

Preventive Medicine Soldiers Keep Troops Safe

By Army Pfc. Bethany L. Little

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE KALSU, Iraq, July 23, 2009 – A small preventive medicine team here does big things to protect servicemembers from disease-borne foods, water, bugs and animals.

“We do a lot of different things here and other locations,” said Army Spc. Matthew B. Hintermaier, a preventive medicine technician with Company C, 172nd Support Battalion. The team conducts a variety of tests and studies, including monitoring insect populations and water sampling, to detect pathogens.

The team maintains a log as it checks water for E. coli and other bacteria and mineral levels, Hintermaier said. “To determine if the water is usable for humans,” the Ann Arbor, Mich., native explained, “we look at the military exposure guidelines for acceptable contamination levels.”

The military exposure guidelines allow commanders assess risk and determine acceptable levels of chemical exposure in a deployed environment.

A bigger part of a preventive medicine team’s job is to protect residents from insects and the diseases they can carry.

“Here on [Forward Operating Base Kalsu], there are three different types of mosquitoes and one type of sand flea or sand fly,” Hintermaier said. “Both can be dangerous to humans.”

To protect servicemembers, the preventive medicine team sets up light traps three times a week to attract mosquitoes and sand flies at 12 sites with a high concentration of people. Set up at night and retrieved in the morning, the traps are then placed in a freezer to be sorted later and sent to Baghdad to be tested.

If any threat is found from the sampling, preventive medicine notifies vector control where the threat is located. Chemical pesticide is then used at night to fog the area. A vector is a carrier of pathogens such as bacteria that can cause diseases.

Residents can protect themselves from mosquitoes and sand flies by wearing the proper clothing and using insect repellent on exposed skin.

Insects are not preventive medicine’s only concern here. The team also works with vector control to manage the animal and vermin population. Animals found on the base include cats, dogs, porcupines, hedgehogs, snakes, jungle cats, foxes and rabbits.

“We go to several different [bases] and work all over the Blackhawk area of operation,” Hintermaier said.

The team inspects areas such as dining facilities, eateries, barbershops and gyms on the bases, watching for food contamination, safety hazards and cleanliness.

By educating the command and showcasing their expertise, the preventive medicine team members said, they hope to make an impact on servicemembers’ safety.

(Army Pfc. Bethany L. Little serves with the 172nd Infantry Brigade public affairs office.)

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Jungle cats, also known as swamp cats, are found along the water reeds at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq. Jungle cats normally are larger than domestic cats and tend to stay clear of humans. Courtesy photo by Bill Patsch

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Bill Patsch, a contracted vector controller, sets up a trap behind the laundry facility at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq, to try to catch animals. Patsch sets traps every night and checks them at first light the following day. U.S.

Army photo by Pfc. Bethany L. Little

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Contracted vector controllers in Iraq trap a variety of animals such as dogs and cats to prevent diseases on military bases. Courtesy photo by Bill Patsch

Patsch

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Army Spc. Matthew B. Hintermaier assembles a light trap to catch insects. There are traps set up throughout the Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq, to help protect residents from vector borne diseases. U.S. Army photo by Pfc.

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