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RAIDERS DOWN RANGE



Volume 1 Issue 9

Diary of the Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team

August 1, 2005

IA Soldiers take control of Omaha

Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE OMAHA, Tikrit, Iraq—Coalition and Iraqi soldiers gathered in a mass formation at Forward Operating Base Omaha during a ceremony, which saw the base handed back to the Iraqis, July 30.

The FOB was turned over to the 1st Iraqi Army Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Division, signifying the increasing role the Iraqis are taking in providing security to their population.

"This is a very historic moment as they continue to transition into controlling this area," said Lt. Col. Todd R. Wood, commander, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry, 1st Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "This (Iraqi) battalion has come so far in their training in such a short time; it is now conducting daily operations at the company level."

Although Coalition Forces are turning the installation and local operations over to the Iraqis, they will provide support if needed.

"If they (Iraqis) need assistance, the quick reaction force will not be far away and can respond quickly to calls," said Capt. Ramone Osorio, fire support officer, 2nd Bn. 7th Inf.

"However, their (Iraq Army) function will be taking care of the missions and patrols in the desert and in and

around Tikrit, enabling us to step back and allowing them to assume the footprint with the Iraqi people," he added.

As the Iraqi soldiers become more proficient in conducting operations there will be more transfers of command posts to the Iraqi Army. The FOB Omaha ceremony was a representation of three bases slated to close down within several days of each other in Tikrit, Osorio said.

"Little by little you'll see the FOB closures and it will put us one step closer to turning entire operations over to the Iraqis," he said.

"It's a leap-frog type of plan," he added, "turning FOBs over and moving to other remaining FOBs until there are no more to move to and the mission is done here."

The Iraqi soldiers welcomed the transfer of the installation and vowed to uphold the fight of freedom.

"We must inspire the meaning of freedom and democracy and lead the enforcement of peace and sta-



Sgt. Matthew Acosta

A 3rd Infantry Division Soldier, Task Force Liberty, cases the United States Colors during a transfer of authority of Forward Operating Base Omaha in Tikrit, Iraq, from American forces to the Iraqi Army July 30.

bility here in Iraq," said 2nd Lt. Maiaja Mohamed, operations officer, 1st IAB.

"What we saw today was the type of thing that will allow the soldiers to see what their hard work is turning into a physical thing they can be proud of," Osorio said.

Iraqi Soldiers train during relief in place at FOB Dagger

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FOB DAGGER, Iraq—The 1st Brigade Combat Team recently received an Iraqi unit that was tasked with assuming control of Forward Operating Base Dagger. Before leaving the FOB, Coalition Forces performed a relief in place with the new Iraqi units.

"These guys are the 4th Iraqi Division, they are the higher headquarters for the brigade that the 1st BCT is partnered with," said Maj. Robert M. Butts, executive officer for the 1/3 Brigade Troops Battalion. "Anytime you have a unit that relieves another unit, you should do a relief in place. You typically spend some time shadowing them, and when you feel they are ready to handle a mission, you let them have the driver's seat."

Part of the RIP for the Iraqis was an exercise in force protection, more specifically reacting to indirect and direct fire attacks.

"We let the Iraqis react to something that we planned for them, to be assured that they are ready to assume the security of the FOB," Butts said.

"This mission helps protect from any kind of direct or indirect attack," said an Iraqi officer who wished to remain anonymous. "After the first rehearsal, we were surprised. The Soldiers went directly to their assigned positions very quickly. They expressed excitement in being able to do this mission."

Coalition Forces got a chance to work directly with the Iraqis who were replacing them. The Iraqis needed to be shown how the CF Soldiers provided security for the FOB during their stay at FOB Dagger.

"For the last three days, we have been sharing the guard posts with the Iraqis," Butts said.

Coalition Forces and Iraqis shared the responsibilities of FOB defense, with the Iraqis assuming more and more control as the days went on, Butts said.

Showing the Iraqis how to defend the FOB and making sure they were capable of the task was a vital part in relinquishing control of the installation.

Sharing FOB guard responsibilities was only a small part of the RIP process, Butts said. "In the mission today, we talked the Iraqis through that action. After we felt they understood the mission, we did a full rehearsal of the mission."

The Iraqi Soldiers' performance was more than satisfactory, and the CF Soldiers knew it was time to let the Iraqis control the FOB on their own.

"Once we observed their reaction during the exercise, and their leaders' involvement in the mission, we felt very confident that they would be able to defend themselves," Butts said.

Many of the Soldiers stationed at FOB Dagger over the last six months

haven't really had a chance to work hand in hand with any Iraqi Security Forces. The last few days the CF Soldiers who were left on the FOB got a chance to do just that.

"It was really rewarding," Butts said. "I think that most of U.S. Soldiers felt like they were contributing to the progress of Iraq. The consistent message we are sending all the way up to the Department of Defense is that our main effort is to train the Iraqi Army. This gave our Soldiers an opportunity to experience that firsthand. A lot of the Soldiers that participated in the exercise today were the ones who have been protecting us. Some of them pulled over 1000 hours of guard duty. Today they actually got to go out and do something different, and get a firsthand chance to train Iraqi Soldiers."

Taking over FOB Dagger held a deeper meaning for the Iraqis than just assuming control of an installation. The Iraqis felt like it was a step in solidifying their identity, and getting a chance to be a part of the development of a better nation.

"They have a heightened sense of patriotism, and they want to feel like they are a part of one nation," an Iraqi officer said. "In our division, we have Kurds, Sunni and Shia. No one complains. We all get along, and that is important to the development of our country. We want to show the world that we are one nation, and a great nation."



Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Iraqi Soldiers race to defensive positions after a warning alarm has gone off during a react to indirect or direct fire training exercise at FOB Dagger July 30.

Voices and Viewpoints

Negligent discharges can be prevented

Staff Sgt. Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

Soldiers are funny. They have a hard life for the most part. Even folks supposedly in the rear with the gear aren't living easy. When faced with hard living the first thing a Soldier will do is cut corners. They'll expend more energy looking for an easy way to do something than they would if they did it the way it was originally meant to be done.

Part of the make it easier way of thinking bleeds over into safety. One of the biggest safety problems in Iraq is negligent discharges.

Many of us have heard that dreaded pop of a round going off into a clearing barrel. According to the safety office, the vast majority of negligent discharges happen at the clearing barrels.

People aren't clearing their weapons correctly. It would seem an easy thing to correct. Yet Soldiers still have negligent discharges.

The safety office says it often boils down to a lack of supervision. Soldiers

need an extra set of eyes at the clearing barrels; someone else to catch a mistake.

Some of the scariest moments I've ever experienced were at FOB clearing barrels. Troops jump out of their Humvees, juggle their fully locked and loaded weapons, stagger to the clearing barrel tiredly after a night's mission, and hurriedly clear their weapons. I've seen troops pulling the magazine out before they leave the vehicle. I saw a Soldier pull the charging handle of his M4 back slowly so that the round didn't eject. He then let the charging handle go forward and reached for the trigger before being stopped by his supervisor.

To some people clearing weapons seems to be a process they must rush through in order to get on with their lives. After spending many hours on a patrol, no one wants to stop at the clearing barrels, get out of the vehicle, go through all the proper steps to clear his or her weapon and get back into the vehicle before pulling away.

In fact, while a lack of supervision is the most obvious reason for negligent



discharges, one of the underlying reasons is really very obvious. Overconfidence in an environment lacking supervision is one of the main causes of negligent discharges, according to the safety office.

Soldiers have told me they don't need clearing barrels, and they could clear their weapons in the vehicle coming in the gate. It's the easiest part of any combat patrol. Just unload your weapon. How difficult can that be? Only stupid, incompetent Soldiers with no knowledge of how firearms work have negligent discharges, they say.

One soldier told me that the process of clearing a weapon can be reduced to two steps: magazine out, round out.

Often the Soldiers saying those things have cleared their weapons untold times and, with half a mind on it,

they go through the motions. Sometimes they cut the steps in clearing a weapon to save precious time. The Morale, Welfare and Recreation computers are calling out to them, they're tired and they've cleared their weapons that way countless times before.

Clearing weapons is easy as long as both the Soldier clearing the weapon and the supervisor are involved in the process. As the Soldier follows the proper steps to clearing his weapon he should hand the ejected magazine to the truck commander. After ejecting the round, hand that to the TC as well. After visually observing the chamber, the TC should load the ejected round back into the ejected magazine.

Clearing a weapon, like any other potentially dangerous act, demands supervision and care. You're messing with a weapon designed to kill people.

One day I'm afraid we'll hear that pop of a round going off but it won't be into a clearing barrel. It will be into a body of a Soldier, and someone may die.

Chaplain's Corner

Remember the sacrifice of the fallen Soldier

Chaplain Mark Nordstrom
1st BCT Chaplain

When one of our Raider Brigade Soldiers is killed in action, we conduct a Memorial Ceremony so that Soldiers may honor and say goodbye to their friend and comrade.

Up to this date in OIF III - 1 August, 2005 - we have done this sad but proud duty sixteen times. Soldiers have always gathered together to say words when one of us has fallen. These words of ours are a way of never leaving a fallen comrade.

Someone once said that when the end comes, it's the way one falls that matters. It matters how we live, faithful to our calling as Soldiers, but it matters more how we die, if we must.

We will all die one day, but to die as a Soldier is to place duty above safety, love for one another above personal ambition, faithfulness and loyalty above a desire to go home.



Sixteen of us have lived, and died, this way. I am humbled by these Soldiers. Their professionalism and bravery set an example for us. During these ceremonies we can only hope to add a bit of dignity to their passing from our ranks by attending to a simple ceremony and salute them one final time.

The ceremony is indeed simple, but filled to bursting with emotions that only Soldiers can share.

Having said that, we acknowledge our fellowship with and debt to their families who grieve so terribly, and we say to them that we never abandoned their son or daughter in life, and we will not forget them in death.

For when the final roll is called, all of us wish

that we could share our friends' final moments in harm's way in order to lighten the burden that they had to carry those last moments of their lives.

Though we could not save them, we shared their duty and the demands of this conflict and long deployment. They are still one of us as long as we remember them. We are comforted by that fact.

God will not forget them either, and if there is any comfort, then we rest in the fact that God is just, and that the calling to be a Soldier is an honorable one. To die as a Soldier is hard, but not without honor and integrity.

As honors are held for each Soldier - the roll call, rifle salute and taps, we commit ourselves to finishing this mission and coming home. By continuing what they started we will remember and honor their time among us.

In the end, it is enough to have served with such fine Soldiers. I thought you would like to know.



Train to maintain...

An Iraqi Soldier pulls security in the prone position outside of FOB Dagger during an Iraqi Army training exercise July 30.

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Use the five C's to secure an IED site.

- Confirm** : the device
- Clear** : the area
- Call** : EOD
- Cordon** : the perimeter
- Control** : site access



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Cav Troopers learn to trust IA by working together

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

BALAD, Iraq—When the Coalition Forces first took on the responsibility of training Iraqi Security Forces to take charge of their own country, there was much to be taught. In the time since B Troop, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment has been stationed at Forward Operating Base Paliwoda, they have seen much progress in the performance of Iraqi Army troops while out on missions.

Troopers from 5/7 Cav. have been involved in almost daily missions with the Iraqi Army, and said the IA is capable of handling missions with little or no help from Coalition Forces.

“With the raid this morning, the IA pretty much planned everything,” said Sgt. Pashaune Henson, a B Troop, 5/7 Cav. team leader. “We just did a kind of over-watch, you know, to make sure they didn’t get hurt. They’re performing a lot better than when we first started. They’ve improved on their searching techniques, and the way they treat civilians when they’re going through the houses. When they first started, they would just run through the house real quick. To us, that wasn’t really searching, so we had to slow them down and make sure they did a proper search.”

When 5/7 Cav. first arrived, they had to clean house a little before they could get the right group of IA Soldiers they felt they needed.

There were many changes that had to be made, including removing some of the Soldiers in the unit the cavalrymen believed could be a threat to the progress of the mission, said Capt. Ralph Elder, B Troop, 5/7 Cav. commander.

After rearranging a few things, the cavalrymen saw the diamond in the rough. Over time the IA Soldiers grew into a force to be reckoned with.

“When we first got here, the IA knew what their job was, but they weren’t real organized,” said Pfc. Levi Malnar, a B Troop, 5/7 Cav. dismount from Winchester, Calif.



An Iraqi Soldier rushes through a fruit grove in pursuit of a possible insurgent outside of Balad.



Photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Capt. Ralph Elder, B Troop, 5/7 Cav. commander, talks with IA Soldiers inside the IA compound in Balad before going out on mission to raid a few houses of suspected insurgents outside of the city July 9.

“There was probably ten guys that knew what was going on, and the rest of them did guard and checkpoints. Since we’ve been here we’ve managed to get to where we have platoons that go out with our platoons. They have more weapons, more flak vests and stuff. They want to make their country safer. They are getting better, and in return Iraq is getting better.”

“As the months have gone on, they have progressed a lot, they’ve learned the mission, they’re more motivated and organized,” said Pfc. Eric Souders a B Troop, 5/7 Cav. dismount from Mechanicsville, Md. “They don’t look to us to know what to do.”

The biggest issue was building a bond between the cavalrymen and the IA Soldiers. Elder had an idea from the beginning to help build that bond. So far it has paid off, he said.

“When we took control, we took our troop out to their compound and moved in for ten days, and pretty much worked with them 24 hours a day,” Elder said. “We had Iraqis guarding us while we slept. It built a bond to where some of my guys and (the Iraqi Soldiers) are almost like brothers. There’s a big trust factor built between us and that company out there. It’s to the point now where if I dismount on an objective, and I start walking around looking at things, next thing I know there are six Iraqi Soldiers in a box around me helping me.”

By gaining the trust factor, the cavalrymen have been able to accomplish things they normally wouldn’t by themselves. It is obvious that the cavalrymen and the IA Soldiers care about each other and the mission. One of the biggest hurdles was learning to understand the culture of the people the troopers were working with. That is where the IA comes in; they know the culture, and can bridge the gap between the Coalition Forces and the local nationals.

“We are able to effectively complete missions with minimum manning,” Elder said.

“It’s important because you get them to take

responsibility for their own country. We can never successfully fight an insurgency if we don’t actually know the culture. A lot of Americans tend not to understand the Arabic culture. Understanding the culture is something (the IA Soldiers) do very well. They grew up in the area, and they are able to put that Iraqi face on your operations. We had a period where we found four caches in one week. We didn’t find it because of our intelligence; we found it because they came to us with their informants and said ‘we know where a cache is.’”

Malnar said while he is happy to be helping the Iraqis, there are challenges to being in a foreign country as a security force.

“The hardest part about being here is getting the Iraqi people as a whole to trust you,” Malnar said. “They don’t want to believe that we just want to make Iraq safer for them. They think we are over here to loot and pillage, and that is not the case at all. We want to go home, and the only way we can go home is to make Iraq a safer place. The bottom line is we are trying to help the Iraqi people.”



Coalition Forces and Iraqi Soldiers stand around a picture of Saddam Hussein found during a raid.

Use the five C's to secure an IED site.

- Confirm : the device**
- Clear : the area**
- Call : EOD**
- Cordon : the perimeter**
- Control : site access**




Have a story idea?

Contact Maj. Richard Bartoszuk, 1st Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Officer via email at richard.bartoszuk@us.army.mil or Staff Sgt. Thomas Mills, 1st BCT PAO non commissioned officer in charge via email at thomas.mill@us.army.mil or by phone at VOIP 670-5127, Forward Operating Base Speicher, Tikrit, Iraq.

Iraqi girl treated for scars by doctor at FOB Speicher

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FOB SPEICHER, Iraq—When two forces meet each other in battle, there are casualties. The innocent often get caught in the crossfire. In many situations, the innocent have no means of getting reparations for the damage they have suffered.

In one little girl's case, the help was requested and given. Maysa Saud Mohammed was burned when her house caught fire during a battle between Coalition Forces and the forces of the former regime in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom 1.

The idea to get medical care for Maysa first came to light when her mother, Nesum Hussein Mohammed met with the 1st Brigade Combat Team legal affairs team to submit a claim for cash to get medical help for her daughter.

"Her mother came into the (office) looking for some compensation for some burns her daughter received during the war in 2003," said Capt. Matt Aman, 1st BCT legal counsel. "I realized that what she really needed was some medical treatment. I coordinated with Capt. Chad Marley, who is our brigade surgeon, and he coordinated with the plastic surgeon (at

Forward Operating Base Speicher) to arrange a visit so that she could be fitted with some sort of apparatus that is going to reduce the scarring that she suffered from the burns."

Helping Maysa was not only a step towards community relations with the Iraqis, but also a way to give a little girl a chance to feel better about herself when she becomes more aware of her condition.

"The reason we're doing this is it's obviously part of the campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqis, but looking at it, it was just the right thing to do," Aman said.

"Certainly when she gets to be a teenager, she is going to be much more concerned about it than she is now," said Col. Lewis Walker, 228th Command Support Hospital commander. "What we're trying to do is to get these scars to flatten out in appearance, so when she becomes socially interactive, when she's dating or considering marriage, she's going to be much less conscious of it."

While Walker was not able to treat Maysa for her burns, he said he would be able to treat her cosmetically. Any other possible procedure would prove to be difficult and painful.

"At this late date intervening in her

case would involve mostly some compression garments for the scars, they're too big to surgically remove," Walker said. "If I did remove them, I'd then have to skin graft the area, that involves removing skin from elsewhere, complicating the issue regarding scarring, and essentially doubling her wound size. We've taken her measurements, and we're going to work through supply and try to get them here as soon as we can."

Maysa's mother wanted compensation to be able to take her daughter to a local doctor, but Aman felt Maysa would benefit more from medical attention than any monetary compensation.

"Her mom wanted money, but I said 'look, that's not going to help you. She needs the medical treatment so that she can live a normal life.' We're able to provide that to her."

Maysa was ecstatic when she heard



Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Maysa Saud Muhammed has her pulse taken by Staff Sgt. April Williams, a medic with the 228th Command Support Hospital during a visit to FOB Speicher with her mother.

she would be able to see a doctor on Speicher for her scars.

"She was very happy, very excited," Aman said. "When she came back for me to break the news to her that we were going to be able to help her out, she was bouncing off the walls. This is just one of the reasons we're here, and I'm glad to do it."

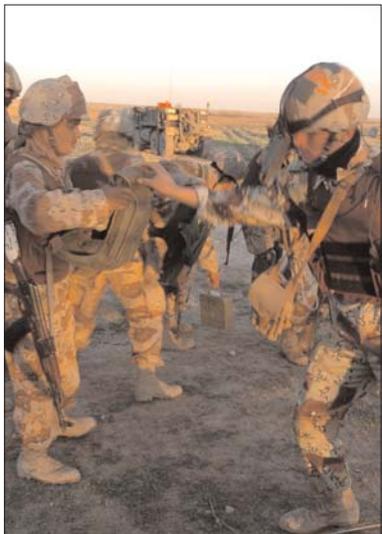
While Maysa was too shy to offer any comment, Nesum said she was very happy to be able to bring her daughter to the doctor, and appreciated all that Coalition Forces were trying to do here in Iraq.

The new face of the Iraqi Army



Photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Iraq Soldiers stand at attention in formation in front of the palace at Forward Operating Base Dagger and await orders to begin a training exercise July 30.



An Iraqi Army sergeant passes out equipment to Soldiers before going on a mission near Samarra.



Iraqi Soldiers dig into boxes of Meals Ready to Eat. The Iraqis seem to like the MREs, and jump at the chance to eat them when offered.



An Iraqi Soldier gets rabbit ears unknowingly while eating dinner at FOB Dagger.



Sgt. Gerald Murdock watches the road at the main gate with an Iraqi Soldier in front of FOB Dagger July 30.



An Iraqi Soldier climbs onto a Bradley to say hello to Staff Sgt. Stephen Balogh at FOB Dagger.



Sgt. Benjamin Gibson has tea with an Iraqi officer after eating dinner at FOB Dagger.