

# The Daily Roar

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MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION - BAGHDAD

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## TF Rogue boosts economy

**By 1st Lt. Shawn Pardee**  
*1st Bn. 64th Armor Regt.*

BAGHDAD— The “Desert Rogues” of Task Force Rouge arrived in the volatile Mansour District of northwest Baghdad in June tasked with improving the security situation in this former al-Qaeda stronghold. Due to the blood and sweat of the Soldier’s and their Iraqi army partners, there has been a drastic decrease of attacks and sectarian violence which once paralyzed the region.

This significant downturn in violence has set the conditions for Task Force Rogue, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, from Fort Stewart, Ga., to commence in a near operation coined “Rogue Currency.” This operation is a simple employment of business theories used to boost the local economies by energizing locally identified economic support zones with micro-grants. Termed “micro-grant,” it is a Coalition funded monetary grant up to \$2,500 awarded to legitimate local national entrepreneurs to jump-start their new or struggling business. The Desert Rogue’s focused these grants in areas of Mansour that were historically avid business districts prior to the fall of the former Saddam Hussein regime.

“There’s many ways to defeat this complex insurgency and one is through simple economics and employment. Our micro-grant strategy is bringing goods and jobs to an area that has long suffered from extremist insurgent activity,” said Jacksonville, Fla. native, Maj. Chris Budihias, 1st Bn. 64th Armor Regt. operations officer. “These grants are giving the local Iraqis employment and through it hope that the future will be better.”

Another significant goal of this operation was to empower and legitimize the local Neighborhood Area Councils as legitimate governing committees. This was achieved by incorporating the NAC into the micro-grant

vetting process. The application process is fairly simple. Local entrepreneurs submit an application with the specifics details surrounding their business-type and business plan to use the grant to improve their store to the NAC.



*courtesy photo*

**Soldiers process micro-grant applications in the Mansour District of Baghdad.**

The NAC then scrutinizes the application to ensure the business venture is legitimate. Once the application is approved it will be submitted to the Coalition to be financed and returned with the awarded money. Once the micro-grants are approved and the identification of the applicants is confirmed, they receive their grant at their local NAC office.

To date, the battalion has awarded 182 micro-grants totaling over \$430,250. The word of the program spread quickly throughout the district. The battalion now has over 700 applications in the approval process. Each award gives a business capital to fix their war damaged stores, and purchase goods or supplies for services. This in turn generates jobs and supports various business markets and customer product demand in the neighborhoods. This cyclic movement of money and goods ultimately contributes to rebuilding portions of the local economy.

The progress of the micro-grant award program is evident as new commerce and customer base are sprouting up throughout the area.

According to Budihias, “The implementation of our micro-grant strategy in our sector has brought to life an area that was al-Qaeda battlefield back in the summer. Daily, these streets were buzzing with bullets and filled with [improvised explosive devices]. Now, they are buzzing with customers buying goods and filled with newly opened business thanks to these small monetary grants.”

The Desert Rogues will continue to aggressively employ this strategy to assist the Iraqi people by returning pockets of the city of Baghdad to a sense of normalcy.



by Spc. Aaron L. Rosencrans, MND-B PAO

**Helping hand**

TAJI, Iraq – Iraqi Army soldiers and local children unload furniture from a truck Jan. 16, to a clinic to help prepare for the addition of a new emergency room.



The Player of the Day award is presented to Maj. Jason Caldwell for outstanding performance as the Division’s Knowledge Management Officer. Caldwell was tasked to seamlessly update the Multi-National Division-Baghdad Portal’s software with no loss of functionality or data. His technical and tactical expertise make him today’s 4th Inf. Div. Player of the Day.

**Baghdad Three Day Weather Forecast**

**Tuesday**  
Partly cloudy  
HI: 59F/15C  
LO: 39F/4C



**Wednesday**  
Chance of rain  
HI: 50F/10C  
LO: 41F/5C



**Thursday**  
Clear  
HI: 58F/15C  
LO: 39F/4C



The Daily Roar

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# Paratroopers look back on deployment

*Author's note: In Part 1 of this series, the White Falcons of the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment moved into the Sha'ab neighborhood in East Baghdad as part of the first wave of the "Surge" in forces aimed at restoring security to the Iraqi capital. Soon, the paratroopers' efforts began to turn the area around. Now, in Part 2, the White Falcons take stock of all they achieved – and all they sacrificed – during this deployment.*

**By Staff Sgt. Mike Pryor**

2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. PAO

BAGHDAD - By the Fall of 2007, Sha'ab was seeing a clear turnaround. From a high of 160 violent deaths in the area in December 2006, the number shrank to just five a year later - a 97 percent decrease, said the White Falcons' commander, Lt. Col. Richard Kim.

It was a major achievement for the paratroopers, one they haven't even fully come to grips with yet, said 1st Lt. Josh Ollek, of Woodstown, N.J., a platoon leader with Company B.

"I don't think it will really sink in until we're home and we start thinking about everything we accomplished," Ollek said.

But the success came at a heavy price. Nine Soldiers from the Battalion and its supporting units were killed in action during the deployment, and scores more were wounded. Combat Outpost Callahan withstood more than 30 withering barrages of rocket and mortar rounds. On every patrol, roadside bombs were a constant danger.

With many of its paratroopers on their fourth tour of duty in Iraq, the White Falcons were already one of the Army's most combat hardened units. But this deployment has left the paratroopers with a seen-it-all, done-it-all layer of toughness shared by even the newest private. They pepper their talk with casual references to horrific events – like the time insurgents catapulted 100-pound propane tanks filled with plastic explosives over the walls of the COP. They make morbid jokes about the IEDs that wait for them on the next patrol. They kid about hoping for the "million-dollar" wound that will send them home in one piece.

But as hardened as they may appear on the outside, almost all the paratroopers are wrestling with homesickness, and the year's-worth of birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays they have missed.

As they walked a patrol one recent morning through a market just beginning to fill up with customers, the paratroopers from 2nd Platoon, Co. B kept up a running commentary during every halt about things they missed from home.

"You know what I miss? Civilian clothes," one of the paratroopers said.

"I miss real food," another offered.

"I miss being able to walk down the street without an M4 and huge bag on my back," said (Doc) David Higuera, as he labored under his swollen medic bag.

"You know what I miss? America," said Blytheville,



by Staff Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division PAO

Phoenix, Ariz. native Spc. David Higuera (left), and Staff Sgt. James Price (behind him), conduct an early morning patrol to assess the market's security before the start of business.

Ark. native Staff Sgt. James Price, pretty much ending the conversation in agreement.

And yet, much as they might long for home, the paratroopers remain focused on the mission, and on completing the job at hand.

"Right now, this is our world. This is our lives," Staff Sgt. Robert Brogdon said. "So until the day we leave, we're just going to keep our heads down and keep doing what we have to do."

For now, that means continuing to help the people of Sha'ab get on their feet. Which is why, a few hours after nightfall on Jan. 14, the paratroopers from Company B returned to the squatter village with a large truck full of tarps, cots, and food for the refugee family. The family members, who had been huddled around a charcoal heater, helped unload the truck as children danced with excitement around the pile of supplies. Ollek shook hands with the grateful father. Sgt. 1st Class Jorge Mazuela, the platoon sergeant, watched the whole scene with an irrepressible smile.

For a moment, the paratroopers looked like big softies, but with all the blood, sweat and tears the White Falcons have invested in Sha'ab, it was impossible not to get a little emotionally involved, Mazuela said.

"You're here, and you're not going anywhere, so you might as well give a damn," Mazuela said.