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RAIDERS DOWN RANGE



Volume 1 Issue 13

Diary of the Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team

October 1, 2005

Iraqis prepare for referendum vote

Maj. Richard Bartoszuk
1st BCT PAO

Officials in Salah Ad Din Province prepared for the October 15 Iraqi national referendum with a large scale rehearsal September 26 thru 28. The mission readiness exercise was held at the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Tikrit, Iraq.

The MRX included representatives from provincial Iraqi government, Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, emergency services, and Coalition Forces.

The MRX rehearsed responses to various emergencies that could arise during the referendum. This scenario-driven exercise included responses to insurgent activity such as IEDs, VBIEDs, fires, traffic accidents, and demonstrations among other emergency situations.

A large part of the exercise was devoted to establishing and maintaining communications to ensure that organizations could send information throughout all levels of the province. The signal plan also included redundancy so that all forms of communication had back-up equipment in place.

The MRX resulted in all organizations being informed of all situations in order to respond to emergencies in a coordinated manner.

Provincial government officials who participated included Governor Hamed Hamood Shukti, Provincial Joint Coordination Center Director Brigadier General Eissa Abid Mohammed, and the



Overwatch...

Spcc. Shim Welch, a Company B, 3-69 Armor Regiment team leader, watches the sun rise over the city of Samarra from a rooftop near Patrol Base Uvanni.

Cpt. Zachary A. Szilagyi, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Combat Team, of LaPorte, Indiana, the Coalition Force mentor who works with Eissa on a daily basis said the exercise created validity for the PJCC.

"It gave them a greater sense of purpose. The coalition created the JCC concept. By letting the Iraqis run the exercise it increased their morale. It was an opportunity for General Eissa to show how his JCCs can help the government and ISF in the province. I know he holds that very dear."

Maj. David N. McNutt, HHC, 1BCT, of Midfield, Alabama, the 1BCT Military Training Team leader who works personally with Abdul Jabbar, said the melding of Iraqi Security Forces and government was the highlight of this MRX.

"I think the most important thing from this was the integration of ISF and government . . . for them to be able to synchronize operations and to be able to conduct command and control of the execution of election operations at both provincial and local levels," said McNutt.

commander of the 4th Iraqi Army Division's 1st Brigade, Brigadier General Abdul Jabar Salih.

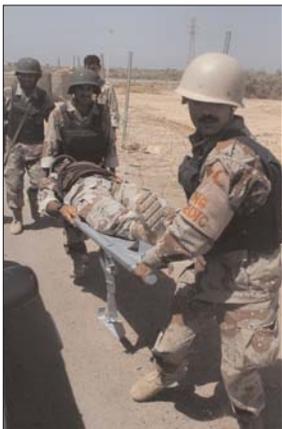
The MRX was the first to integrate the operations of these three officials, and gave them all the opportunity to refine the operations of their agencies, and to build teamwork among their agencies.

Iraqi Army trains, prepares to take control of Vanguard

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

Insurgents in Iraq target Iraqi army soldiers as well as Coalition Forces Soldiers. In training the IA and turning Iraq over to them, CF must also prepare them for reacting to attacks on their installations.

Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 128th



Iraqi soldiers carry a soldier acting as a casualty after a mock VBIED attack.

Infantry Regiment and 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry Regiment at Forward Operating Base Vanguard held a training exercise for the 4th Battalion, 1st IA Brigade.

The training showed IA soldiers how to react to a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. IA soldiers were taught how to treat casualties while at the same time reinforce security at the point of the attack, said Capt. David Jerkins, commander, Company E, 100-442nd Inf.

The training was part of the relief-in-place training CF Soldiers were doing with the IA before a transfer of authority scheduled in the near future. CF and the IA have worked together for some time on FOB Vanguard.

"When we first came here, we only had (limited) Coalition Forces," Jerkins said. "We knew we couldn't protect the FOB on our own, so we had to integrate the IA."

The purpose of the exercise, besides the training aspect for the IA, was so CF leaders running the exercise could evaluate the IA soldiers' performance. It will not be long before the IA will be in total command of the FOB.

"We want to make sure they are running everything on their own," Jerkins said. "If they are not actively

performing these missions right now at least they know what their duties and responsibilities are."

IA soldiers said they are benefitting from the training, and they are eager to display their abilities to the CF Soldiers.

"It's a very good idea," said Pvt. Azhar Maher, Security Platoon, 4th Bn, 1st IA Bde. "We are going to be running the FOB by ourselves. We will have a chance to prove ourselves by doing well during this exercise and in the future doing operations without any help from the Coalition."

CF Soldiers have worked with the IA as part of a military transition team since the beginning of their deployment, and say they are sad to be leaving after living day in and day out with the Iraqis.

"I am really going to miss these guys," said Staff Sgt. Rene Baliscao, a 100-442 Inf. MiTT medic. "We have been working with them this whole time, and some of them are like brothers to us."



Photos by Spcc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

An Iraqi soldier asks a passenger in a suspected mock VBIED to exit the vehicle. The passengers were IA soldiers as well, participating in a react to VBIED attack at FOB Vanguard.

You're not invulnerable.

All vehicles are at risk.

0049 IEDs KILL

Voices and Viewpoints

Looking for a source of wisdom

Staff Sgt. Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

I know what I'm going to do with the millions (give or take) of tax free money I'm making here in Iraq when I get back. I've got big plans. My motorcycle that has been screaming for years now for various upgrades and add-ons figures highly in those plans. It needs to be lowered, it needs ape-hanger handlebars, and it needs more chrome. Numbers, figures, mathematical equations swim around in my head – can I afford that six speed transmission I've always wanted and still get the chrome engine covers?

I need retail therapy, after a year in this place, and by golly I'm going to get it.

My wife, though, keeps interjecting a most irritating factor into my retail therapy equations: wisdom.

Things don't swim in her mind. They line up nicely and do her bidding. Roth IRAs, Thrift Savings Plans, savings accounts and bonds are prioritized and categorized. She has a month by month budget that looks twelve months out!

People assume that, as a Staff Sgt., I

rent a small house somewhere. "No," I tell them, "we own a house."

And their next question is, "Oh, really? Where does your wife work?"

"In that house," I say.

People are amazed that she doesn't have a paying job; that we are a single income family. How can you have a big van, a Harley-Davidson, a big house, three kids, and two big hungry Golden Retrievers, they want to know.

It's easy, I tell them...I guess.

To tell you the truth, with all the times I've been overseas or deployed I really don't know how we do it!

My wife is a homemaker, true, and she works hard to make that home while I'm away. But she's also my financial advisor, my conscience and my wisdom. I'm in short supply of any of those skill sets in my brain. If I were single, making the same money I am now I would be dirt poor.

Instead of planning meals week by week I would eat out whenever I wanted. Instead of putting massive restric-



tions on credit card use I'd shrug and whip out the plastic at a moment's notice with a weak promise that I won't use it the next time.

I'd live in a shack and pay a ridiculous rent. I'd probably wear a Rolex watch, instead of a nice Seiko, but I would also starve the last five days of each month.

A couple of years ago I sold my old Harley while at Fort Polk and when I went to Fort Bragg I started looking for another one. My wife went with me to the Harley dealer and lead me straight to a new bike from the previous model year that was being sold for below MSRP.

Everything was rosy and sweet smelling until we got to the financing stage.

My wife had found some obscure financial institution in Texas that could offer us a low rate. Harley said they'd beat it, but during the financing stage the guy behind the desk gave us a rate that was .1 percent higher. My wife picked up her purse and said, "Well we

can't do it."

Then she looked at me and said, shrugging, "Sorry, honey."

Sorry honey!? I had tears rolling down my cheeks as did the guy behind the desk. She would not budge. Harley finally budged and I got my bike.

We all need a source of wisdom in our lives. For me it's my wife. For some it's the chaplain, or their parents, or their NCO. Some turn to ACS for advice on how to take care of the everyday business of living. We all need someone, whether it be financial, spiritual or emotional, to keep us on track.

I'd like to think that everyone deployed to Iraq has a source of wisdom to turn to, but I know that isn't true.

I would like everyone to think about it, though, and beware. In the next few months we'll be redeploying back home to friends and family and those of us who don't have an anchor of wisdom will have some problems.

Start looking now for that source of wisdom. If you can't find one, though, I'd really like a nice set of leather saddlebags and my budget won't cover it so maybe you could float me a loan?

Chaplain's Corner

Ramadan month of blessing for Iraqi Muslims

Chaplain (Maj.) Mark Nordstrom
1st BCT Chaplain

All of our soldiers are receiving special training about Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and a month-long time of fasting and prayer for Muslims. For more than a billion Muslims around the world—including some 8 million in North America—Ramadan is a "month of blessing" marked by prayer, fasting, and charity.

Muslims believe that during the month of Ramadan, Allah revealed the first verses of the Koran, the holy book of Islam. Around 610 A.D., a caravan trader named Muhammad took to wandering the desert near Mecca (in today's Saudi Arabia) while thinking about his faith. One night a voice called to him from the night sky. It was the angel Gabriel, who told Muhammad he had been chosen to receive the word of Allah.

At many mosques during Ramadan, about one thirtieth of the Qur'an is recited each night in prayers known as tarawih. In this way, by the end of the month the complete scripture will have been recited.

Muslims practice sawm, or fasting, for the entire month of Ramadan. This means that they may eat or drink nothing, including water, while the sun shines. Fasting is one of the Five Pillars (duties) of Islam. As with other Islamic duties, all able



Muslims take part in sawm from about age twelve.

During Ramadan in the Muslim world, most restaurants are closed during the daylight hours. Families get up early for suhoor, a meal eaten before the sun rises. After the sun sets, the fast is broken with a meal known as iftar.

Iftar usually begins with dates and sweet drinks that provide a quick energy boost.

Fasting serves many purposes. While they are hungry and thirsty, Muslims are reminded of the suffering of the poor. Fasting is also an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the body and mind. And in this most sacred month, fasting helps Muslims feel the peace that comes from spiritual devotion as well as kinship with fellow Muslims.

Most importantly, the month focuses on the Koran. It is read daily and time usually given to other pursuits of daily living is given over to the recitation of the Koran.

Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid al-Fitr, which this year will begin on 3 Nov 05. At sundown on the final day of Ramadan a Muslim who has kept the fast (no eating or drinking during daylight hours, abstaining from sexual relations or the

consumption of alcohol, etc.) is promised forgiveness of his or her sins.

Literally the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," Eid al-Fitr is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations (the other occurs after the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca). At Eid al-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family.

A sense of generosity and gratitude colors these festivities. Although charity and good deeds are always important in Islam, they have special significance at the end of Ramadan. As the month draws to a close, Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor and making contributions to mosques.

Our soldiers will show respect to Iraqis during this month in several ways. We will ask Muslims how we should behave, and so learn something about their way of life, culture and religion. We will avoid eating, drinking or smoking in their presence during the day when they are fasting. We will understand that fasting is not an easy practice, and show consideration for those Iraqis with whom we come in contact.

Most importantly, we will acknowledge that this is a special month for Iraqi Muslims, and show honor and respect to people who may not share our faith or customs.

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

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



Iraqi, American soldiers share losses, successes

Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta
42nd ID PAO

FORWARD OPERATING SUMMERALL, Bayji, Iraq – Behind the walls of an old British fort here, and in the area around the base, a Pennsylvania Army National Guard unit with roots in the American Revolution is helping Iraq secure its own nationhood – by training, and fighting alongside its soldiers.

Through success, setback and loss, troops of Company A, 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry and Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division have shared the frustrations – and rewards – of this mission.

“They possess the willingness to be in the Iraqi army,” said Sgt. James Mostiller, a Company A team leader from Philadelphia. “What they need is more help. One company is not going to do it for Bayji.”

“Sometimes you’ll train them on task, and they don’t seem to get it,” said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Flynn, a Company A squad leader from Levittown, Pa. “Then you’ll go out on a mission, and they’ll do it perfectly. They’ll surprise you sometimes.”

The Iraqi troops apply the training they receive in the fight against the insurgents. Almost daily, the Iraqi and American soldiers mount humvees and pick-up trucks and roll out of the gate, departing the base to patrol, man traffic-control points, or check infrastructure like power lines – a new mission recently added to the soldiers’ battery of tasks.

Company A began training and performing combat operations with the Iraqi soldiers last December. In May, they certified the Iraqi soldiers in squad-level missions and now they’re training them to take on platoon and company-level missions.

“It’s frustrating, but you’re taking people with literally no experience and training them to be platoon sergeants and squad leaders,” said Staff Sgt. Chad Bruckner, a Company A squad leader from Horsham, Pa.

“At a squad level they perform pretty decently ... like building clearing, raids and that type of thing,” Flynn said.

In March, with Coalition Forces support, the Iraqi soldiers pulled off a two-pronged raid, netting both targets – a weapons cache and a known terrorist, said Bruckner.



A soldier of Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division bounds forward on a live-fire range at FOB Summerall.



A member of Company C’s newly-formed quick-reaction force helps secure an unexploded ordnance site near FOB Summerall. Iraqi and American soldiers here conduct combat operations together such as patrols and traffic-control points in the surrounding area.

“They hit the targets simultaneously,” said Bruckner. “We got the man and we got the target. I thought, ‘We can make a difference.’”

Other training and tactical milestones followed, including the capture of insurgent Samir Yasin Taha in July – a platoon-level operation whose success is owed entirely to Iraqi soldiering and leadership, Mostiller said.

“They led the briefing and led the patrol,” Mostiller said. “We allowed them to do everything. They did a great job and accomplished the mission.”

However, refining the Iraqi unit’s ability to execute platoon and company-level operations has been hit by difficulties beyond either the American or Iraqi soldiers’ control – like changes in leadership, a developing logistics system and a fledgling Iraqi noncommissioned officer corps.

“They still have a long way to go,” Flynn said. “The NCO corps needs a lot of work. You can’t build an American sergeant in a year, and you can’t build an Iraqi sergeant in a year, either.”

The Iraqis don’t have an NCO chain of command like the American Army, said Mostiller.

“Trying to get them to take charge is difficult,” he said. “We try to focus our training on their squad leaders and platoon sergeants.”

“The biggest thing missing here is NCO leadership,” said Sgt. Craig Fisher, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 103rd Armor. “They need to understand what the NCO corps concept is – and use it.”

Fisher is a medic from Lancaster Pa. Along with medic and fellow unit member Staff Sgt. Jon Siennick of Harrisburg, Pa., Fisher mans the aid station in the Iraqi Army compound within the base here – the old British fort from which the Iraqi soldiers train and operate.

Fisher and Siennick’s efforts – including “correct diagnosis and preventive medicine,” Siennick said – strengthened Iraqi ranks by reducing sick-call visits. They also created medical records for the Iraqi soldiers, conducted first aid training and had first-aid tasks translated into Arabic.

“Everything we do here we do so the Iraqi soldiers can do it on their own,” Siennick said. “People think Iraq is Arizona – it’s not. There is no healthcare system here.”

Fisher and Siennick said basic cultural aspects, like differing Iraqi dialects and tribal loyalties, make training a challenge. Company A soldiers use tribal conflicts among the Iraqi troops as a teaching tool about the importance of unit loyalty, Fisher said. Tribal conflict has abated somewhat, he added, but it is an ongoing struggle.

“We’ve been trying to reinforce that,” Fisher said. “We tell them that the Iraqi army is a tribe and that they’re a band of brothers. It sounds like a cliché, but it’s true.”

The Company A soldiers reinforce all the training they conduct, and Bruckner said they “conduct remedial training at every opportunity.”

“These problems are not any more outlandish than in other armies,” Bruckner said. “They may need more work, but their problems are no different.”

Training the Iraqi troops and accompanying them on missions is an advantage, Flynn said. The two build on each other he added. “That’s good because you can see their strengths and weaknesses first

hand, and get an idea of how they perform overall,” Flynn said. “Where they excel is getting in touch with the people in the area and conducting street-level policing.”

“It’s not a problem,” said Staff Sgt. Jamal Achmed, of Company C. “We train, rehearse, then apply what we learned on the streets of Bayji.”

The Iraqi troops’ strong suit, Bruckner said, is their ability to gather intelligence – the ace-in-the-hole of low-intensity conflicts like the one they’re fighting. “I don’t care what kind of intelligence specialist you bring in, they’re not going to get the kind of intelligence the Iraqis can get,” said Bruckner.

“The Iraqi soldiers speak Arabic, so they often know better what’s going on,” said Sgt. Zaban Rady Shbat, a Company C squad leader. “The American



Photos by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta

An Iraqi NCO of Company C, 201st Iraqi Army Battalion briefs members of the company’s newly-formed quick-reaction force (QRF) before they leave the base on a mission. Along with combat-lifesaver qualification, the formation of the QRF was another step forward for Company C.

soldiers need translators. We want to go out and talk to people, to see how they are, if they need anything, and if they’ve seen any terrorists.”

“We need all Iraqis to work with the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police,” said Pvt. Faliḥ Mohamed Gothwey, Company C. “We need information.”

“I can speak with the people and I know the area very well,” said Achmed. “Getting information is something we need for this job. The way we talk with people helps get us get info.”

The Company A soldiers know the risks the Iraqi troops are taking.

“Where we patrol, a lot of the Iraqi army soldiers live there,” said Mostiller. “They’re putting their lives on the line just being in the Iraqi army. They’re also putting their families lives on the line.”

Mostiller said he is proud of the Iraqi soldiers, and lamented the fact that the Iraqi soldiers have to cover their faces while on patrol.

“It’s easy for me to be a soldier because I don’t live in the towns I patrol,” said Mostiller. “They have a lot of spirit and heart. It’s a shame that they have to cover their faces for fear that they or their families will be attacked.”

Some of the Iraqi soldiers are poor, some are farmers, Bruckner said – but they joined the army to defend their country.

“They believe in doing something greater,” he said.

Cpl. Nazhan Ali, Company C, said the American and Iraqi soldiers get along well. “We are friends and we are joking with each other all the time,” Ali said.

Some of the Americans have learned Arabic words, Achmed said, and soldiers of both nations also communicate with gestures and tones.

Both units have suffered casualties. Company A recently lost six soldiers to IEDs near Bayji.

“They came to do this mission, and we leave the base to do missions together,” Achmed said. “This is enough to create a strong relationship between us.”

Signs of that bond are borne out in the story of Company A soldier Spc. Brian Walczel, from Allentown, Pa., who was driving a humvee hit by an IED attack May 17. **See Bayji, next page**

Soldiers from three cultures work on one FOB

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

With the operation tempo of units mobilizing and deploying, many times units are thrown together to compensate for open slots. Often units are made up of more than one element.

Such is the case at Forward Operating Base O’Ryan. Soldiers living on the FOB are made up of three separate units from three very different places. The 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry Regiment of the Hawaiian Army National Guard, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment of the Wisconsin Army National Guard and 3rd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment of the Tennessee National Guard make up Task Force Eagle. The three units have learned to live and work together since deploying late last year.

Each of the units has a different impression of the other unit, although all units respect each other. The 100-442 Inf., or Konohiki, are

known to be sensitive and tolerant of the Iraqis.

“The Konohiki are more culturally sensitive than the rest of us,” said Sgt. 1st Class Rathburn Ray, a 3-278 ACR fire support non-commissioned officer. “They seem more tolerant of other people’s culture, more laid back.”

Capt. Brice Buckingham, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-128 Inf. said the Soldiers from Hawaii are a very nice, easygoing group of people.

“They are very friendly, pleasant people to me,” Buckingham said. “Everything is half full to them. They’re a little more laid back and appreciate camaraderie within their group.”

Buckingham said the guys from Wisconsin are all business when it comes to their missions, and have a harder time unwinding.

“It is definitely a different culture,” Buckingham said “Up where we are from we are a lot more pragmatic. We do things by the book.

We’re kind of a stoic people.”

“They’re more aggressive than we are when it comes to their work,” said Staff Sgt. Rene Balisco, a 100-442 Inf. medic. “They don’t have the Aloha spirit like us Hawaii boys do. I think we approach people trying to understand their culture more. The guys from Wisconsin jump in and get the job done. They are very hard working and take their work seriously.”

Ray said the Wisconsin Soldiers are more sensitive of their grammar than their free time.

“The Wisconsin guys aren’t as playful,” Ray said. “They don’t joke around as much as we do. They are more grammar oriented than we are. They are very detail oriented and very professional.”

The Soldiers from Tennessee, on the other hand, are viewed as true southerners. Their laidback attitude and their distinct speech are noticed by everybody on the FOB.

“The Tennessee boys are more playful, cowboy guys,” Balisco said. “One thing that sticks out in my head

is their accent; their twang. Our guys have accents, being from all over the Pacific, but with the Tennessee guys you really have to pay attention to understand what they are saying.”

One thing different about the Soldiers from Tennessee is their work ethic, Buckingham said.

“People from Tennessee work hard and play hard,” Buckingham said. “There is no in between for them. We work hard and don’t play enough. I think we could all learn something from each other. When it’s time to work, they work really hard. When the mission is over, they take their play time just as seriously.”

Buckingham said his fellow Wisconsin Soldiers’ outlook as well as their social skills comes from their environment up north. The cold accounts for their attitude.

“We have those bitter winters where we are from, and we are used to isolating ourselves; retreating to our caves and huddling next to our fires,” Buckingham said. “We don’t get out and socialize as much.”

Bayji from page 3

Though he escaped serious injury, the Iraqi soldiers in the humvee didn’t. Walczner was distraught.

“I felt bad because I was driving the vehicle,” Walczner said. “I thought, ‘maybe if I drove more to the left, they’d still be here.’”

Walczner calls the day the explosion, coinciden-

tally the anniversary of his enlistment in the Army, a “dark day.”

“I remember looking at the wounded and thinking, ‘I’ve never seen anything like this before,’” he said.

Being part of “the main focus here” is rewarding, Flynn said. “The goal is to help build a coun-

try and build their army,” Flynn said. “We’ve actually taken part in that.”

“We all believe in the mission,” said Bruckner. “We all put in extra hours.”

“We’re trying to get as much experience as we can from the American Army,” said Achmed, “because they are not going to be here forever.”

A look at our home in Iraq



Staff Sgt. Daniel Bailey

The view of Tikrit from a helicopter flying near Forward Operating Base Danger. The tall minaret in the distance marks the location of the main Tikrit mosque.



Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Pfc. Rawn Graves, infantryman, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, pauses on a patrol in the city of Balad.



Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Iraqi boys play soccer using uniforms distributed by Coalition Forces. Twenty-five teams involved with the Salah Ad Din Provincial Soccer League are using the equipment distributed by Task Force Liberty Soldiers.



Sgt. Robert Tigh

Soldiers climb a hill during a reconnaissance mission near Samarra. The hill was being checked out before an Air Force bombing mission designed to keep insurgents from using the hill as a site to attack Coalition Forces with indirect fire.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Army Staff Sgt. Jason Massey, Howitzer crew chief (left), Sgt. Thomas Hubbard (middle) and Pfc. Kenneth Campbell (right) of Battery B, 1-41 Field Artillery, practice crew drills. The crew simulated loading rounds, checking coordinates and firing "ghost rounds" to maintain quick reaction counter-fire times.

Bravo Battery stays on target

Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta

22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Balad, Iraq—Coalition Forces around Forward Operating Base Paliwoda can rest assured that when they are out on patrol and need an extra punch of firepower, they can rely on a crew of Soldiers to place deadly high-explosive precision fire on a target without seeing it, day or night.

The nine-man crew of the 8th Howitzer Section, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery, 1st Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, is on call 24 hours a day safeguarding the lives of those in need, with the help of the M109-A6 Paladin, the Army's medium self-propelled howitzer.

"Our mission is to provide quick fire support for units that need it, but we have the ability to send illumination rounds over a targeted area for support on night operations or to just let the insurgents know we're watching them," said Staff Sgt. Jason Massey, Howitzer section chief.

The crew is also called upon to fire periodic terrain denial missions and counterfire missions toward the point of origin of incoming mortar rounds or



Army Pfc. Andrew Ponton, field artillery cannon crewmember, restocks the powder storage container with a "red bag," one of the more powerful charges the Howitzer fires.

rockets.

"When we see the insurgents firing from the same firing point, setting a trend, we periodically fire rounds on the coordinates to prevent the enemy from using it," Massey said. "And when we have rounds impact on the FOB, we return fire at the point where they fired from."

The unit has also been called upon to fire white-phosphorous rounds into wooded areas to clear it of concealment the enemy might use.

With the ability to send a 138-pound laser-guided, high explosive, anti-tank warhead over 30 kilometers, the area of fire-support coverage includes several other Coalition Forces bases in the Balad area.

Although the Paladin is mobile, it's mostly used as a stationary piece. In the event it might be used for the combat support role outside its range, the tracked vehicle gun is driven closer to the intended target.

"With this capability," Massey said, "we can be rolling down the road and get a fire mission from the fire direction center over the computer."

Massey said that the crew can stop the vehicle and it will calibrate the gun to the vehicle's position on the terrain, turn in the direction of the target, fire and then continue driving down the road.

When the Soldiers aren't firing artillery rounds, they're maintaining the weapon system keeping it in precise firing condition and temperature.

"Keeping the gun ready to fire is almost a precise science," Massey said.

Since the propellant used in the artillery piece is temperature sensitive, it must be checked on a constant basis.

According to Pfc. Robert Waid, field artillery cannon crewmember, if the powder is cool, the round may fall short of a specified target than if it were calibrated for warmer powder.

"The powder will burn quicker if heated and slower if cooled, so the temperature must be put into the targeting computer for precise calculations to hit a target," said Waid.

Massey said once the FDC gets a request for fire, using the targeting computer and database, it relays the fire coordinates, specifies the particular round and powder charge to the gun's computer through a satellite link, which is confirmed by the gun's crew, then the Howitzer is fired.

Whether they receive a call for fire support to suppress an insurgent attack, return incoming fire or to fire illumination flares to aid in night combat operations, the crew responds within a moments notice.

"From the time the call for fire comes in, we can have rounds splashing (impacting) down on target in under a minute," said Pfc. Andrew Ponton, field artillery cannon crewmember.

Massey said they normally focus on maintaining the vehicles, cleaning weapons or training.

"Sometimes we do crew drills and other training, right now we're preparing Soldiers for the board," he added, "taking care of Soldier business."

But no matter how important a job the crew might be doing while on call, everything comes to a rapid halt when a mission is called in.

"We can be doing anything, but when someone calls for fire, we immediately drop what we're doing and head to the gun," Massey said. "The mission comes first."

Massey said the counterfire missions can be sporadic.

"We have had five counterfire missions in one day and then gone days

without firing a single round," he added.

The crew of four works in unison to complete fire missions in the confined space of the vehicle, rotating jobs every few weeks.

During a fire mission, the crew chief monitors the radio and fire control computer for communications with the FDC and supervises the crew working the gun, while the driver manages the engine/ hydraulic systems that power



The Army's M109-A6 Paladin 155 Medium Self-Propelled Howitzer belonging to Battery B, 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery, fires a volley of rounds during a calibration fire mission, in Balad Iraq.

the gun also logging the outgoing rounds.

Cannoneer one sets the timer delay on the round if needed and loads the round in the breech. After the gunner loads the powder and closes the breech, he rechecks the chief's fire control computer coordinates. The number one man primes the charge and fires the weapon on the chief's command.

With a reload time of less than 30 seconds, the crew can send a volley of three rounds out, ranging from just outside the FOB walls to several miles away in under a minute and a half.

To date, the unit has fired over 935 rounds with over 190 fire missions, since they arrived in Iraq in January, on call day and night, seven days a week, 24-hours a day in support of Coalition Forces operations.

Cav Soldiers monitor mosque messages

Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Balad, Iraq- An integral part of the new Iraqi Security Forces' success lies in the very people they have vowed to protect.

Without the support of those who live in Iraq, the effort to rebuild this country could be severely hindered; hence the importance of assessing the opinion of those who may have influence over the population.

One way to determine the opinion of those with this power is to listen to and translate mosque messages that are broadcasted for the townspeople to hear.

"We conduct what we call mosque missions where we go out and record the messages that are preached in town," said Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Bush, platoon sergeant, B Troop, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Brigade Combat Team. "Listening to the messages is a good way to see how the religious leaders perceive us and our efforts."

Bush said that although many of the messages broadcast are innocent in nature, preaching "good things," there have been reports of mosques' preaching anti-Coalition propaganda.

"It annoys (the Iraqi army and policemen) because their actions are being undermined by these few people who are trying to recruit (insurgents) or upset their progress," said Pfc. Aaron Schindewolf, medic, B Troop, 5-7 Cav.

Sometimes the 5-7 Cav. Soldiers have driven right up to the mosque during the broadcast over the loudspeaker and recorded the message from within its secure perimeter. Bush said however, there have been times when as they pulled up, the broadcast stopped in the middle of the message.

"It's hard to say what was being said but it makes me think they were preaching anti-coalition messages because when they see us coming, they stop the message," Bush said.

Due to this, the Coalition Forces have adapted their tactics to counter these alleged actions of secrecy.

"We decided to start approaching the mosques unseen when possible," Bush said. "We deter-

mine what mosque we are going to record, then see what cover is available around the area. On some missions we get within several meters of it using the trees or orchids for cover."

On one particular mission, the Soldiers crept through an orchid prior to the broadcast and waited for the broadcast to begin.

"We got close to the speaker, which was mounted on the roof of the mosque; close enough to hear the message loud and clear," Bush said. "We also had an interpreter to let us know if there was an anti-coalition message being played."

Bush said that after the message is recorded, it is turned over to the interpreters and completely translated into English, then used for intelligence purposes.

Although there may be anti-coalition messages preached, there may also be pro-coalition messages as well.

"Terrorists come from other countries to destroy this country," said "Jack," who is working as an interpreter with Coalition Forces, in reference to a translated mosque message.

"So we must stay together to build a safe country, so everybody can live in peace," he added.

"They are not all bad messages," said Jack. "Sometimes mosques preach good messages for the Soldiers and sometimes bad messages. That is why we have to go out and make sure they aren't preaching against our progress."

Soldiers go out on mosque missions weekly covering different mosques every time, Schindewolf said.

"Since we're not allowed to enter the mosques all we can do is record the messages, but it's a good gauge in seeing what kind of positive support or negative influence is being preached," Bush said. "It gives us a heads up on what to expect from that area."



Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Bush, platoon sergeant, 5th Bn, 7th Cav, records a mosque message from the concealment of trees next to a mosque in Balad, while "Jack" translates the message and writes down the basic ideas of the broadcast.

Iraqi Army soldiers learn to provide medical care

Staff Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Balad, Iraq- Medical support for soldiers with boots on the ground is a critical part in waging war.

As Iraqi troops take over the role of conducting combat operations and raids, they must also step up to the role of providing their soldiers with the proper medical support, whether the routine sick-call patient or a wounded soldier with traumatic injuries.

Equipping the Iraqi Army with medical personnel requires training from Coalition Soldiers who possess the ability to bridge the gaps in technology, language and customs between Coalition Forces and the Iraqi army.

"Right now Iraq's emergency medical system is in the process of being stood up," said Cpl. Slade Deister, medical supply noncommissioned officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Brigade Combat Team. "We're helping them as much as we can to treat both their military and civilian casualties and their sick."

Although the Coalition Forces are helping to set up the emergency medical system and treating Iraqis for medical related issues, they have started to turn away people and soldiers from coming to the Coalition base gate for free medical health care and divert them to the hospital in Balad.

"Sometimes it breaks my heart to see someone in extreme pain, only to tell

them they need to go to the hospital in Balad for treatment," said Spc. Dominic Italiano, medic and combat life saver instructor, 5-7 Cav. "But if we don't turn them away, they'll just keep coming here for treatment for the most minor injuries to life-threatening traumatic wounds."

"But obviously, if it's life threatening then we do what we can for the patient. Otherwise, we send them down the road," he added.

Since the Iraqi army is moving to take over combat operations in the area, Italiano said the decision was made to start training some Iraqi soldiers in first aid, starting with the combat life saver course.

"The Soldiers attend a three-day course learning the basics of first aid," Italiano said. "They get instruction in bandaging, splinting, checking for pulse and breathing, how and when to give (intravenous injections), how to assess a casualty and the fireman's carry, to name a few."

He said many of them receive the training well and out of those who can read and write, a select few are sent for further training as medical personnel in Taji and Tikrit medical facilities.

Training the Iraqi soldiers hasn't been without its share of challenges.

"In the beginning we used slides with words on it, but since many Iraqi Soldiers can't even read, it didn't work as well as we had planned," Deister said. "So we decided to use interpreters to help train the class explaining everything we say into Arabic which works well."

"Then we decided to put the Iraqi

unit's medics to work helping us train these soldiers, integrating them into the training," he added.

Since they started incorporating the Iraqi medics into the training, the soldiers have been able to learn at a much faster rate and retain more knowledge when they take the final exam, Italiano said.

"Their customs also differ from ours in a sense when we need medical care we get it," said Italiano. "But they think if Allah wants them to live, he will save them. So sometimes, it's a bit difficult to get them to the point where they will treat each other if needed without worrying about 'godly repercussions.'"

"There have been soldiers who have thrown-up while getting IVs because the thought of not knowing if they are going against their own beliefs makes them physically sick," he added. "Treating them and training them is a challenge, but we've got it now, and they're doing just fine with it."

Deister said the ultimate goal was to get the Iraqi army to stop relying on Coalition Forces for medical support. The Iraqi army already has a medical supply system in place, with a constantly growing inventory.

"They need to realize we're not going to be here forever to help them," said Italiano.

The Iraqi medics can effectively treat many injuries they encounter while out on patrol and raids, so the Coalition Forces do not have to worry about using all their supplies on them, Desiter said.

"Because we have our Soldiers to worry about," he added.



Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Iraqi soldiers practice the fireman's carry during a combat life saver's course taught by US Army and Iraqi army medics at FOB Paliwoda, near Balad.