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New PX should be ready soon in Baghdad

By Star Courier staff

Amid sporadic firefights, roadside bombs and increasing heat, daily life goes on for the the brave members of Galva's Battery F, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery as they patrol the streets of Baghdad as part of the 1st Cavalry. The 122nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment recently released stories from Camp Victory North, located on a former game preserve near Baghdad International Airport, where 120 members of Battery F are now stationed. The combined stories include information on a new post exchange our soldiers should be using soon, and better-protected Humvees which should arrive soon for troops in Baghdad. There is also information from a recent article in the Armed Forces newspaper, "Stars and Stripes," about the new trailers in which our troops are now living. -- Edit.

CAMP VICTORY NORTH, Baghdad, Iraq -- The Army and Air Force Exchange Service opened the doors to their new 30,000-square-foot Post Exchange (PX) late last week in the Division Life Support Area of Camp Victory North.

According to David Schloss, the AAFES general manager for the Baghdad area, plans are underway to develop a diverse food court. Right now, Burger King is the only confirmed food concession for the PX, but other restaurant chains are awaiting approval.

"We have come a long way since last year, where we would just open boxes of Gatorade on the floor and have a cashier in a tiny little room," he added.

The store at the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP)

that closes this Friday has 7,000 square feet of selling space. The new PX is more than four times that size. The building's dimensions also include storage areas and offices, according to Jonathan Tokar, the general manager for all AAFES operations in Iraq.

Other concessions that tend to be around a PX won't be encased within the 30,000 square-feet of the building, AAFES officials noted. Concession shops such as barber, beauty, sewing and alterations, food concessions, and gift shops will be outside the structure.

An array of local vendors will also be found outside the new PX. The current plan is for all the vendors at BIAP to move to North Victory, Schloss said.

The staff of the BIAP PX, as well as the stock, will move operations to the Victory North exchange, but more stock will be moved in and more staff will be hired to accommodate the larger PX.

"This store's stock will have total access to our European stock because this is a sustained area versus a contingency," Tokar said.

Bulkier items, such as furniture, will be in a different part of the store, separated from the smaller, more commonly seen inventory items like food, hygiene products and compact discs. The store is made of two large tent-like structures that resemble BIAP's Bob Hope Dining Facility where President Bush had dinner with the troops last Thanksgiving Day.

"We are really looking forward to opening this store," Schloss said. "We are putting in the look that you would find at your PX back in the States. We're just trying to make it as much like home as possible," Schloss said.

"I just want to say that our main goal for coming out here is to support our troops," Tokar said.

"We're really happy to serve along side you," he added. "You guys carry rifles, and we carry soap."

According to a recent article in "Stars and Stripes, living conditions on BIAP -- which consisted of basic tents for many soldiers initially -- are giving way to air-conditioned trailers for thousands at Victory. Lower-enlisted soldiers in the division will share rooms. Higher-enlisted soldiers and junior officers

will get their own rooms, but will have to walk to a separate trailer for showers and bathrooms. Senior NCOs and officers will share bathroom facilities between their rooms.

n The first of a series of shipments of brand new and refurbished M1114 Highly Mobility Multi-

Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HUMMVEE) also arrived in Baghdad this week. The

M1114s include extra armor, a heavy-duty chassis and other safety features designed to better withstand explosive blasts and increase protection from other threats.

In addition to it's sophisticated armor package, each M1114 comes equipped with a turret mount, the latest in Army communications system technology and a turbo-charged motor system.

"[M1114s] allow us to move quickly around the urban terrain. And they give the best force protection posture that we can have while out on the road," Sgt. 1st Class Juan

Rodriguez, an operations noncommissioned officer with the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, works with a troop that is familiar with the streets of Baghdad. Between raids, patrols, traffic control missions and cordon and searches they leave their forward operating

base in HUMMVEEs nearly everyday.

"[The M1114s] give the soldier a better mindset. When they go out, they'll feel more protected. When they feel better about their mission, they'll [focus more] on their mission," Rodriguez said.

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