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Features

24 Velvet Hammers

News impressions from Iraq often focus on the combat portion of the U.S. mission. But as three National Guard enhanced brigades prepare for deployment to the region, their training continues to evolve. Arkansas' 39th Infantry Brigade prepared for deployment at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., in February and got a taste of both Iraqi combat and culture.

28 For the Books

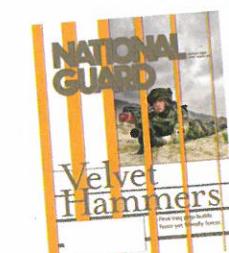
The Texas Air National Guard's 136th Airlift Wing made history when in May it achieved 150,000 hours without a Class A mishap. In an article that originally appeared in Flying Safety magazine, the Air Guard attributes of experience, continuity and cohesion emerge as the foundation for the 136th's excellent record. From its maintenance personnel to its pilots and crew, the 136th sets the safety standard.

32 Hope Rebuilt

Some Iraqi children have new clothes, toys and school supplies thanks to some Iowa Guardsmen, their families and friends back home. The same Iowa Guardsmen also have repaired schools and other structures. The efforts have helped rebuild hope to people served by facilities looted after the fall Sadaam Hussein.

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ON THE COVER A National Guardsman with the 81st Armored Brigade trains at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., in preparation for deployment to Iraq. The final stop for cultural as well as combat training.

AP PHOTO