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## Soldiers tee off to wind down

By MARGARET FRIEDENAUER, Staff Writer

FORWARD OPERATING BASE Q-WEST--As a glowing fluorescent projectile hurtled through the Iraqi twilight, narrowly missing a pedestrian on this military installation, Staff Sgt. Todd Brown yelled to the person from the roof of his workshop.

"FORE!"

Next, Sgt. Wyatt Clark went to work, and with a "whack" he sent another glowing projectile into the night sky, nearly hitting a Humvee.

"It's OK," quipped Staff Sgt. Phil Henize. "They're bullet-proof."

Welcome to tee time for the threesome of Brown, Clark and Henize at the Forward Operating Base Q-West golf range. Dress code is combat boots, camouflage, fleece jackets and anything else you don't mind having spattered with glowing chemicals.

It's not hard to tell that this tight-knit threesome had not graced the sport of golf with their collective talents until they were deployed to Iraq with the 172nd Stryker Brigade



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Combat Team of Fort

Wainwright. But this nightly

roof-top ritual--involving

chemical glow-sticks, golf balls

and a wide-open field of gravel

near the edge of the base--has

provided the soldiers an

unconventional, but effective,

way to unwind.

"It's something to do to break

the monotony," Brown said.

The monotony Brown spoke of is the day-to-day routine of soldiers here in Iraq. These three usually spend their days as jacks-of-all-trades fixing radios, electrical equipment or basically anything with wires coming out of it, Henize said.

They are soldiers with the 4-11 Field Artillery with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Brown and Clark live and work out of the building they stood upon, whacking golf balls, Thursday night. It's a chop shop with radios, batteries and electrical equipment strewn across the floor and their two bedrooms on each side of the shop. This set up is so they can be located quickly if equipment needs fixing at any hour. Henize works at another communications station across the base.

But Thursday, with their work completed for the day, all thoughts were on golf and goofing off.

Once they got warmed up and had thoroughly doused the roof and themselves in glow-stick formula, they put on quite a light show. The head of the driver glowed green-yellow and splattered liquid on the roof and bystanders with each swing. The balls left glowing vapor trails as they sailed through the air, like fluorescent comets soaring across the sky.

The soldiers' gloves, fleece jackets and pants were patterned with constellations of glow-

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stick spray after a few minutes of play.

The whole affair began when the three arrived here in August with the rest of the brigade.

They found a green mat on the flat roof of their station, and they later came across a couple of golf clubs and about a dozen golf balls that had been left in an adjoining field near the edge of the base.

It was dusk at the time. They didn't want to wait until morning to take a couple swings, so they cracked open some chemical glow sticks, poured the contents over the balls and whacked away.

"Then it became like a full-time hobby," Brown said.

The group has since fine-tuned some of their tactics. They measured the field with Global Positioning System receivers so they could gauge the length of their drives. They also developed a dipping method for the balls to maximize use of the glow-sticks.

"You dip it in there just like an Easter egg," said Brown, using a hooked piece of metal to dip the ball in the solution poured into a chopped-off plastic liter soda bottle.

Their equipment has also been upgraded. They used to go out each night to collect the glowing balls in the field. But then Henize put out a call for golf balls on the Web site [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com), where soldiers can request specific items and people can log on to send care packages.

Henize linked up with a woman named Aurora in Colorado who lives adjacent to a golf course. She collected a box of discarded golf balls to send them. Then, she elicited a donation of about a dozen golf clubs. Now she regularly sends golf balls and even slips in some golfing magazines that the guys admit they look to for pointers.

"The first time we did this we couldn't clear the roof," Clark said.

But practice has paid off. There are still a few line-drives and the occasional whiff, but most of the time they can hit them 200-300 yards.

They don't take themselves too seriously at the tee, usually egging on whoever is hitting at the moment.

They named the range after a fellow soldier who was medically discharged before the brigade deployed to represent the de-stressing effect the activity has.

"He had the worst luck," Brown said. "You couldn't help feel better about your day when you heard about his. So we named the course after him."

And while they've gotten better in the last months, balls still fly in every direction, including toward bystanders on the roof, who scattered when Brown sent a ball ricocheting off the ledge of the roof and back over their heads.

"We're not going to come back from Iraq and join the tour or anything," he said with a laugh.

Margaret Friedenauer is embedded with the 172nd Stryker Combat Team in Iraq. Contact her and read her stories and behind-the-scenes blog entries at [www.newsminer.com/iraq](http://www.newsminer.com/iraq).

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