HISTORY OF THE 1168TH TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

MOBILIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT

FOR

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM –

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

10 FEBRUARY 2003 – 10 APRIL 2004

1168th TC (-), Red Oak, Iowa
Detachment 1, Perry, Iowa
Detachment 2, Audubon, Iowa

COMPILED BY:

CPT JONI ERNST, COMMANDER
The following information is a compiled history of the 1168th Transportation Company while serving with the command team of CPT Joni Ernst and 1SG David Carstens in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom from 10 February 2003 to 10 April 2004.

Tensions between the United States and Iraq had been growing steadily since 11 September, 2001. The War on Terror was already in full swing in Afghanistan by 7 January 2003 when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld announced the United States would be increasing troop levels in the Middle East.

The first rumors of mobilization began in November 2002. The 1168th, as well as all other Iowa Army National Guard units, received notification that all wheeled equipment would be going to the paint booths at Camp Dodge and Sioux City. The paint operation was scheduled to run 24 hours/7 days a week. The vehicles were being painted “desert tan.” A statement issued by the Iowa National Guard proclaimed that the vehicles needed new paint, and because most Iowa units had missions focused in the Middle East, the color of choice was tan.

Although the statement from the National Guard seemed to satisfy most of the Iowa public, the company knew this was the first step in a mobilization process. The company’s 120 M871A2 trailers were approximately ten years old and the 60 M1088 tractors were five years old, so they did not need to be re-painted.

On 1 November 2002, SFC Ted Schoonover, 1168th Readiness NCO, sent an email to CPT Joni Ernst, Commander, alerting her to a conversation he had with a representative from the 68th Corps Support Battalion, Fort Carson, CO. In this conversation, the 68th CSB soldier was asking for information on the company, because the 1168th TC was to fall under the 68th CSB in their upcoming deployment. At this time the company had been given no indication of when an alert would come, but it was a good indication that a mobilization was inevitable.

The Alert Notification came at 1245 on 28 January 2003. This notification was to alert the soldiers to a possible mobilization. This notification followed the 17 January alert notices received by the 1133rd Transportation Company and the 109th Aviation Maintenance Company.

The 183 soldiers of the 1168th were called-in to their armories on 5 February to begin the administrative process to expedite the possible mobilization. The unit traveled to Camp Dodge, Iowa from its respective armories in Red Oak, Perry and Audubon, Iowa and received mobilization briefings on Thursday evening, 6 February.

The following day, 7 February, the unit began its Soldier Readiness Processing, rotating through stations that included immunizations, physicals, legal, and personnel. The SRP was completed in one day. COL Tracy Warnock, IA National Guard DCSPERS, met with CPT Ernst on that same day and presented her with the 1168th TC’s mobilization notification.
The unit was called together later that evening and was given the mobilization notification by CPT Ernst and 1SG Carstens. There was a question and answer period and then the soldiers were released to call their families.

The soldiers who were given a “GO” during the SRP were sent to the Clothing Issue Facility at Camp Dodge on Saturday, 8 February 2003. The soldiers were issued their desert camouflage uniforms and additional Organizational Clothing and Individual Equipment (OCIE) necessary for the deployment.

The 1168th Transportation Company was ordered to Active Federal Duty by Permanent Orders 38-44, HQ Fifth United States Army, under Title 10 USC Section 12302 by Presidential Executive Order, as well as the consent of the Governor Tom Vilsack, State of Iowa, on 10 February 2003. Each platoon reported to their armories – 1st PLT to Red Oak, 2nd PLT to Audubon, and 3rd PLT to Perry. The Maintenance and Headquarters Platoons remained at their home armories to prepare organizational equipment and process additional personnel issues as they arose during the Home Station phase of mobilization.

The unit was ordered to remain at Home Station until a call-forward was received from Fort McCoy, WI. The recent refusal of Turkey to allow United States forces to use its land and air space as a pre-positioning platform to deploy soldiers into Iraq caused an overburden of soldiers at mobilization stations while logistical planners re-worked the issues that accompanied this development. All deploying soldiers were eventually re-routed into and through Kuwait, but this created a large bottleneck of US forces and equipment in the small nation while awaiting the order to advance on Iraq.

In the 17 days spent at Home Station, the platoons were able to complete NBC, first aid, night driving, and weapons classes under the guidance of SFC Todd Monson, Unit Training Assistor assigned to the 1168th TC from Fifth Army. The Family Readiness Group was able to meet and conduct briefings to prepare family members for the departure of their soldiers. 120-M871A2 trailers, 60-M1088 tractors, 5-M998 HMMWVs, and 10 miscellaneous pieces of wheeled equipment were prepared for convoy to Fort McCoy. All company equipment and duffle bags of personal soldier gear were packed onto the platoon trailers.

Iowa received a large winter storm on 15 February, and training was cancelled for the 16th. The roads were too treacherous for travel, and it was decided that the soldiers would be allowed to stay home and training would resume when the weather cleared. The soldiers were also given 22 February off in anticipation of a call-forward.

The call-forward was received and the Advance Party led by CPT Ernst departed for Fort McCoy, WI, on 24 February 2004 to prepare for the unit’s reception.

On 26 February 2003 all three locations had send off ceremonies for the unit. In Red Oak the ceremony was performed at the Red Oak High School, BG Zirkelbach and
COL King were the guest speakers and was a very emotional and motivational ceremony. About 3,000 families, friends and local residents attended, after the ceremony the Red Oak Ambassadors prepared and served the families and soldiers a dinner meal, they were then released to spend the night at home. 3rd Platoon’s send-off was conducted at the Perry High School and again BG Zirkelbach and COL King spoke to the large crowd that attended the ceremony. Again there was a large turn-out of families and local residents. 2nd Platoon’s ceremony was conducted at the Audubon High School and it resulted the same overwhelming turn-out as the other two ceremonies.

Unit members gathered at all three locations on 27 February 2003 and prepared for the two-day convoy to Fort McCoy. Families were not allowed in the armory or compound and were encouraged to drop off their loved ones and then line the convoy route to show their support. The unit then departed all three locations on a designated route and was overwhelmed with the outpour of patriotism and people that lined the routes all the way to Fort McCoy, WI. The unit had an overnight halt in Mason City, IA, at the 1133rd TC’s armory. The separate platoons were now traveling as one consolidated company, and the company arrived at the Mobilization Station on 28 February 2003, meeting their gate time of 1500 hrs.

After staging the company vehicles and equipment in the assigned parking area, the soldiers were able to draw their linen and settle into their barracks. The 150-person unit occupied four barracks and an orderly room located near the Fort McCoy PX and McCoy’s, a club that housed a restaurant, game room, and bowling alley.

The Soldier Readiness Processing began the following morning, 1 March, and occupied most of the next several days. After completion of the SRP, the unit began its required training, again with the Unit Assistor SFC Monson facilitating the process.

The unit engaged the M16, M9, M203, M249, .50 cal, and MK19 ranges and attended Rules of Engagement, medical considerations, and terrorist threat briefings during the first week of March. Those soldiers who did not qualify during the initial weapons qualification were rescheduled in the following weeks.

NBC and Collective Task Training were validated by 12 March, and the unit moved into rail loading classes and final preparation of trailers for rail transport. The unit was authorized two twenty-foot containers to secure sensitive items and excess gear. The platoons hardened eight trailers with sideboards by attaching 2x4 bracing across the tops of the trailers and used plywood and decking screws to affix the “lid”. Tarps were then stretched over the trailers to conceal the hardened tops. These trailers contained field desks, tentage and camouflage, duffels, personal gear, mess equipment, spare parts, tools, and additional items needed for the deployment.

The rail load of began on Tuesday, 18 March, and lasted for 7 hours, a record for Fort McCoy. The rail load supervisors were impressed with the speed and accuracy with which the soldiers worked. This good working relationship enabled the unit to assist the
186th MP Company and the 2133rd Transportation Company with their rail loads when they received their call-forwards.

The port call for the unit equipment was scheduled for 27 March in Beaumont, TX, and a detail of 7 soldiers was sent to the Port of Beaumont to assist with the upload of equipment onto the USNS Shugart. Not all of the equipment was loaded onto this first ship. Additional loads were sent on the USNS Pillilaau and the USNS Soderman, with the majority of equipment on the USNS Pillilaau. The unit was able to send two soldiers as Super Cargos on the ship with the equipment, CW2 Don Yost and SGT Doug Chapman. They departed Beaumont aboard the USNS Shugart.

The unit began lanes training on 27 March with vehicles drawn from Fort McCoy. The lanes training included reacting to a NBC attack, reacting to an ambush, and reacting to a sniper. Lanes training concluded the evening of 28 March.

The soldiers were allowed commander’s time on Saturday, 29 March, and Sunday, 30 March. Families were encouraged to join their soldiers for the weekend, and many took advantage of this opportunity and made reservations in local hotels. SGT Harpster, Administrative NCO, and his fiancée Diane, were married on 29 March at 1600 in a chapel on Fort McCoy. The unit and the newly married couple hosted a reception on the first floor of the female barracks following the wedding. This weekend provided some greatly needed family time for the soldiers before they deployed overseas.

During the stay at Fort McCoy, the unit gained two soldiers. SPC Mark Euken was medically cleared to join the unit, and PFC Jayme Wendt completed her Advanced Individual Training and came to Fort McCoy.

While the unit saw the addition of these two soldiers, two were transferred to the medical hold company. SGT Rebecca Rudolph was eventually medically discharged for asthma, and SPC Jason Schomburg was released later that summer and joined the unit in Kuwait.

The unit continued to train on individual and collective tasks, and, even though it couldn’t have been predicted at the time, trained on Force Protection tasks, which turned out to be the unit’s primary mission later that fall.

During the stay at the Mobilization Station, CPT Ernst was contacted by CPT Brown, S3 from the 541st Maintenance Battalion (Active Duty) from Fort Riley, KS. They were designated to receive the 1168th as one of their downtrace units while deployed. Ongoing discussions and exchange of unit information occurred until the 541st left for Kuwait in early April.

The unit was visited by Des Moines Register John Carlson in the middle of April. Mr. Carlson was hoping to join the 1168th in Kuwait or Iraq after the unit deployed. On the day that Mr. Carlson visited, the unit received its fly date. A company formation was held, and the seven plus weeks of anticipation culminated. The soldiers were ready to go.
Several days of last minute packing and checks followed. The troops were up early morning on the 18 April, and they were transported to Volk Airfield, WI. The soldiers went through a final inspection in the hangar and then were moved onto the commercial aircraft. The first class seats were reserved for the loading crew for a well-deserved rest. Wheels went up at 1005 on 18 April 2004, and the unit began its journey to Kuwait.

The 1168th arrived in Kuwait at the Kuwait City International Airport on 19 April 2004. The temperature was in the lower nineties (Fahrenheit) and humidity was very high. All soldiers were in full combat gear with weapons and were transported by bus to Camp Wolf, a reception area that was adjacent the airport.

The unit was sent through the reception area, a large canvas Bedouin tent, and the soldiers’ identification cards were scanned to track entry into Kuwait. Briefings were given on local culture, intelligence, safety, and camp regulations.

Camp Wolf was overburdened with incoming soldiers. The camp, designated as a reception area, was designed to receive soldiers and send them to their gaining units within a four-hour block of time. Because of the huge number of soldiers entering Kuwait at the time, units were being housed at Camp Wolf for many days. Outlying camps had no room for additional soldiers, so they were kept at the reception area until other camps gained room as units moved forward into Iraq.

Camp Wolf was not outfitted with shower or hygiene facilities for the transient units, and the tents were packed with soldiers. Soldiers attempted hygiene as best they could, with many sneaking into the permanent party showers on the other side of Camp Wolf. Laundry and sponge baths were achieved to a small degree of success with the plastic buckets brought from home station.

Many soldiers slept in make-shift shelters outside the tents. This offered some relief from overcrowding, but it rained brief periods of time throughout the first few days, soaking those soldiers who chose the fresh air and room over the dry, but odorous, air-conditioned tents.

There was not room for all of the soldiers’ gear inside the Bedouin tents, so all units occupying Camp Wolf were assigned a staging area for supplies and duffels in the drop-off parking lot. Guard shifts were established to secure the gear, but most of the unit would congregate at the staging area and play cards, read, and visit to get away from the monotony of staying in the Bedouin tents.

The 1168th was split between several tents in the first few days, but was able to consolidate into one tent on the third day. The Bedouin tents were designed to hold up to 250 people, but with 150 people, it was quite uncomfortable. Everyone slept on the wood flooring, with only room for rucksacks or a personal bag. It was difficult to move about
On the fifth day at Camp Wolf, the unit moved across the road to Camp Champion, the 82nd Airborne’s area, to accommodate more incoming troops. The unit was moved by the Mayor’s Cell with the promise that it would only be for one night, and that they would be housed in new tents that were to be set up by contractors the next day at Camp Wolf.

Not surprisingly, the new tents were not completed the next day. The 1168th had set up GP large tents as a break area for new troops for the mayor of Camp Wolf. The unit occupied these tents by force, sleeping on scrounged plywood and cardboard on the sand and rock floor.

CPT Ernst and 1SG Carstens visited the Camp Wolf administrative tent every few hours, every day, to track their potential movement from the camp. CPT Ernst was able to locate the 541st Maintenance Battalion at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, and established contact with the unit. The entire process was frustrating at best; the 1168th would not be allowed to move until there was room at Camp Arifjan.

After making a phone call to the ARCENT-QA Sergeant Major, SGM George Ponder was able to assist CPT Ernst with the 1168th’s call-forward. On the afternoon of 25 April 2003, the unit moved from Camp Wolf to Camp Arifjan. The unit loaded their gear into a cargo truck, and boarded buses for the “short” drive to Camp Arifjan.

The “short” drive to Camp Arifjan, which was approximately 30 miles to the south, took several hours, and the unit arrived well after dark. The Third-Country-National (TCN) drivers were not familiar with the route into Arifjan, and circled the area many times before locating the camp. As the 1168th entered Camp Arifjan, they passed through an Entry Control Point that was manned by soldiers from the 186th MP Company, a sister company from the 134th Quartermaster Battalion.

Camp Arifjan, the largest Army post in Kuwait, was just south of Kuwait City. The camp was a clearinghouse for incoming and outgoing soldiers, and consisted of main post (Camp Arifjan) and four sub-camps, Truckville, Camden Yards, Arlington, and Kohima. The 226th Area Support Group, commanded by COL John Loden and CSM Barr, supported the camp base cluster.

After reporting to the ASG housing office, CPT Ernst was given the housing assignment locating the unit in South Camden Yards, which was roughly one mile from the gate to main Arifjan.

Camden Yards was a multi-national camp, occupied by approximately 540 Ukrainian soldiers on North Camden Yards, and roughly 1,300 American soldiers on South Camden Yards. The camp and mayor’s cell was managed by an AD engineer
battalion. This mayor cell assigned the 1168th eight tents throughout Camden Yards, approximately 20 soldiers per tent.

The camp mayor also assigned the unit a Command Post tent inside of a concertina-wired area to the north of the dining facility, and centrally located on Camden Yards. The CP was small, but did have a DSN phone. Over the next several months, the 1168th was able to gain an additional CP tent with multiple phone lines and internet connectivity. Until these lines were established, the soldiers were able to use a “community” DSN phone if they chose to wait several hours in line with soldiers from the other occupying units.

There was a common dining facility (DFAC) manned by Kellogg, Brown and Root managers and TCN cooks. Soldiers with the 92G military occupational specialty were designated to overwatch the TCN cooks and do headcounts during meal times. The DFAC served four meals daily: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and midnight chow.

The food was somewhat “American,” but often had a slightly different flavor, depending on how the TCN cooks (most from the Philippines) seasoned it. Water, iced tea, juices, and milk was served. Canned soda and non-alcoholic beer was available sporadically. Eventually the DFAC was able to install a soda fountain, but it still lacked a true “American” flavor.

South Camden Yards had two shower trailers and an abundance of porta-johns, which was a huge relief for the unit. This saved the effort of building latrines and shower facilities. There were also two laundry trailers with clothes washers and dryers, and they stayed busy at all hours of the day.

All facilities on Camp Arifjan were maintained by contracted TCNs through KBR. They cleaned, cooked, built, and repaired. This freed more soldiers for their primary missions and guard duty.

Upon arriving at Camp Arifjan, the 1168th fell under the 541st Maintenance Battalion (which became a CSB), commanded by LTC Lobeto. They were in the process of moving forward to Logbase Seitz in Iraq. The 1168th had only just received on 30 April the few pieces of equipment that had been loaded on the USNS Shugart, and was expecting the majority of its equipment to arrive around 10 May. It was decided by the 226th ASG to cut the 1168th to another unit as the 541st CSB completed its move north. (The 541st CSB later became the parent battalion of the 1555th QM Company and the 1133rd TC, both of the IA ARNG.)

The first convoy into Iraq was made on 5 May 2003 as part of the 542nd Maintenance Company’s permanent move north to Logbase Seitz, located just outside of Baghdad, Iraq. The 1168th took three FMTVs with trailers, one HMMWV, and one 5T wrecker. The trucks carried supplies and mail for the 541st CSB.
This initial convoy to Baghdad was well-planned, not so well executed. Most of the convoy was split while driving through traffic in Kuwait City. The 1168th was able to re-assemble and picked up many other vehicles from other units along MSR Tampa, the main supply route from Kuwait to Baghdad. They assembled their own serial and met up with the rest of the 542nd convoy at Navistar, the fueling stop just prior to the Kuwait/Iraq border.

The first night was spent at Tallil Air Force Base, a secured location in Iraq. This base also housed EPWs. The soldiers slept in and on the vehicles.

The next morning, the convoy departed Tallil AFB, and continued on to Baghdad International Airport and Logbase Seitz. The second night was spent at Logbase Seitz where the soldiers downloaded the cargo and got what sleep they could. There was constant gun-fire outside the perimeter, and they watched tracer rounds go overhead all night.

The return trip was made in one day, with the 1168th returning to Camp Arifjan on their own. The trucks were able to push up to 54 miles per hour coming back empty, versus the 40 – 45 miles per hour they were able drive with fully-loaded 20 foot containers.

There was only one incident on the return trip. As the 1168th came through Safwan, a densely populated town in Iraq just north of the Kuwait/Iraq border, young Iraqi males were grabbing onto the trucks and several laid down in front of the slowed vehicles. The drivers kept the trucks rolling forward slowly, and just as the Iraqi men were within harm, they rolled to safety. The trucks were able to pass through with no injuries to the soldiers or the local population. The convoy returned to Arifjan late that evening. The next day, the CPT Ernst reported to the 68th CSB, the 1168th’s new battalion.

The 68th CSB was commanded by LTC John Collie and CSM Jackson. The XO was MAJ Thompson-Shoats and the Transportation OIC and NCOIC were CPT Chris Robertson and SFC Scott Hall. This battalion was permanently assigned to Camp Arifjan, and supported the local area with its quartermaster (warehousing), maintenance, and transportation assets.

The rest of the company equipment arrived at the Port of Shuaybah (SPOD) around the 3rd and the 10th of May. All equipment was recovered from the port staging area in fairly good shape.

From May through the end of August, the 1168th provided transportation assets to the 68th CSB. Missions ran through extreme heat and sandstorms, at all hours of the day and night. The unit was a catch-all unit, and moved anything that could be moved with the 30-foot trailers.
In the first several months, the unit was driven hard, and some nights the drivers got by with four to five hours sleep before being called out again. Their hard work and determination did not go unnoticed. Many of the supported units passed along their appreciation to the soldiers and their command.

Not only did the drivers do an outstanding job, so did the maintenance platoon under the direction of CW2 Don Yost and SFC Brad Sauser. Their team of mechanics were well-known and well respected on Camp Arifjan, and it was quite normal to find a “new” unit in our motorpool receiving friendly Iowa assistance.

The maintenance personnel kept the unit equipment at an overall readiness rating of 98%, and a readiness rate of 93% for pacing items throughout the deployment. This was an amazing feat considering the extreme conditions in which the trucks and trailers were used.

The drivers of the unit transported baggage, ammunition, Patriot missiles, concrete Texas and Jersey barriers, sun shades, scud bunkers, over $2 billion in paper currency and gold, retrograde parts, 20-foot containers and ISU 90s, refrigerated vans, fresh fruit and vegetables, body armor and tactical vests, blocking and bracing materials, medical supplies, CL IX parts, bunkbeds, mattresses, grills, forklifts, HMMWVs, swamp coolers, palletized water, MREs, Iraqi uniforms, guard towers, tents, embalming powder, clothing, mail, barbed-wire, and POL.

These supplies comprised the 402 missions with a total of 2,091 loads, 10,455,000 short tons delivered, and 230,278 mission miles driven.

These loads were picked up and delivered to all “state” camps, Camp Udairi, Camp Coyote, Camp Champion, Camp Wolf, PWC, Theater Distribution Center, Kuwaiti Naval Base, Kuwait International Airport, Port of Shuaybah, Camp Victory, 15th Mubarak Brigade, Camp Arifjan, Breach Point West, Joint Military Mail Terminal, and Camp Doha, Kuwait. Loads were also delivered to and picked up within Iraq at Tallil Air Force Base, Logbase Seitz, and Baghdad International Airport.

Units supported during transportation missions included the 3d ID, 4th ID, 2d ACR, 3d ACR, 1st SFG, 2d SFG, 3d SFG, 11th AVN RGT, 12th AVN RGT, 1st MEF, 1st AD, 82d AB DIV, 101st AA DIV, 10th MTN DIV, CFLCC, V Corps, and many additional downtrace units.

The unit was joined by Des Moines Register reporter John Carlson in July. He spent a week covering the soldiers and their missions before moving into Iraq to visit other Iowa units.

The end of August also brought the end of the 1168th TC’s transportation missions. There had been a steady decline of missions as the force transitioned from soldier-drivers to contracted drivers. CPT Ernst and 1SG Carstens were notified that their company, as well as several of the other 68th CSB companies, were being tasked to
other units. The 1168th was assigned to the 226th ASG on 1 September 2003 and given the Camp Arifjan Force Protection mission. The 1168th reported directly to the Area Support Group’s commander COL John Loden.

For the first several days in September, the company trained for their FP mission. Squad leaders and above attended classes, then shadowed the soldiers currently working the areas the 1168th was assigned. Through a train-the-trainer process all soldiers that would be working FP learned the tactics and process that would be utilized in this mission. On 5 September, the 1168th took control of the front two Entry Control Points (ECP) of Camp Arifjan. They also provided the Quick Reactionary Force and Roving Patrols for Camp Arifjan. The soldiers were working thirteen to fourteen hours days with the guard mount briefings and 12-hour shifts. The work load was heavy, and there were many weeks the soldiers did not have a day off.

The Force Protection mission took the company by surprise. This was totally unexpected, as most of the soldiers believed that once the company was no longer needed for transportation, it would be sent home. This was not the case, and even more disturbing to the soldiers, was that in fact, there was word that every unit in theater was being extended to one year “boots-on-ground” (BOG).

The 365-days BOG was a reality and was confirmed by General Blum, Chief, NGB, during a townhall visit at Camp Arifjan in September. Morale was at an all-time low. COL Loden came to Camden Yards for a meeting with all squad leaders and above, to answer questions about the BOG. It did help, but the soldiers and their family members back home were still upset with the BOG policy.

Through all of the uneasiness due to the BOG, the soldiers concerns were heard as far away as Washington, D.C. A committee of United States Representatives was formed and came to Kuwait and Iraq on 18 September 2003. CPT Ernst, SGT Sara Cox, SPC Nathan Dolph, and SPC Timothy Allen were able to meet with Representative Steve King of Iowa and his aides at the Kuwaiti International Airport. He took notes on morale and soldier issues that arose from the deployment. His concern was genuine, and he continued to track the 1168th’s progress through their redeployment.

To help ease the pain of the long deployment, the unit was able to schedule Video-Teleconferences (VTCs) through Camp Arifjan’s Building 5 and the armories in Iowa utilizing the ICN. Every soldier had the opportunity to talk live with his or her family and friends during the week of 20 to 24 October. Although most soldiers enjoyed seeing and visiting with their family, some admitted it was very hard emotionally.

At the end of October, the Theater Support Command, made the determination that each camp should have a permanent FP structure. The battalion that was selected to fill the FP role at Camp Arifjan was the 1-162 IN BN from the Oregon Army National Guard.
The 1-162 had been deployed in Iraq during the ground war, and was given the FP mission to finish out their 365 BOG. Effective 1 November 2003, the 1168th TC was assigned to the 1-162 IN BN, commanded by LTC Joseph Cramer and CSM Gerald Schleining.

This relationship was new for both the 1168th and the 1-162. The 1168th had not worked for an infantry battalion, and the 1-162 had not had truckers working for them. It took a while to adapt to the battalion’s leadership style, but the 1168th prevailed.

The 1-162 had two of their own peacetime companies working for them at Camp Arifjan, and in spite of this, LTC Cramer favored his 1168th truck drivers. He knew they worked hard and needed very little direction. At the end of the deployment, LTC Cramer informed the ASG commander and the other battalion commanders that the 1168th was his best company. They responded, “Not your infantry hooahs?” And he said, “No, my truckers!”

After the 1-162 took control of FP, the 1168th moved to new points on Camp Arifjan. They moved from the front two ECPs to the rear ECP, the Building 5 guard shacks, a two-person detail for the Base Cluster Operations Center, and Tower 14. They continued to maintain the two roving patrols and Quick Reactionary Force.

There were many probing incidents with cars, trucks, four-wheel ATVs, and paragliders on the perimeter of Camp Arifjan, but the soldiers reacted with confidence and determination. To their credit, there were no breaches of security while the unit was on FP.

FP wasn’t always a serious matter. Often the local Bedouins would find that their sheep or camels had crossed over the berm onto Arifjan. Then the Roving Patrol or QRF would be called to chase them back over to the waiting herder. Some of the soldiers were even able to test their camel riding skills.

FP kept the soldiers busy, and they settled into a routine. Most enjoyed the fact that they had a set schedule, something they did not have when running transportation missions. The days were much more predictable, and morale of the unit steadied.

On the soldiers’ down-time, they busied themselves by reading books and magazines sent from home, swimming at the Arifjan pool, working out at the gym, keeping journals, attending church services, writing letters, playing video games, watching satellite TV, and watching digital videos. Every few weeks there would be a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation trip available to the downtown Kuwait City markets, the Marble Palace, and Camp Doha. Even with a variety of activities available, desert life seemed monotonous, and everyone longed for home.

As busy as the unit was, the soldiers were allowed to take R&R leave for 15 days. The company was broken into groups of 15 soldiers each, and assigned dates based on
special occasions, holidays, etc. Not every soldier decided to take leave, and there were those who went to Europe with friends rather than make the long trip home.

The capture of Sadaam Hussein on 14 December was exciting, and the soldiers watched it on satellite TV, but it did not affect the mission. There was still a job to do, and the 365 BOG was not yet complete.

On 20 December 2003, the 1168th became the official Mayor’s Cell of Camden Yards. It was a large task, but kept the unit in the good graces of the ASG. The cell was responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and administration of the 142-tent (and ever-growing) sub-camp.

The Mayor’s Cell, like everything else, was a challenge, but SSG Raymond Turner kept the contractors in line and the camp running smoothly. The cell was responsible for housing the hundreds of redeploying troops, and there was a constant in-and out-flux of units. The ASG commander cited Camden Yards as their best-run sub-camp.

The 2003 holiday season came and went without much fanfare. SPC Heather Kreitlow and SPC Jason Schomburg entertained the troops on Camp Arifjan with their amazing singing talents in the holiday soldier show. Everyone seemed to find a niche, even in the desert.

Early in 2004, the unit began making preparations for redeployment. Because the trucks and trailers were not being utilized for transportation missions, they were prepared for shipment back to the states. All equipment that was not being utilized by the company was sent to the washrack on 19 and 20 January. It was then driven to the SPOD and staged, awaiting the next available ship.

On 3 March, the unit began its right-seat ride with a battery of the 2-146 FA BN, the Washington National Guard unit that would replace the 1-162 IN BN on FP. The mission was turned over on 8 March, but was more than the incoming unit could handle. The 1168th was re-missioned on 13 March, picking up some of the same points they had just vacated.

Not only did the 1168th gain some of the old guard points, they were re-assigned to the 375th Transportation Group as a transportation unit. The 1168th reported directly to the group commander, COL Cory Youmans, and drove borrowed 915s from an adjacent unit on Camden Yards during these final transportation missions.

COL Youmans utilized a group of twenty 1168th soldiers as shuttle drivers, transferring equipment to and from the SPOD to various camps in Kuwait. COL Youmans referred to the soldiers as his “shining stars,” because they worked so much harder than the other transportation units in his command. His operations sergeant major commented that he wished the 1168th had been working for him the whole period of his deployment.
The 1168th completed their driving missions at the end of March, along with their FP mission. The Mayor’s Cell was turned over to the 175th Maintenance Company from South Carolina. The unit anxiously awaited the news they were heading home.

The unit received the fly date on 30 March. The unit was flying on 5 April, and there was no doubt the troops were ready to go.

The last several days in country were busy; duffels were packed and repacked. Home-made furniture was given away to other units. Boxes of personal items were mailed home.

The morning of 4 April 2004, the customs inspectors came to Camden Yards and inspected all baggage that would accompany the unit on the airplane. Just hours before the unit was scheduled to depart for the APOD, SGT Rodney Wenger dislocated his shoulder. He was taken to the Troop Medical Clinic, but they were unable to help.

SGT Wenger was transported to the Camp Doha TMC, where the doctor was able to relocate his shoulder. The ambulance drivers dropped him off at the APOD, where he re-joined his worried unit.

While SGT Wenger was on his way to Camp Doha, the unit had their final formation on the asphalt basketball court on Camden Yards. After a few words from the commander and first sergeant, the soldiers fell-out after a loud “TURN IT UP!” The soldiers loaded onto the buses, and for the final time, exited the gates of Camp Arifjan.

The 1168th departed the APOD at 1020 on 5 April 2004 on a commercial aircraft. They flew home by way of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Ireland (where the unit was able to patronize the airport’s pub), Maine, and to Volk Field, Wisconsin, where they deplaned at 2300.

The following 5 days were busy with medical reviews, administrative paperwork, and homecoming preparation. On 10 April, the 1168th departed Fort McCoy at 0400 on three buses, one bound for Perry, one for Audubon, and one for Red Oak.

Each location had a wonderful welcome home for the soldiers. CPT Ernst attended the Perry homecoming, then flew with BG Dardis on his Blackhawk helicopter to Red Oak for their homecoming. 1SG Carstens attended the Audubon homecoming. BG Ron Dardis, COL Stephen Bogle, and MAJ Verdi were guests at the ceremonies. U.S. Representative Steve King was also there to welcome the Red Oak soldiers home. There was not a dry eye in the crowd as the troops were dismissed from their 14-month mobilization.

God Bless the 1168th!

TURN IT UP!