

Multi-National Division – North

Public Affairs Office, COB Speicher, Iraq
APO AE 09338



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
STORY RELEASE No. 091026-01
Oct. 26, 2009

CAB Soldiers seek self-improvement through education

Story and Photos By

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CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq – South African human rights activist and symbol of international peace, Nelson Mandela, once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Soldiers understand weapons.

Many 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division Soldiers have committed themselves to changing their “world” by taking professional development and civilian education classes while deployed to Contingency Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit.

The COB Speicher Education Center is staffed by an education officer, a career counselor and field representatives from the University of Maryland University College and Central Texas College. The center is also outfitted with a fully functioning computer lab and classroom.

According to 1st Lt. Maricela Cantu, COB Speicher education officer, 211th Regional Support Group, an Army reserve unit from Corpus Christi, Texas, the center offers a variety of military professional development and civilian education services similar to those available to military members at their respective home stations.

“All Defense Activity Non-Traditional Education Services (DANTES) are accessible through the center,” said 1st Lt. Cantu, of DANTES, a military program that supports off-duty, voluntary education programs for the Department of Defense. “For instance, Soldiers can take their American College Testing (ACT), Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST) or Alternate Flight Aptitude Selection Test (AFAST) here.”

ACT is used to evaluate candidates for military occupational specialty changes, warrant officer training and officer candidate school. The FAST program targets Soldiers interested in improving their General Technical score. AFAST is used to evaluate candidates applying for admission to the Army flight program.

“Basically, there’s a lot of opportunity for Soldiers to [further their] education while they’re deployed,” said 1st Lt. Cantu. “You don’t have to use your G.I. Bill. The Army offers every Soldier \$4,500 annually in tuition assistance for college level classes. So why wait?”

Two Soldiers not waiting are Pfc. Tiffany Gordon and Pfc. Jill Logan, both paralegal specialists, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 25th CAB. Both arranged to take courses while in Hawaii through Chaminade University and are using the Speicher Education Center for its support services. Chaminade is physically located on the island of Oahu, yet offers extensive distance learning programs on-line.

Private First Class Gordon, a native of New York City, N.Y., earned her Associate’s Degree in Business Administration from Prince George Community College in Maryland and

had nearly completed her bachelor's degree from City University of New York before joining the Army.

"I intended to go back to school and was a little concerned when I learned I was deploying," she said. "But I always felt that if you want an education there is no excuse not to get it. So I enrolled with Chaminade and decided to take classes toward my Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice," she said. Pfc. Gordon is taking classes in Criminology and World Religions this year in Iraq.

Private First Class Logan, raised in Twenty-nine Palms, Calif., aspires to become an Army officer, making a college degree indispensable to her future career plans.

"I was excited to learn that I can use my tuition assistance and take classes while deployed," said Pfc. Logan. "Also, I feel like I am accomplishing something more while I'm here." "I want to go home with a degree. Here, I have more time to get my education because I am not dividing my time between my family and my career."

Private First Class Logan, wife and mother of two young children, is taking on-line Criminology and Philosophy classes.

Ralph Stewart, an education services specialist with the Department of the Army, provides counseling and other educational services for troops and civilians through the Speicher Education Center. He assists Soldiers with everything from obtaining a General Education Degree to starting college-level courses or pursuing graduate programs of study.

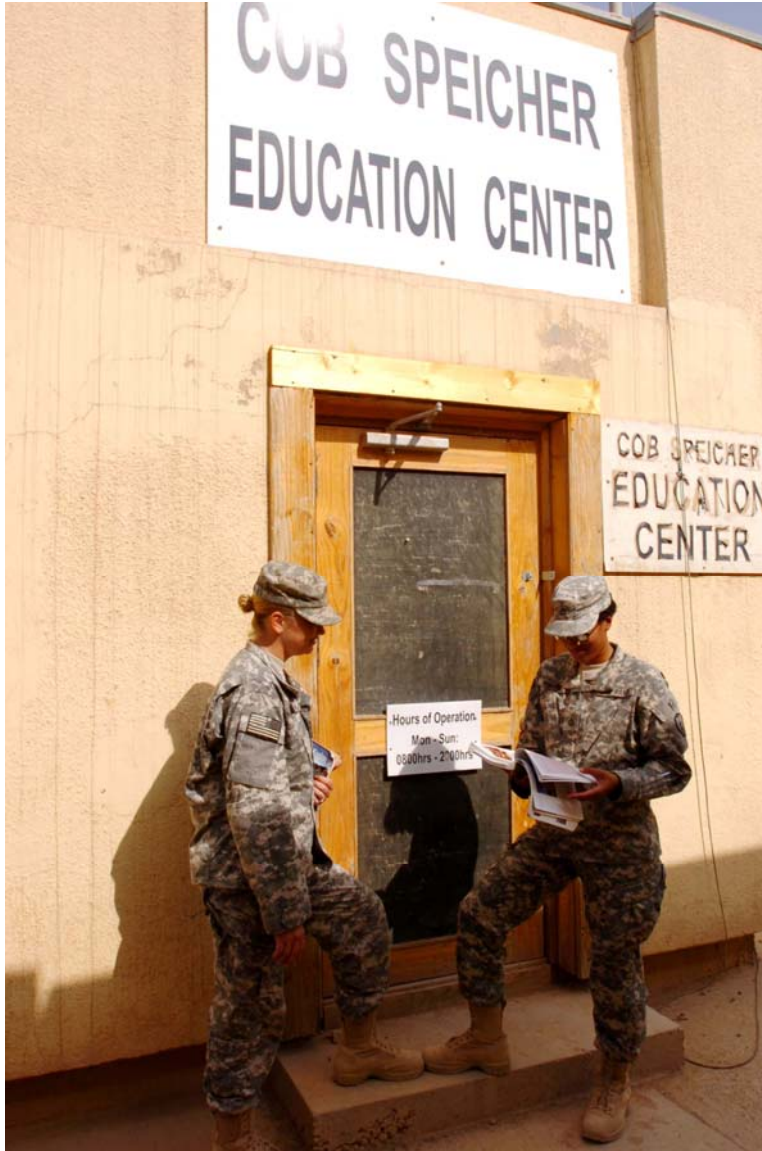
Stewart's advice to Soldiers is simple: "Take advantage of every opportunity the Army is giving you. Every Soldier is entitled to \$4,500 of tuition assistance annually," Stewart emphasized. "We all only have 24 hours in a day. But make the effort now," he continued. "Education can be a key to get you ahead in life and, it's offered right here at Speicher."

Photo Cutlines



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Private First Class Tiffany Gordon (far seat) and Pfc. Jill Logan, paralegal specialists, HHC, 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div., work on their on-line courses at the computer lab in the Contingency Operating Base Speicher Education Center, COB Speicher, Oct. 15. (Army photo by: Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts | 25th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs)



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Private First Class Jill Logan (left), and Pfc. Tiffany Gordon, paralegal specialists, HHC, 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div., stand outside of the Contingency Operating Base Speicher Education Center discussing coursework, Oct. 15. (Army photo by: Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts | 25th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs)



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Private First Class Jill Logan (left) and Pfc. Tiffany Gordon (center), paralegal specialists, HHC, 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div., discuss financing on-line classes with 1st Lt. Maricela Cantu, COB Speicher education officer, 211th Regional Support Group, an Army reserve unit from Corpus Christi, Texas, at the COB Speicher Education Center, Oct. 15.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT THE MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION – NORTH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE AT: MNDNPAO@25ID.ARMY.MIL OR DSN 318-856-0218

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