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Protective Armor Issued To Arriving First Cavalry Division Troops

By Master Sgt. Dave Larsen and Spc. Bryan D. Kinkade, 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

“One thing we learned from the first rotation of Operation Iraqi Freedom is that these armored plates save lives,” said 1st Cavalry Division Chief of Staff Col. Keith Walker, referring to the Small Armor Protective Inserts (SAPI) issued to each new arrival.

“The Army has issued plates to every Task Force Baghdad Soldier who crosses the border into Iraq with the 1st Cavalry Division,” Walker said. “SAPI saves lives.”

The protective plates weigh down Soldiers with an additional six pounds. The plates fit snugly, front and back, into a Kevlar Outer Tactical Vest (OTV). Every Soldier carried their OTV into the theater of operation from the United States. Units arriving in Kuwait issued SAPI plates to troops, as they staged for their movement north into Iraq.

Six pounds may not sound like much additional weight, but Soldiers wearing the plates said it did take time to adjust.

“They were a lot heavier than I thought,” said South Bend, Indiana, native, Spc. Christopher Vinson of Headquarters Company, 1st Cavalry Division. “But as long as it keeps me protected, I can work with it.”

Soldiers were instructed in the proper wear of the vest with the new plates inserted while in Kuwait. The key to comfort is tightening the vest with two cinching straps on each side to evenly distribute the weight.

“It was uncomfortable, but once I learned how to wear it properly, by taking the weight off my shoulders, I felt a lot more comfortable,” said Sgt. Patrick Simon, a light-wheeled mechanic from Fayetteville, N.C. serving with the division headquarters.

Like previous versions of body armor worn by Soldiers, the OTV with plates protects Soldiers against fragmentation devices and shrapnel, but it goes a step further. The plates can stop a bullet, up to 7.62-millimeter in size. The weapon of choice by most terrorist elements in Iraq is the Russian-made AK-47 assault rifle, which fires a 7.62-millimeter round.

“If I happen to take a bullet, it’s going to protect me,” said Spc. Hector A. Rios, from the division’s headquarters. “I feel pretty safe with them.”

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