

Soldiers break bread, learn culture

by Sgt. Michael Connors

Anaconda Times Staff

LSA ANACONDA, Iraq—Soldiers here came together to get a taste of Islamic culture recently.

Sgt. 1st Class Trent Bricker, 1034th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), organized a Halal-meal sampling for fellow unit members and Soldiers from units the 1034th works closely with June 5. About 15 Soldiers tried the food.

The 1034th, an Iowa National Guard unit, supplies Halal meals to units that distribute them to the local Muslim population and detainees. "Halal" means "proper and permitted." Halal foods are consistent with the dietary requirements of Islam and do not contain pork, alcohol or their byproducts. The meals consist of an entree, an accessory pack with various snacks, and a heater for the entree.

"I think they're decent; they're a good change from MREs (meals ready-to-eat)," said Chief Warrant Officer Scott Weber, a material management supply technician with the 1034th. "The texture and flavor is good. The accessories packets have a nice variety."

Bricker, a material management noncommissioned officer, said Halal-meal entrees come in 24 different varieties, consisting of beef, lamb, chicken or vegetarian dishes. A few examples are Florentine lasagna, chicken and black beans, beef stew, and cheese tortellini.

The snack packs the Soldiers sampled consisted of Frosted Flakes, two granola bars, bagel chip mix, sunflower seeds, peanuts, hot cocoa mix, instant coffee, salt, black pepper, sugar, nondairy creamer, mints, a moist towelette and tissue.

Spc. Richard Dull, an information systems specialist with the 1034th, who tried the beef stew, said it was good and tasted "about the same as an MRE."

Bricker said the majority of Halal meals the 1034th distributes are used here and in the surrounding area, but some

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Sgt. 1st Class Trent Bricker
1034th CSSB, 13th SC(E)

meals are distributed through the supply chain to other forward operating bases. The inventory of Halal meals was increased recently because of additional operations associated with the current surge in U.S. troop strength, added Bricker, a Des Moines, Iowa resident.

"It's a good idea to support all elements that support the operation of LSA Anaconda and other logistics hubs," said Bricker. "It's very sensitive of us in the military to take into consideration the rations needs of the host country."

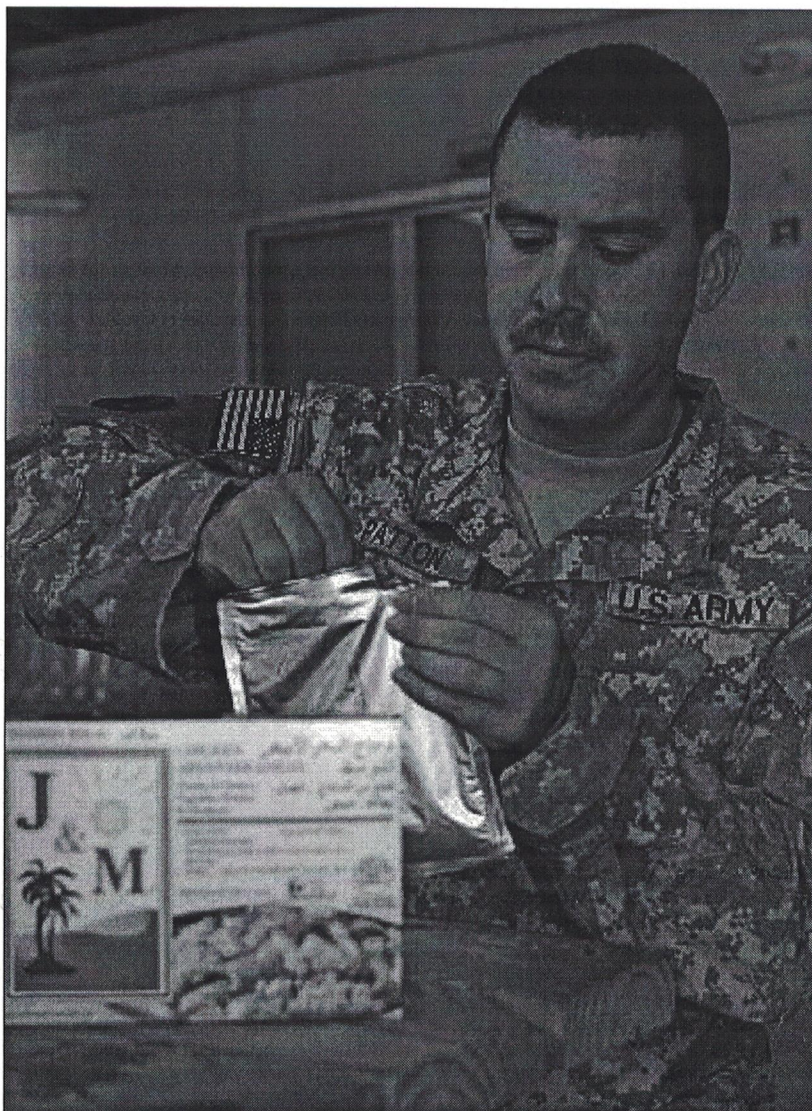
Weber, a resident of Polk City, Iowa, worked with two Muslims when he was on a tour in Afghanistan at Bagram Air Base in 2003. His unit supplied them with meals. They had the choice of Halal meals, MREs or vegetarian meals (another type of meal the military distributes).

"They preferred Halal meals over MREs or vegetarian meals and would often ask for two," said Weber.

The Halal meals are products of the U.S. that are certified by the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America, according to the packaging. According to the manufacturer's Web site, only "Dhabiha Halal" meat and poultry is used in the meals, meaning the animals were properly slaughtered by a Muslim according to Islamic rituals.

"For a product to be Halal certified, it must be produced under the inspection and evaluation of Muslim professionals trained in both Islamic religious laws and in production practices," according to the manufacturer's Web site.

In regard to why it is important to supply Halal meals, Dull, a Des Moines, Iowa resident, said, "We're here to help them. It's good we're supplying them with food that fits into their culture."



Photos by Sgt. Michael Connors

Pfc. Robert Patton, a mortuary affairs specialist with the 111th Quartermaster Company, opens a Halal-meal entree at a sampling organized by Sgt. 1st Class Trent Bricker, 1034th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. The 1034th supplies the meals to units that distribute them to the local Muslim population and detainees. Halal meals are consistent with the dietary requirements of Islam. (Below) Pictured here is a Halal meal, consisting of an entree and an accessory pack.

