



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2004

MECHANICS BEAT ARMY STANDARD IN KEEPING VEHICLES OF 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION UNIT READY AND ROLLING

1st Infantry Division Public Affairs Office release

TIKRIT, Iraq — Humvees in various stages of distress are lined up in the motor pool. Over in a corner, the finishing touches are being put on one of the vehicles. But as mechanics finish the job, there's no time for reflecting on a job well done.

At that very moment, a tow vehicle drags in another Humvee to take the place of the one just repaired.

"Here they all come. Round two," said Sgt. Chris Gast, wheeled vehicle section chief for V Corps' Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry.

Deployed for both Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, Gast knows mechanics can expect a lot of things during deployments, but that "down time" isn't one of them.

But he says the importance of the work keeps him and the rest of the section's mechanics motivated.

"What I like most about the job is keeping a great percentage of the vehicles rolling and helping keep the mission effective," said Gast. "And it's not just me. It's the whole team."

Last month we were at 94 percent readiness. The Army standard is 90 percent. The key is hard work and dedication. We figure out what's wrong and we fix everything that we can."

And if it can't be fixed right away, Gast makes sure those who get it next are set up for success.

"I go through the whole troubleshooting process and try to narrow it down to what the problem is," he said. "So when the next level (of maintenance and repair) takes it, they know where to go from there."

Gast says engines and transmissions break down most frequently here.

"Sand hasn't really been a problem, but the sandstorms haven't really started yet. Mostly it's just the heat affecting everything right now," he said. "It causes hoses to corrode faster, which is one of the major problems with our engines. If a hose blows, the engine will overheat in less than a minute. The transmissions, a lot of the time, heat breaks down the fluid faster and causes them to shift irregularly."

Gast encourages his company's operators to be especially aware of transmission fluid levels and check for early signs of hose damage.

That's consistent with his stated emphasis on preventive maintenance. "When a vehicle is broke and the operator notices, I stress strongly that they bring it in right away," he said.

When operators bring a vehicle in, someone like mechanic Pfc. Chad Boxell takes over.

It would probably take Boxell less time to rattle off problems he hasn't seen here, than those he has.

"I've been doing a lot of differentials, seals, starters, changing out engines, transmissions, transfers, drive shafts. And we've done a lot of work on shocks and springs because of the add-on armor," he said.

Boxell worked as a mechanic before he came in the Army, but that experience only helped so much.

"Military vehicles are completely different from civilian vehicles," he said. "They're a lot harder until you get used to working on them."

While Boxell has stayed extremely busy this year, he says the hectic pace has made him a better mechanic. "Once you've done the job several times, you know what everything is used for and where it goes," he said.

"Sometimes the job can make you mad. But you have to slow down and do it right because if you rush things, the operators can run into problems out on the (Main Supply Route)."

He agreed with Gast's opinion that the importance of his job keeps him going and gives him the most satisfaction.

"When I'm through I know the vehicle will make the mission," he said.

