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Task Force Dragoon Soldiers Net Insurgents

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE SUMMERALL, Baiji, Iraq – For Task Force Dragoon Soldiers, it was a victory owed to planning, persistence, wit, coordination, technology, and consistency ... for the insurgents, it was a defeat due, in part, to their own consistency.

As surely as they lobbed rockets at the base here every Wednesday night, month after month, Task Force Dragoon Soldiers tracked and captured them - 22 in all – in early May, capping a sustained campaign of intelligence and observation to eliminate the insurgent threat Task Force Soldiers dubbed “The Rocket Man.”

The campaign focused on locations of probable enemy activity, including rocket attacks. In May, these sites, called Named Areas of Interest, were under surveillance by Scouts of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 103rd Armor, and Third Platoon, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry. Along with the AH-64 Apache attack helicopters of a Coalition Forces air weapons team, the Task Force Dragoon units were watching – ready and waiting to respond.

“We watch NAIs and we’re prepared to move,” said Scout Platoon Leader 1st Lt. Tommy Guthrie. “We act on the S2’s intel.”

When the insurgents launched a rocket, the units were close enough to witness it.

“We heard the rocket and saw the flash from the explosion when it hit,” said Third Platoon member Spc. Jason Kleinman, who is from Roslyn Heights, N.Y.

“We were out doing counter-rocket operations on an observation post,” said Guthrie, who is from Smithfield, Pa. “At approximately 9:15 p.m., we observed the rocket launch southwest of our position, in the vicinity of the Tigris River Valley. There were a lot of sparks. It looked like a rocket from the Fourth of July – just sparks flying through the air.”

Using their LRAS, or Long Range Surveillance Device, the scouts found the launch site which was two and a half kilometers away.

“It shoots a laser to the point of origin,” Guthrie said. “The laser bounces back and gives you the range to the point of origin, and a 10-digit grid coordinate. It’s a great asset.”

The Task Force radio nets came alive with spot reports. Guthrie’s concern – that the insurgents would melt into the dense vegetation and tall palm trees in the Tigris River Valley as they had before – was allayed by the air weapons team, who had a fix on them.

“They were also out in sector, observing

the NAIs,” Guthrie said. “They were staying out of observation and hearing range from the NAIs, just back far enough so if they did launch, they could move to the point of origin. When we called in the grid, I believe the Apaches in the sector had already reacted. By the time we got going, they were already flying over us to the grid of the point of origin, where the rocket was fired.”

From the launch site, the air weapons team tracked vehicles, including a truck, to some houses in the nearby town of Abu Toma. These became target houses, and the air weapons team guided the scouts and infantry to them.

“Our gunner said, ‘Hey, I just saw a flash from over in that direction.’ Then we got word from the Apaches that they were following the truck,” said Company B medic Pfc. Marc Salsberry, from Reseda, Calif. “Communication was paramount,” said scout platoon member Spc. Michael Pattison, from Washington, Pa. “The birds talked to us and brought us into the target.”

The scouts and infantry entered the town from the west and east, respectively, and secured the target houses, along with 22 individuals in and around the houses. They didn’t resist, Kleinman said.

“We stormed the house a moment later and found 14 males inside. “It looked like a normal house from the outside. Inside, it was empty except for the people. I didn’t expect that.”

“They all seemed pretty calm,” he said. “They were sitting in a half-circle, and said they were having a prayer service.”

Inside one of the houses, Salsberry had formed a hasty aid-station for possible wounded. As the medic, “it’s good for me to be in a central location,” he said. He sized up the individuals Third Platoon had secured there, and had some intuitions about who was who - based on what they were wearing and how they acted.

“You could tell who was the leader, who drove, and who fired the rocket,” he said. “I saw one with a gold watch – that’s the first gold watch I’ve seen since I’ve been here, and you could tell



The crude rocket launcher shown above is believed to have been used in multiple attacks against Coalition Forces.

he had money. Another guy spoke up, and he seemed like the leader. Another man apologized in English, over and over, saying ‘Mister, mister, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’”

Suspicious as the scene seemed, the search for the rocket launcher – which Guthrie called “the big find.” and “the smoking gun” – continued. It was a source of frustration for the Soldiers and the scouts in particular, who had seen and followed up on a rocket attack in mid-April. Though they investigated some people, they didn’t find a rocket launcher – the very weapon being used against Coalition Forces here, including Task Force Dragoon.

Salsberry had joined the search outside. In a truck, he found a burlap bag with a loaded AK-47 in it, and with an assortment of items, including a meter, timer, global-positioning system and some wire. Then, in the back of the truck, he spotted a long pipe with wires sticking out of one end. He called Third Platoon leader 1st Lt. Timothy Lawton over, who confirmed that there was a 122mm rocket inside the pipe.

“That’s when we knew we could detain these people,” Salsberry said. “Once we found the rocket, we felt that this had a pretty good chance of being a cell meeting here, so we detained them.”

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Patrolling with the Iraqi Army

'Rocket Man' Nabbed

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By Sgt. Jennifer J. Eidson
22nd Mobile Public Affairs

AD DUJAYL, Iraq – Iraqi army Soldiers here are moving closer to taking over military operations.

The Soldiers of Company A, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, are helping the Iraqi soldiers reach that goal through various combat missions.

Task Force 1-128 is composed of Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, Wisconsin Army National Guard, and Troop K, 3rd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Tennessee Army National Guard, who are actively working to train and prepare the Iraqi army to take control of military operations in Iraq.

Spc. William Fisher, an infantryman with 1st Platoon, Company A, said the Iraqi soldiers are learning to conduct patrols and raids as well as set up traffic control points.

"I am very glad to see the Iraqis working with us," Fisher said. "They are taking a bigger role, and within the next month or two they should be doing a lot of work on their own."

Iraqi soldiers are not only learning a lot by conducting missions with the Task Force Liberty Soldiers, but they bring an aspect to the patrol that the Soldiers of Task Force 1-128 can't, Fisher said.

"The Iraqis help us out a lot when we do mounted patrols (and) some dismounted patrols through the villages," Fisher said. "They know the people, they know where things are and they also know the temperament of the people, whether they like us or don't like us. They also do very well with security and helping locate (unexploded ordnance)."

Fisher said when Iraqi soldiers join them on their patrols the local nationals are not as reluctant to provide the Coalition Soldiers with information.

"The Iraqi people themselves are a lot more willing to talk when we have Iraqi soldiers with us," he said. "They feel more comfortable. The Iraqis are able to obtain more information than we would with just an interpreter. A lot of times, some of the Iraqis feel that we are intimidating, and when we bring Iraqis with us they feel more at ease."

The Iraqi soldiers will not be conducting these missions with the Coalition Soldiers much longer, said 2nd Lt. Andrew Lorsung, platoon leader from 1st Platoon, Company A. Soon the Iraqi army will take the lead on military operations in the area, he added.



Spc. William Fisher, 1st Platoon Company A, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry (left), listens as 2nd Lt. Andrew Lorsung, 1st Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry (right), speaks through an interpreter (right center) with an Iraqi army squad leader (left center) from 1st Platoon, Company B, Iraqi army, before going out on a joint patrol. The Task Force 1-128 Soldiers are helping Iraqi soldiers take over combat operations near Forward

"I personally think the Iraqi army will be ready to take over shortly, within several months," Lorsung said. "Most platoon leaders have already taken out a patrol ... where they are actually in charge and they performed very well. It is just a matter of fine tuning."

A squad leader from 1st Platoon, Company B, Iraqi army, agreed that the Iraqi army soldiers are well prepared due to the help of the Coalition Soldiers.

"I think the Iraq army is ready," said the Iraqi soldier. "Right now we are going to be training more on the (Coalition base) every month. We are patrolling with Coalition Forces

"We are patrolling with Coalition Forces and we know all of this area, and we know all of the people in this area. We are ready to support the people of Iraq."

and we know all of this area, and we know all of the people in this area. We are ready to support the people of Iraq. Coalition Forces trained us really hard and taught us more on the map and the patrols. The Iraqi army right now is much better than before."

Fisher said it is important for the soldiers to develop combat skills so they can not only protect their country, but their families as well.

"They need to be able to fend for themselves when we leave in order for democracy to work in Iraq," Fisher said. "I believe they need to be able to take care of themselves and not allow insurgents to pressure them and intimidate them."

Fisher said he has enjoyed working with the Iraqis and believes they will be able to fight the insurgency when the Coalition Soldiers leave Iraq.

"They do a good job and I am glad to be working with them," he said. "The group here is very good and enthusiastic about what they are doing. They will be a good army here in Ad Dujayl."

"Initially they said they hadn't found anything," Guthrie said. "Then they called five minutes later and said they found the rocket. Our morale shot way up, because we go out so many times, and don't make the big find. It was awesome."

Pattison, who was busy relaying radio traffic from both platoons, received the report about finding the launcher. He was "overwhelmed with joy," he said, and joked with Guthrie about it.

"At that moment, I knew we had the guys," Pattison recalled. "I said, 'You know sir, if we could drink, tonight's the night to have a shot.'"

Guthrie met with Lawton, the other commander on the scene. They turned their attention to more pressing tactical priorities – transporting the detainees, finishing the mission and getting the troops home.

"These were some real insurgents and we needed to act quickly, because if they had made a phone call, we could've been in for a counter-attack," Guthrie said. "That was my prime concern."

The commanders had an idea that saved time and possibly lives – they used the detainees' truck to transport the detainees.

"We didn't have room to transport them, and we didn't have time to wait for battalion assets," Guthrie said. He credited all the units involved for the mission's success.

"It was a textbook operation," he reflected. "I was impressed with the coordination between the units ... Third platoon, the air weapons team, and my platoon – the scouts. It was classic."

"If it wasn't for Third Platoon and the guys in the sky, we wouldn't have had anything except for a grid," said Pattison.

"It was a good feeling, knowing we helped out the FOB," said Lawton, who is from Bridgewater, Mass. "We wouldn't have caught them without the air weapons team. A lot of things fell into place. Everything worked out how it was supposed to. The Scouts are a good platoon to work with, as are all the National Guard platoons we've worked with. It's been a good experience."

"It takes a very patient and persistent person to do this kind of work," said Staff Sgt. Chris Reynolds, a scout platoon squad leader from Pickering, Ohio. "It's not the end of it. There are more bad guys out there. It made every one feel good to catch these guys. It's a bit of a relief. Everyone did a good job, and it makes us that much more eager to go out and catch others."

"There are more insurgents out there, regenerating," said Task Force Dragoon Commander Lt. Col. Philip Logan.

"We'll see if the rocket attacks stop," Kleinman said. "My personal opinion is that there is always somebody else that will do it. Catching the bad guys and getting them off the street is a good thing, always. That might be less guys shooting rockets at the FOB. I hope it makes a difference."

"There will always be somebody to take money to fight against us," said Pattison, "and we'll be ready for them."