

## IRAQ

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So the U.S. death toll — at least 4,415 by Pentagon count as of Wednesday — may not yet be final.

The Stryker brigade, based in Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state and named for the vehicle that delivers troops into and out of battle, has lost 34 troops in Iraq. It was at the forefront of many of the fiercest battles, including operations in eastern Baghdad and Diyala province, an epicenter of the insurgency, during "the surge" of 2007. It evacuated troops at the battle of Tarmiyah, an outpost where 28 out

of 34 soldiers were wounded holding off insurgents.

Before the Aug. 31 deadline, about half the brigade's 4,000 soldiers flew out like most of the others leaving Iraq, but its leadership volunteered to have the remainder depart overland. That decision allowed the unit to keep 360 Strykers in the country for an extra three weeks.

U.S. commanders say it was the brigade's idea, not an order from on high. The intent was to keep additional firepower handy through the "period of angst" that followed Iraq's inconclusive March 7 election, said brigade chief, Col. John Norris.

It took months of preparation to move the troops and armor across more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) of desert highway through

potentially hostile territory.

The Strykers left the Baghdad area in separate convoys over a four-day period, traveling at night because the U.S.-Iraq security pact — and security worries — limit troop movements by day.

Along the way, phalanxes of American military Humvees sat at overpasses, soldiers patrolled the highways for roadside bombs, and Apache attack helicopters circled overhead as the Strykers refueled alongside the highway.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gus McKinney, a brigade intelligence officer, acknowledged that moving the convoys overland put soldiers at risk, but said the danger was less than in past.

The biggest threat was roadside bombs planted by Shiite extremist groups who have a

strong foothold in the south, McKinney said.

But except for camels straying into the road, and breakdowns that required some vehicles to be towed, there were no incidents.

The worst of the ride was conditions inside the Strykers — sitting for hours in a cramped space — and the temperatures outside that reached 50 Celsius (120 Fahrenheit).

The driver's compartment is called the "hellhole" because it sits over the engine and becomes almost unbearably hot. The vehicle commander and gunner can sit up in hatches to see the outside world. At the tail end are hatches for two gunners. Eight passengers — an infantry squad in combat conditions — can squeeze in the back.

Riding as a passenger felt a bit

like being in a World War II-era submarine — a tight fit and no windows. The air conditioning was switched off to save fuel on the long ride south to Kuwait. Men dozed or listened to music on earphones.

When the convoy finally reached the sandy border, two soldiers, armed and helmeted, jumped off their vehicle and raced each other into Kuwait.

Once out of Iraq, there was still work to be done. Vehicles had to be stripped of ammunition and spare tires, and eventually washed and packed for shipment home.

Meanwhile, to the north, insurgents kept up a relentless campaign against the country's institutions and security forces, killing five Iraqi government employees in roadside bombings and other attacks Wednesday. Coming a day

after a suicide bomber killed 61 army recruits in central Baghdad, the latest violence highlighted the shaky reality left by the departing U.S. combat force and five months of stalemate over forming Iraq's next government.

For Dill, who reached Kuwait with an earlier convoy, the withdrawal engendered feelings of relief. His mission — to get his squad safely out of Iraq — was accomplished.

Standing alongside a hulking Stryker, his shirt stained with sweat, he acknowledged the men who weren't there to experience the day with him.

"I know that to my brothers in arms who fought and died, this day would probably mean a lot, to finally see us getting out of here," he said.

## OSPREY

From Page 1

completed and Fink-Cantwell beamed while looking over the new tail given to Betty.

"A whole new tail — you know it's the latest in cosmetic surgery," she joked.

Betty didn't seem as pleased with the work. As Fink-Cantwell held her up for observation, the bird snipped at the biologist's arm with her sharp beak.

Fink-Cantwell said it's been a somewhat difficult year for the project. The storm that hammered the Lake Yankton area two weeks ago damaged two hack boxes, as well as the trailer where she lives during her stay in Yankton. It also sank a boat used to rescue downed osprey.

"Amazingly, these birds held on and every one of them was accounted for after the storm," Fink-Cantwell said. "We did find a few grounded, but we got right down here and popped them back up on the tower (that the birds call home)."

Additionally, two of the approximately 20 osprey that were to be released have died from avian aspergillosis, a fungal respiratory illness.

Fink-Cantwell believes the illness was helped by weather conditions. Humidity levels in Idaho were around 15 percent, while humidity levels have recently exceeded 90 percent in Yankton.

"We believe that contributed to the deaths of these two birds," she said. "We have a third bird, Victoria, that (is being medicated for avian aspergillosis). We're hopeful she'll recover. The other two were younger, less developed and less able to fight it off in spite of our care."

Don and Wanda Veltkamp of Yankton are in their second year of volunteering for the project and were intimately involved in trying to save the lives of the two deceased birds.

They took one of the osprey, Warrior, into their home. During the day, they would feed Warrior fish and Fink-Cantwell would stop by to give the bird medication.

"We were fighting a losing battle, and we couldn't get it turned around," Don said. "It's kind of like losing a pet, though you're probably not quite as attached after only a few days. But for a little while, it feels like you're missing something."

Osprey face tremendous hurdles to surviving even under the best of conditions, Fink-Cantwell said.

## Columbian Leader Praises Rescuers In Plane Crash

BY CESAR GARCIA  
Associated Press Writer

SAN ANDRES, Colombia — Authorities on Wednesday reopened the island runway where a jetliner crashed with 131 people aboard, clearing the way for flights after crews worked overnight to remove spilled fuel and fractured pieces of the plane.

Columbian President Juan Manuel Santos thanked the rescue workers, firefighters and police who helped passengers to safety as he visited the airport. Only one person on board the plane was killed when it slammed into the ground short of the runway Monday on San Andres Island.

"We're very proud of the way you worked," Santos told rescue workers at the airport.

The wreckage was moved to a hangar while investigators search for clues to the cause of the crash.

Both survivors and authorities called the low death toll miraculous.

Doctors on the island initially said one woman who died, Amar Fernandez de Barreto, may have suffered a heart attack. But an autopsy concluded that the 72-year-old woman was killed by blows in the crash and didn't have a heart attack, morgue director Dolana Navas told reporters on the island.

"In nature, the mortality rate of these birds is about 75 percent in the first year," she stated. "It's unrealistic to expect that 20 birds are going out and all of them will survive."

So far, 15 osprey have been released. A final batch, including some held over from last year, will be released next week.

When the osprey reintroduction project concludes in September, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks will have released about 100 osprey in Yankton County.

Fink-Cantwell said there has been no confirmation that birds released during the past several years have returned to the area to mate. However, osprey don't return to the place where they imprinted as a youngster for three to four years, when they have become sexually mature. Even then, they may nest anywhere within a 100-mile radius of that spot.

The participation of the public is crucial to the success of the project, according to Fink-Cantwell.

If a downed osprey is spotted, intervene by throwing a jacket or towel over the bird's head, grab it by the legs, put it in a box and call Fink-Cantwell at (208) 582-0797.

Also, Game, Fish & Parks officials are asking the public to help track the progress of the osprey project. If you see an osprey with a band on its leg, record the date and location. Also take note of the color of the band and its placement on the leg. The information can be reported to Eileen.DowdStukel@state.sd.us or Silka.Kempema@state.sd.us. Also, observers can call (605) 773-3387 to report the information.

Birds equipped with satellite radios were tracked to Louisiana and Central America last year, Fink-Cantwell said.

Veltkamp said he hopes that he spots an osprey in the area 15 years from now and can tell his grandchildren that he was involved in reintroducing them to the area.

"You get kind of attached to the osprey, especially the ones that have unique circumstances," he said. "We'll all be pulling for the one that got the feather transplant today. It may work or it may not, but it's worth a try."

The family atmosphere shared by those who volunteer for the project will also be hard to forget, Veltkamp added.

"When it's over, it's kind of like Christmas is over," he said.

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# Meet Dr. Kudera, Orthopedic Surgeon


YANKTON MEDICAL CLINIC, P.C. IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE ASSOCIATION OF  
**Jeremy Kudera, M.D.**  
*Board Eligible Orthopedic Surgeon*


Dr. Kudera is originally from Dell Rapids, SD and completed his undergraduate degree at The University of South Dakota where he was a student-athlete. He is a graduate of Sanford School of Medicine-University of South Dakota. Dr. Kudera completed his Orthopedic Surgery residency training at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, and is board eligible.

Dr. Kudera will provide care for a multitude of musculoskeletal conditions including joint replacement of the knee, hip, and shoulder, treatment of athletic injuries, adult and pediatric fracture care, rotator cuff repair, and treatment of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Please join with us in welcoming Dr. Kudera, his wife, Jennifer, and their son, Jackson, to Yankton.

**Dr. Kudera will begin seeing patients at  
Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. August 23, 2010.  
Appointments can be made by calling 605-665-1722.**



  
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