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Local soldier experiences, writes on Operation Freedom's Cry

Editor's Note: Capt. Brock A. Zimmerman of Hoopeston, and his unit took part in Sunday's Operation Freedom's Cry. Here, he recounts the experience

The day started at 0130 in the wee hours of the morning. Tensions were high and everyone assumed the day that lay ahead was going to be a deadly one. I gathered my soldiers around our vehicles at 0245 hrs and gave them a situational report of our area of operation and safety brief before we left our base camp into the dark night. Traveling down the road, I could feel the heat and smell the exhaust of my M113 Personnel Carrier blow back into my face as my men and vehicles headed toward the 204th Iraqi Army Base Camp located in the town of Galibiyah. The election was four hours away.

**Tales
from the
Front**

By
Brock Zimmerman



Our mission was to be a medical quick reactionary force based out of the Iraqi Army Headquarters in case of any U.S. or Iraqi casualties during the Election Day. All available forces from our unit were out in full force by 0500 hrs. Polling centers were hardened with concrete barriers, concertina wire, and had been heavily guarded by the 204th Iraqi Army Battalion since Jan. 26. The Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq (IECI) headed the election process and was responsible for getting the polling sites opened, assisting voters, and counting ballots at the end of the Election Day.

At 0700, I asked my interpreter, Ali, if he was ready to vote. He replied, "I am ready!" The first polling center that we arrived at was in a town called Saif

Briefly

Sweetheart Banquet

The 14th annual Senior Citizen Sweetheart Banquet will be held beginning at 12:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 18 in the Hoopeston Area High School gym. The event is sponsored by the high school drama department and student council.

Hoopeston Area seniors interested in attending should make reservations by Feb. 10 by calling 283-6668.

FAFSA assistance

Danville Area Community College financial aid advisors will be at the Hoopeston Area High School computer lab from 6-8 p.m. Feb. 9 to assist with filling out FAFSA forms online.

For more information, call guidance counselor

Kay Brown at 283-6661 or DACC, (217) 443-8891.

DACC will also hold a meeting to fill out paper versions of FAFSA at 6 p.m. Feb. 22 in the Bremer Center.

HGSA meeting

Hoopeston Girls Sports Association will meet at 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 13 at the Hoopeston Multi Agency. The meeting is open to the public. Anyone interested in coaching or running the concessions stand is urged to attend. For more information, call John Fowler, 283-7563 or Brad Hardcastle, 283-7456.

Neighborhood Watch

Keith Sousa and Sgt. Steve Swisher of the Vermilion County Crime Stoppers will be the featured speakers at the Hoopeston Neighborhood Watch meet-

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**Hoopeston Area High School
Saturday, Feb. 26**

Matinee with

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\$13 advance, \$15 at door

Evening with

HARVEST CITY BOYS 7 p.m.

\$16 advance, \$18 at door

Call (217) 283-5492 or email

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All seats reserved

Tacos, chicken tacos, steak quesadillas,
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Saad, but the

See **FREEDOM** on other side

Freedom continued from other side

polling center was closed. As my vehicles approached the polling center, I could see Iraqi citizens peering over the walls that surround their homes and some were just standing outside watching. After assisting the IECI, the polling site was officially open.

My interpreter Ali was the first one to vote at the polling center in Saif Saad. He walked out of the polling center and it seemed like he had won a million dollars the way he was smiling.

A few male Iraqi citizens went through the security inspection and entered into the polling center to cast their vote as others watched from their homes. The Iraqi men walked out of the polling center and I asked Ali, what it was they were discussing as they walked out. Ali said, "They were just discussing who they had voted for."

I kind of chuckled because I thought of all the political badgering that goes on when we vote and realized that the Iraqi people are freely speaking about who they voted for in the first election in over 50 years. In those elections, Ali said, "Everyone voted for Saddam Hussein because if they didn't they would either be tor-

tured or killed."

As he said that, I turned around and saw men, women and the elderly people walking from their homes to get into line. As more and more people arrived the lines were getting longer and everyone was eagerly waiting to have their voice heard.

Things were under control and I was informed that a second polling site near my location was still not open. We moved into a village called Hashmiyah where voter turnout was expected to be low because of the mix between Sunnis and Shias. As I got out of my vehicle, I was greeted by the Muqtar (kind of like a mayor) of the village. He assumed that the site was closed since no one was voting. I worked with the IECI representative and got the polling center ready for voters.

Citizens trickled in with family, friends, etc. At that polling site, I was choked up when I saw an elderly man ride his bicycle to the polling center. The man had only one leg. Once he arrived at the security site, the Iraqi Army soldiers helped him stop his bicycle. The determined man took his canes and proceeded into the polling center.

The polling sites closed at 1700 hrs. The IECI

Police News



A **41-year-old** Hoopston woman reported Monday that she lost her Motorola cell phone Saturday at Skater's Paradise, 425 Cedar.

Michael L. Spencer, 25, of 185 E. Washington, Hampshire, was arrested at 3:05 p.m. Monday in the 200 block of East Main.

He was charged with possession of title documents without complete assignment, unlawful display on a vehicle of any title documents registration, no valid driver's license and on a Greene County, Mo., warrant.

He was taken to the Public Safety Building in Danville.

Weather



Partly cloudy today, tonight and tomorrow. High today 35, low 22. Tomorrow, high 43, low 30.

For current weather conditions, call Hoopston Weather Service, (217) 283-6221.

New Books at the Library



Fiction

- The Society by Michael Palmer
- The Secret on Ararat by Tim F. LaHaye (inspirational)
- McNally's Bluff by Vincent Lardo
- Fluke, or, I Know Why the Winged Whale Sings by Christopher Moore



**Hoopston Lions
Club**

Pancake & Sausage Day

Saturday, Feb. 5 5 a.m.-
2 p.m.
Hoopston American Legion
Adults \$4 Under 6 free

representatives were now responsible for sealing ballot boxes and the 204th Iraqi Army, along with my vehicles, escorted the ballots from Hashmiyah to Saif Saad where the IECI conducted an initial count of ballots. Rough estimates of numbers for Saif Saad added to be a little less than five thousand and Hashmiyah was pushing a thousand.

Throughout the entire day I was overcome by an overwhelming feeling. Soldiers, including myself, wonder everyday if we were making a difference here in Iraq. I have seen many faces here in Iraq, but wonder which one of those faces out there wants to kill me. When I saw those people walking toward the polling center, I realized that those people were on our side.

Our American Soldiers have accomplished the unthinkable tasks since being in Iraq ranging from combat operations, school construction, fixing water lines, re-establishing power grids and building an effective Iraqi Army in 10 months to maintain peace for their historic day. I have never been more proud to be an American soldier.

Classifieds

APARTMENTS FOR RENT

Rossville: 1 bdr. Riverview Apartments. Completely refurbished, on-site washers & dryers. 1 bdr. \$310/mo., \$310 deposit Call (217) 840-3672.

HOUSES FOR RENT

3 bedroom house for rent. Call (217) 283-7028
Hoopston. 2/Bedroom 2/Bath Duplex. Garage and yard. Seniors Welcome. \$550 + deposit. Available for immediate move-in. (217) 442-0593 or 260-2546.

LOST

Male Boxer. Fawn w/white markings. "Oscar." Last seen Monday in 900 block of East Orange, Hoopston. If found, call 283-9663.

SERVICES

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VEHICLES FOR SALE

Red 2003 Honda 300 EX ATV, Runs good, \$2650, Call 283-5171 & ask for Dale

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