



**3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command
16th Sustainment Brigade
Public Affairs Office**

Contingency Operating Base Q-West, Iraq
DSN (NIPR) 318-827-6101
DSN (SIPR) 302-243-5104
sean.dillard@iraq.centcom.mil

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Transportation Soldiers train to save lives in combat

By 2nd Lt. Bradley A. Nowack
497th Transportation Co., 30th CSSB

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq – In this training scenario, Spc. Esteban Trevino, gunner, 497th Transportation Co. out of Ft. Lewis, Wash., 30th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, had only moments to save the lives of his fellow Soldiers.

The initial blast had disabled the lead vehicle in the convoy. The convoy commander dismounted to direct the recovery, but an unseen secondary device detonated, severing his left leg and inflicting other wounds from shrapnel. He was unconscious and losing blood fast. To make matters worse, the convoy was now coming under small arms fire from the enemy.

Faced with this nightmare scenario, Trevino and his partner for the simulation lane laid down suppressive fire, dragged the casualty to cover and began applying a tourniquet to the amputated leg.

Fortunately this situation was only a test, the culminating event of the combat life saver certification course held from Jan. 5 to Jan. 8, 2009.

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“Playing out scenarios like this really makes you think about what could happen out there,” said Trevino after finishing his lane. “I’m really glad I would know, from training, what to do.”

In another similar battle, raging a few yards away in the gravel courtyard of the 407th Medical Detachment headquarters at Q-West, Sgt. Raffinee Adams, squad leader, 497th Trans. Co., swabbed the forearm of her simulated casualty with an alcohol pad and prepared to insert a not-simulated 18-gauge needle-catheter unit into his vein. Under the scrutiny of the instructor and the weight of her full combat load and body armor, Adams steadied her hand and made a perfect puncture on her first try.

“It’s important for the Soldiers to keep training even while deployed,” said Adams, still wearing her outer tactical vest and latex gloves. She would be wearing that armor again, on mission, in 16 hours.

From Dec. 23 to Jan. 29, the 497th Trans. Co. and the 407th Medical Detachment worked together to train or recertify 69 Soldiers from the company as combat life-savers. The class, normally a week long, had to be compressed to three days at double the hours to fit into the busy operational schedule of both units. The push was in response to a directive that all Soldiers going “outside the wire” be CLS qualified.

Medics from the detachment, who are attached to the transportation company on each convoy mission, taught the course in tactical combat casualty care or “TC3”. TC3 encompasses advanced first aid topics including opening and managing a casualty’s airway, controlling severe bleeding, treating penetrating chest trauma, and initiating a saline lock and intravenous infusion. The training was both classroom and hands-on. Each Soldier administered an IV, and no one escaped getting stuck.

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CLS-qualified Soldiers are trained how and when to apply these skills in a combat environment.

“Sometimes the best thing you can do to save your buddy is kill the enemy,” explained senior instructor and medic Staff Sgt. Eddy Ellis, in his lecture.

A Combat Life Saver is a Soldier whose primary role is not that of a medic, and Soldiers are taught that the instinct to drop everything and tend to a casualty in the middle of a firefight will lead to more casualties overall, Ellis said.

In the opinion of the medics, having 100-percent of Soldiers CLS-qualified augments the effectiveness of medics rather than replacing them.

“It means a CLS Soldier can open airways, stop major bleeding and control the other factors that are the main causes of death before I get there and take over, because my vehicle might actually be a mile away,” said Spc. Paul Macchi, medic, 407th Med. Det.

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(Photo by 2nd Lt. Bradley A. Nowack)
Spc. Esteban Trevino, gunner, 497th Transportation Co., 30th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, practices first aid techniques during the culminating situational exercise of a three-day course in combat life saver techniques at contingency operating base Q-West, Iraq, Jan. 8.



Spc. Esteban Trevino, 497th Transportation Co. wheeled vehicle driver and gunner, administers an IV to a simulated casualty during Combat Lifesaver Course lane training at contingency operating base Q-West, Iraq, on Jan. 8.