteriously intact. Robert and I could not get enough of the details and the history of each place we visited. We took literally hundreds of photos while soaking it all in. By a fateful coincidence, we happened to enter Al Faw, one of the most spectacular of Saddam's palaces, while "something important" was going on. We soon realized that an official ceremony was about to begin. It was the 233rd birthday of the US Marine Corps (November 10th) and attending the celebration was General Odierno, Commander of the US Troops in Iraq. Another great experience for us and a little poetic justice for Saddam. Karma is a beautiful thing!

There were many other memorable moments of this tour, too many to narrate. Like Afghanistan, this had been an incredible experience that Robert and I had been fortunate to share. The last day we had the opportunity to shake hands again with Major General Oates of the 10th Mountain Division (we had first met him in Fort Drum). We also had a good-bye dinner with all the Sgt. Majors of the Task Force, where I presented CSM Redmore with the first and only "Master Instructor of Military Combatives" certification issued by the Military Combatives Association and he presented us with certificates of appreciation for our work with the troops.



"King John Pellegrini on Saddam's Throne"

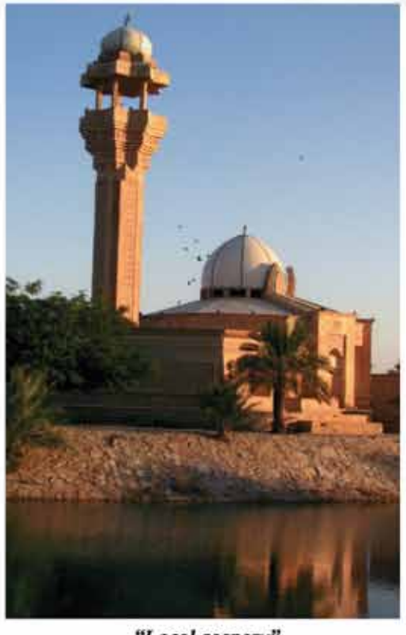


"Sgt. Gaylord relaxing amidst the ruins of one of Saddam's palaces"



The events of the following 12 years, leading to the present war, have been thoroughly documented and endlessly debated: weapons of mass destruction, UN resolutions, Saddam's duplicity, threats, manipulations, mass murders, failed diplomacy, sanctions, faulty intelligence, etc… and this is not the place to discuss the existence (or lack) of justifications, reasons and merits for the war which the US led coalition launched on March 19, 2003. Judging current military and geopolitical affairs is a tricky business because all relevant ramifications and long term consequences have not yet unfolded. So it may be wise to leave the "could haves, should haves and might haves" to future historians who, hopefully, will have at their disposal a clear, complete and unbiased record to analyze, enabling them to render an accurate historical verdict. Therefore this is where the history lesson must necessarily end and this narrative fast-forward to Robert and I arriving in Iraq and why we decided to go there in the first place. The answer is actually very simple: we volunteered our services to help the troops. That's all. No political statement, no hidden agenda, no thrill seeking. During our experience in Afghanistan, we had witnessed firsthand the hardship, sacrifices and dangers constantly facing our young men and women in uniform. We observed their hard work to help the local people, their compassion, generosity and courage. So, again, we had decided to give something back, to make a small contribution. The 2006 Afghan trip had also taught us valuable lessons about our interaction with the troops. What we had discovered (and were told by their NCOs and Officers) was that it was not just the combatives training and our contribution to their "combat readiness" that was important to the troops. They were grateful that someone from "home" cared enough to be there with them. Our presence demonstrated a tangible appreciation for their service and sacrifices. It was a true "morale booster" for the troops and that, ultimately, was our greatest reward.





"Local scenery"

"Local scenery"

IN COUNTRY

On Wednesday, November 5, our busy schedule began with an exhilarating open door 1 hour ride in a Black Hawk helicopter that took us to FOB (forward operating base) Echo in Diwaniyah Province for our first training seminar. Task Force Command had decided that driving to any FOB would be too dangerous and logistically demanding. IED's and ambushes are still a very real occurrence, while flying presented "only" the risks of ground RPG fire or the rare unfortunate crash. The troops, from the different units (cavalry, artillery, tanks, infantry, etc..) were enthusiastic about the training and enjoyed the opportunity to do something truly different to break their routine. The next day a 30 minute Black Hawk ride took us to FOB Kalsu in Karbala Province for a ½ day seminar and then back to Camp Victory in Baghdad for another ½ day seminar. Once again, the troops' response at both locations was extremely positive. Robert and I were so pleased as not to feel the fatigue of the long day. Next came FOB Delta in the Wasit Province. After a 1 ½ hour Black Hawk ride, we conducted a morning seminar for US troops. No gym mats at this location and all take-downs were on a hard concrete floor. Of course Robert and I were very grateful for being the ones doing the teaching and not the falling; age and martial arts rank have their privileges! After a lunch in our honor that included a cake decorated with my name and the ICHF logo (which prompted my comment "but it's not my birthday!") we visited the HQ of the "Cuscatlan" Battalion, an elite unit of the Salvadoran Army. The small but proud Central American country of El Salvador is one of the strongest and most loyal allies of the US in Iraq. The hospitality, friendship and sincerity of the Salvadoran troops almost brought tears to our eyes and it's an experience we will never forget. That afternoon we conducted a seminar for the Salvadorans which attracted over 150 (about ½ trained, the other ½ could only observe as they were "on duty" and could be called away at any moment). By the time we reached the flightline to head back to Baghdad, the sun had disappeared over the desert horizon and we got to experience our first night flight in a Black Hawk. Exciting but very cold! After a meal and a few hours sleep, we left again, this time for FOB Adder in Dhi Qar Province. This ride in the Black Hawk was the longest (about 2 hours) but, with sunny and clear weather, it was anything but boring. Once again the seminar was a success, with eager participants covered in sweat and dust but clearly having a great time.



"With Col. Acosta Bonilla – Salvadoran Army"



"FOB Delta – Cuscatlan Battalion"

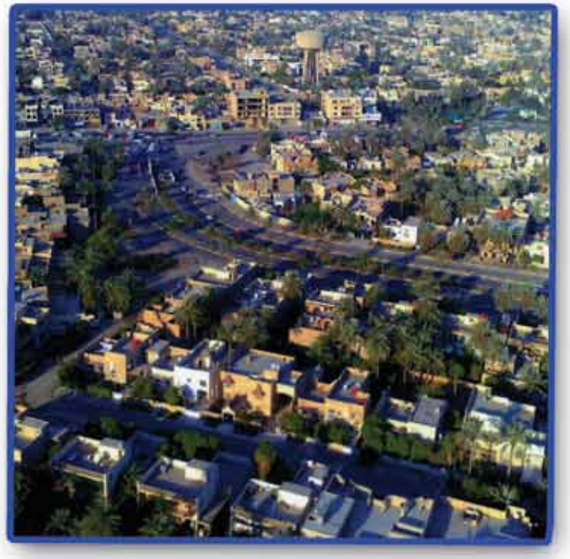
The return trip to Baghdad, in what was to be our last ride in the Black Hawk, was also the most memorable because CSM Redmore had instructed the pilot to give us a special treat by flying over the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon. The sight of these majestic ruins filled us with awe and we were utterly spellbound. It is almost impossible to describe what it was like, flying at about 400 feet over what thousands of years ago was one of the first, most advanced civilizations in the World. Now silent and empty, in the middle of the hot desert, Babylon eerily reminded us of the transitory nature of even the most powerful kingdoms. As we were furiously trying to shoot some good photos, we realized how fortunate we were to have been given this incredibly rare opportunity.

At this point, I must also give some well deserved recognition to the crews flying the 2 Black Hawks assigned to our tour. The pilots and the gunners were nothing short of fantastic, discharging their duties with extreme professionalism, competence and courage. While on board those awesome "birds", Robert and I always felt safe and in good hands. The crews even managed to make our flights "exciting": we experienced skimming over treetops and power lines at 80 feet altitude, later soaring to 4000 feet; "banking" at 90 degrees over villages and speeding through deserts at 150 MPH (ground speed), the gunners always alert to any possible threats. Those crews are truly made of the "right stuff."

The most impressive sight, after Babylon, was the city of Baghdad (pop. 5 Million) bathed in the afternoon sun. Nothing like we expected, the city appeared "normal" and thriving. Skyscrapers, markets, children playing in courtyards (and waving at us), commuter traffic. If it were not for the occasional checkpoint, military patrol and some "bombed out" buildings to remind us that we were in a war zone, this could have been a modern city almost anywhere in the World.



"Ruins of Ancient Babylon"



"Modern Baghdad"