

COALITION CHRONICLE

Volume 3, Issue 7 July 2008



LITHUANIANS FACE DIFFICULT CHOICE

Air Assault history

*Halls, trauma rooms
at Fallujah hospital
stand empty*



A Lithuanian soldier stands guard over the Lithuanian compound at Forward Operating Base Delta, Iraq, May 29. (Photo by Army Sgt. Daniel T. West.)



page 6

Rakkasans of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, continue making air assault history with Iraqi soldiers.



page 16

Thousands of Iraqi civilians line up at the Furat facility in Baghdad as Soldiers of the 18th Military Police Brigade begin the process of turning them into Iraqi police officers.



page 20

The Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment system is run by surveillance Soldiers of the Indiana Army National Guard's 75th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

COALITION CHRONICLE

The Official Magazine of
Multi-National Corps – Iraq

July 2008
Volume 3, Issue 7

MNC-I Commander
Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III

MNC-I Public Affairs Officer
Col. Billy J. Buckner

MNC-I Public Affairs Sergeant Major
Sgt. Maj. Sharon Opeka

Layout and Design
Staff Sgt. Jeremy D. Crisp

Editor
Staff Sgt. Jeremy D. Crisp

Questions, comments and concerns about The Coalition Chronicle can be addressed via email at **mncicoalitionchroniclegroupmailbox@iraq.centcom.mil**. The Chronicle accepts articles, photos and letters for submission. Send submissions to **mncicoalitionchroniclegroupmailbox@iraq.centcom.mil**. The Chronicle reserves the right to edit for security, accuracy, propriety, clarity and space.

The Coalition Chronicle is an authorized monthly publication for members of the Department of Defense. Contents of this monthly publication are not necessarily the official views of or endorsed by the U.S. Government or the Department of Defense. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the Public Affairs Office of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq.

Departments

Feature up Front

page 1

Freedom's Focal Point

page 10

Photo Feature

page 18

In Memoriam

page 21

The sign at the emergency entrance to Fallujah Surgical speaks volumes about the decreased violence in al-Anbar Province. The sign was erected in 2006 due to the heavy flow of combat casualties coming into the trauma center at Camp Fallujah.

WE NEEDED

NO BLOOD NEEDED
AT PRESENT TIME

FALLUJAH HALLWAY

“
THE ‘NO BLOOD’ SIGN IS A DRAMATIC CHANGE FROM LAST YEAR. WE DON’T NEED ANY BLOOD, WE DON’T HAVE ANY PATIENTS THAT NEED IT.
”

Petty Officer 2nd Class Leticia Ruenas
Hospital corpsman
Fallujah Surgical

Story, photos by Marine C
Regimental C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq — The halls remain empty, the sirens are silent, the only thing collecting on the floor is dust from the staff walking in and out; boredom is consistent, and no one is complaining.

This is the state of one of the U.S. forces most actively used hospitals in Iraq, Fallujah Surgical. Fallujah Surgical, once a frequent stop for combat casualties, is no longer treating many injured warriors in combat due to the sharp decrease in violence in al-Anbar Province, but is instead a clinic treating common day-to-day injuries. The sign outside the emergency entrance, although minute, has big meaning... “No blood needed at this time.”

According to reports, May 2008 held the lowest number of coalition casualties since 2004. Much of that can be contributed to the combined efforts of local Sheiks, Iraqi police, Iraqi soldiers, and coalition forces in quelling the violence.

Gen. David Petraeus, commanding general, Multi-National Force — Iraq, stated during his report to Congress, Sept. 10, 2007, that the most significant development

in Iraq was the rejection of al-Qaeda by tribal leaders, and how it has shown dramatic changes in al-Anbar.

“A year ago the province was assessed ‘lost’ politically,” he said. “Today, it is a model of what happens when local leaders and citizens decide to oppose al-Qaeda and reject its Taliban-like ideology.”

Tribal leaders realized that al Qaeda was lying to them about American forces wanting to occupy their land and destroy their mosques, spawning “The awakening” amongst 41 tribes.

“The awakening was not our move,” said Lt. Col. Bill McCollough, regimental tribal engagement officer, Regimental Combat Team 1. “The tribal leaders and people stood up and said, ‘we cannot tolerate what

al-Qaeda is doing to us any more.’ We had made overtures to them, but they had to come to the final decision to join us in the fight against al-Qaeda. Once they did, we built a partnership to rid al-Anbar of the murder, terror and lawlessness of al-Qaeda.”

The Marines in Fallujah through recent months have been progressively pulling out of the city, leaving only a small contingent of Marines mentoring and assisting the Iraqis to help take control over the ‘City of Mosques.’

These changes have helped make Fallujah a much safer place for coalition forces and the citizens of Fallujah, leaving coalition hospitals a much more mundane place of employment spent waiting rather than acting.



Trauma Room C at Fallujah Surgical on Camp Fallujah has been unoccupied for some time now due to a decrease in violence in the Anbar Province.

SURGICAL: HALLS EMPTY

by Capt. Stephen M. McGinnis

Combat Team 1

“The no blood sign is a dramatic change from last year. We don’t need any blood, we don’t have any patients that need it,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class Leticia Ruenas, a 30-year-old hospital corpsman at Fallujah Surgical, from Pico Rivera, Calif.

Ruenas worked at Fallujah Surgical from September 2006 to March 2007.

“We put that sign up last year because we were in constant need of blood. I looked at the log book from last year, for a period of time it was either every day or every other day that we needed to tap into the blood bank. Since we got out here we haven’t had to use it once,” she added.

In a job where boredom is looked at as a good thing, the hospital staff is stuck in a difficult spot, wanting to use their skills they have trained on for months prior to their deployment in Iraq, but also hoping never to have to use them.

“I was expecting a lot more before I came out here, but once I got out here I saw how slow it was,” said Oscar J. Castillo, a 20-year-old corpsman at Fallujah Surgical from San Francisco.

Instead of treating mass amounts of combat casualties, the hospital staff trains constantly just in case their skills are needed by one of the many warriors patrolling the streets of Fallujah.

“We haven’t had nearly as many

chances to use our skills compared to those before us, but we just try and do some surprise drills to keep our guys skills up,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Alisha L. Munoz, a 30-year-old hospital corpsman at Fallujah Surgical, from Yakima, Wash.

Munoz deployed to Baghdad in April 2006 to October 2007 and received weekly reports concerning the action at Fallujah Surgical and can

remember avoiding Fallujah and taking alternate routes around it because of the violence.

“It has definitely slowed down a lot since the last time I was here,” she added. “The young guys were expecting to come out here and be mopping up blood, because Fallujah always had action and always had casualties, but they aren’t seeing anything.”

Since the summer of 2007 and the formation of the Anbar Awakening, monthly coalition troop casualties have been steadily declining; about two-thirds since the summer of 2007, according to Department of Defense records. An RCT-1 unclassified intelligence report revealed incidents in and around the Fallujah area have dropped drastically from around 250 reported incidents in December 2006, to less than 10 in December 2007. Iraqi army and police units have been working hand-in-hand with coalition



The halls of Fallujah Surgical remain silent and empty. Once a frequent stop for combat casualties, the hospital is no longer treating many combat-related injuries due to the sharp decrease in violence in al-Anbar Province.

troops. Iraqi forces have even started to command and control their own operations.

Maj. Gen. John F. Kelly, commander, Multi-National Force – West, said he’s amazed by vast improvements across Anbar province, with a sharp drop in violence and continued progress among Iraqi security forces.

“It’s stunning to me how low (violence levels) are,” Kelly told Pentagon reporters from a videoconference center in Baghdad March 10.

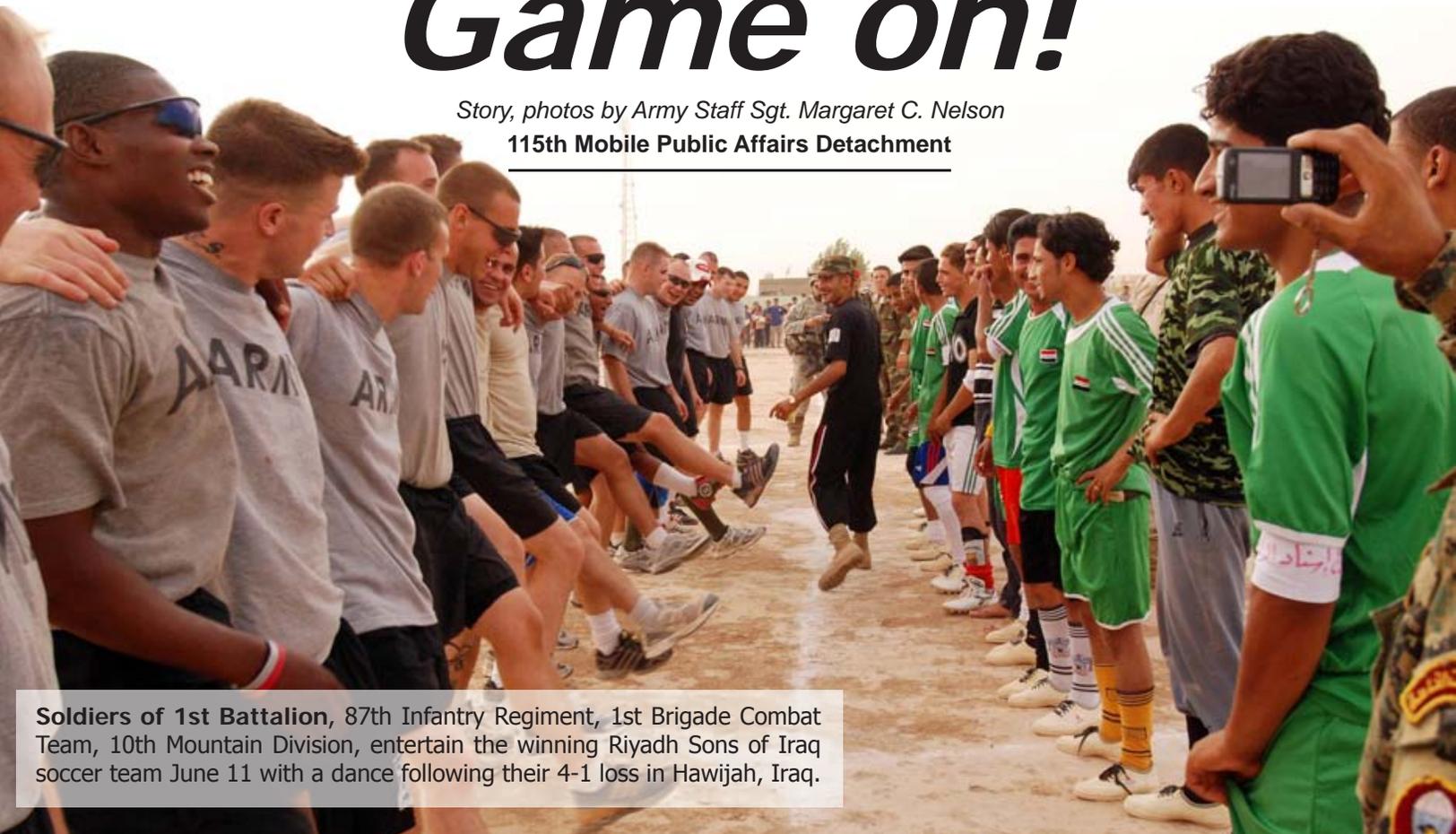
The number of attacks against coalition forces may have decreased, but they haven’t disappeared.

And although business is slow at Fallujah Surgical, complacency is never tolerated.

“You could get real complacent out here; it gets boring sometimes, so we do what we can to keep us busy. It’s a good thing, it means no one is getting injured,” said Castillo.

Game on!

Story, photos by Army Staff Sgt. Margaret C. Nelson
115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, entertain the winning Riyadh Sons of Iraq soccer team June 11 with a dance following their 4-1 loss in Hawijah, Iraq.

10th Mountain troops take on Sons of Iraq in Hawija soccer match

A different kind of battle happened June 11 in northeastern Iraq – one where nobody died, no body armor was necessary and no shots were fired.

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, battled it out in a game of soccer against a team of Sons of Iraq members.

The game was the second in a five-game series for Task Force Summit Soldiers in an attempt to show Iraqis in the Hawijah district, “the human side of the U.S. Soldier – the non-combatant,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Vanek, commander, 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Reg.

Although their attempts were valiant, Task Force Summit Soldiers

scored only once during the game, losing 4-1 to the Sons of Iraq.

The Iraqi team dominated throughout the game, thus demonstrating why soccer is their national sport. Nevertheless, the outcome was good for both sides: increased friendship and camaraderie.

Ali, a 14-year-old Iraqi, said he liked the matchup between the Summit Soldiers and the SOI because for him, it was the first time he’d seen American Soldiers not wearing combat uniforms.

“I’ve never spoken to a U.S. Soldier before, and now I see them playing soccer with us,” Ali said. “They are trying to get to know us. I think that is good and they are very nice.”

More than 500 Iraqis from the area attended the event.

“

If you had asked me back then if I would be playing soccer here, and on top of that without body armor, I would have thought you were crazy.

”

Spc. Brian Smith
1st Battalion
87th Infantry Regiment

The Hawijah district has seen a 90 percent decrease in violent attacks since December. Although violence has struck home with the loss of three Summit Soldiers here in recent weeks, community building efforts such as the soccer game continue.

Vanek said he was apprehensive about allowing his Soldiers to play in the soccer match, considering the recent violence. But it was the Soldiers themselves that convinced him to let them play, he said.

“They decided that the best way to honor the memory of our fallen is to show the enemy that our mission continues,” he said. “They cannot stop our efforts and those of the citizens of this region to establish stability and peace here.”

The sacrifices of TF Summit Soldiers and the gains they have helped secure in terms of stability and security have not gone unnoticed by those Iraqis who participated or watched the game.

The loss of a youth center seven months ago — destroyed by Al Qaeda — meant young Iraqis in the area had nowhere to gather as a community.

“We did not play so much soccer because it was dangerous and we were afraid,” said Mohammad, 24, an SOI member who pulled security at the event. “The terrorists blew our youth center up so that we could not meet as a community.

But the Americans want to bring us together, help us. And they have brought peace and security back to our city.”

Spc. Brian Smith, with 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Reg., was the Soldier that scored the team’s only goal and said he was initially surprised that he and fellow Soldiers would be back in the area to play soccer for a second time.

“I couldn’t believe it when they said we were going to be playing our second game in Riyadh,” Smith said. He experienced his first fire-fight there in December. “If you had asked me back then if I would be playing soccer here, and on top of that without body armor, I would have thought you were crazy. But I’m convinced after seeing the changes here since my last visit that we are accomplishing our mission and bringing a positive change to this area.”

The Soldiers will continue their series in the Hawijah District, located in the Kirkuk Province of northeastern Iraq, with a 0 - 2 record, as the 10th Mountain Soldiers lost the previous week to a team from Mahus, 6-1.



A Soldier with 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, attempts to score but is stopped by a member of the Riyadh Sons of Iraq soccer team during a match held June 11. The Soldiers lost to the Iraqis 4-1 in the second of a five-game series, one which has matched the Soldiers against teams around the Hawijah District located in the Kirkuk Province of northeastern Iraq.



Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division compete against a soccer team comprised of Sons of Iraq members in Riyadh, Iraq, June 11.

Rakkasans, Iraqi army history of air assaults

Story by Army Sergeants 1st Class Kerensa Hardy, Thomas Mills and Army Pvt. Christopher McKenna
Photos by Army Pvt. Christopher McKenna Multi-National Division — Center PAO

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq – A long tradition of air assaults and a fledgling army are coming together to secure Iraq.

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team “Rakkasans,” 101st Airborne Division, continues to use air assaults to execute its mission in southwest Baghdad Province, while the Iraqi army draws on the expertise of the Rakkasans during these combined air assaults.

“We want to be able to dictate the time, place and terms of engagement,” said Capt. Brian Kain, a St. Louis native and BAE plans officer, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Abn. Div. “By the time the enemy hears the roar of the rotor systems, we are already at their doorstep.”

The IA is honing its skills in the execution of air

assaults while it is still in the process of conducting independent operations.

For one, the IA doesn’t have its own aviation assets, explained Maj. Robert Newell, Iraqi security forces officer-in-charge, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

“All rotary and fixed-wing aircraft belong to the Iraqi air force,” said Newell, a Wagoner, Okla., native. “Due to the limited number of aircraft and operational rate of those aircraft, all of the units we partner with use coalition assets to conduct air assaults.”

Although their aviation ability remains limited without coalition support, the IA has still been able to garner considerable experience on the maneuvering aspect of air assault operations.

Iraqi army soldiers get in the prone position after dismounting Black Hawk helicopters during Operation Chelsea Creek, a combined air assault in Yusifiyah conducted June 14.



continue



Staff Sergeant Matt Strausbaugh, Company D, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, dismounts a Black Hawk helicopter during Operation Chelsea Creek, a combined air assault in Yusifiyah conducted June 14.

“We are trained by the U.S. Soldiers for air assaults,” said Capt. Amjad Mahmud Hassan, 4th Company, 4th Battalion, 25th Brigade, 6th IA Division commander. “With planning, the U.S. Soldiers give the battalion a task and our colonel comes up with a plan developed specifically for the air assault.”

Prior to executing the mission, the Iraqi police, IA and coalition soldiers go through extensive cold-load training to ensure everyone is aware of what to do when the air assault lands at the objective.

Cold-load training is the staging and practicing of the movement prior to occurrence.

That training was put to the test for the IA June 14 in Yusifiyah, in the form of a air-assault mission dubbed Operation Chelsea Creek.

“With Operation Chelsea Creek, the mission was IA-led with coalition support,” said 1st Lt. Joshua Snyder, a platoon leader from Dayton, Ohio, with Co. D, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment. “It was also the first time in the Yusifiyah area that the Iraqi army and Iraqi police joined together on an air assault.”

Snyder said the overall objective for Operation Chelsea Creek was to disrupt Shia extremist group movement and show cooperation between the IA and IP.

And the reaction of the local citizens spoke for itself when the combined units moved throughout the city.

“When we first arrived, people weren’t quite sure on how to perceive us; but as time has progressed and we (coalition) have placed the IA more in front, people have begun to accept our presence more,” Snyder said. “Eventually we are looking to have the IA fully leading all missions, with, say, a squad of IA soldiers and maybe three coalition soldiers just for support.”

“The people are happy when they see the security forces,” Hassan said. “It makes them feel safer, especially knowing we are out there to help them and ensure their safety.”

Since arriving in Iraq, the Rakkasans and their Iraqi counterparts have completed 55 air-assault missions – approximately 63 percent of the total number of air assaults conducted in the Multi-National Division – Center area of operations.

Lithuanian troops face difficult choice

Story, photo by Army Sgt. Daniel T. West
214th Fires Brigade PAO

With only a week remaining in their six-month tour in Iraq, soldiers from Lithuanian Contingent 10, Iron Wolf Brigade, faced a difficult choice. Two options remained following the news that the Lithuanian government had voted to extend the unit's tour for two more months: the soldiers could volunteer for the extension or continue their redeployment.

Twenty-nine of the 40 soldiers in the platoon chose to continue the mission.

"Without them, we would be stuck," said Capt. Caroline Pogge of Company B, 411th Civil Affairs Battalion. "They are the primary personnel security detachment for civil affairs and Provincial Reconstruction Team Wasit. Without them, we are immobile."

Selecting to continue their deployment showed a lot about their character, Pogge said.

"To a lot of people, six weeks (the extension was later changed to eight weeks) isn't much," said Pogge, a native of Danbury, Conn. "But over here, it's a long time."

Word that the Lithuanians had selected to stay was a welcome surprise, said Col. Peter Baker, commander, 214th Fires Brigade.

"We are so dependent on them for movement; we didn't know how we would move the teams that are so vital to the reconstruction effort," Baker said.

The soldiers appreciated the fact that the choice was left to them.

"It is important to serve our country, but in some moments it is more important to take care of home and family," said 1st Lt. Gediminas Alisauskas, platoon commander. "I'm glad to have the chance to choose. All of us had plans for when we got back – most changed them, some couldn't."

Being so close to returning home made the choice difficult.

"I had one week left and it felt like I was already home," said



Lithuanian Sgt. 1st Class Donatas Krivickas, of LITCON 10, pulls security May 20 in Dujayli, Iraq.

Cpl. Rimvydas Stasaitis. "I had plans, but changed them when I decided to stay. It's my duty and responsibility."

For some, the decision to stay was because of the team, a reluctance to leave while comrades stayed. The platoon bonded over the time here, and for some, the decision was whether to leave one family for another.

"We came as one platoon and have friends here," said Capt. Karolis Morkunas, the platoon's senior national representative. "We want to stay with our friends."

Tutkus emphasized Lithuania's continued commitment to supporting the United States.

"We came in with the U.S. during the war and will stay in support until the end," he said. "It's important to be a credible member of NATO and the coalition. In order to demonstrate our credibility as a country, we have to share the risk."

As the soldiers of the platoon performed their duties over the past six months, they impacted on all who interacted with them, from their Chief of Defense to the U.S. Soldiers who worked with them from day to day.

"I'm proud of the soldiers here," Tutkus said. "From the first part, every time I visit soldiers and their commanders, I hear only the best things. There is a light in their eyes. They are motivated, professional, well-trained and competent."

The civil affairs team members they escort echoed the sentiments.

"They are phenomenal, professional soldiers," Pogge said. "They know their job and do it extremely well."

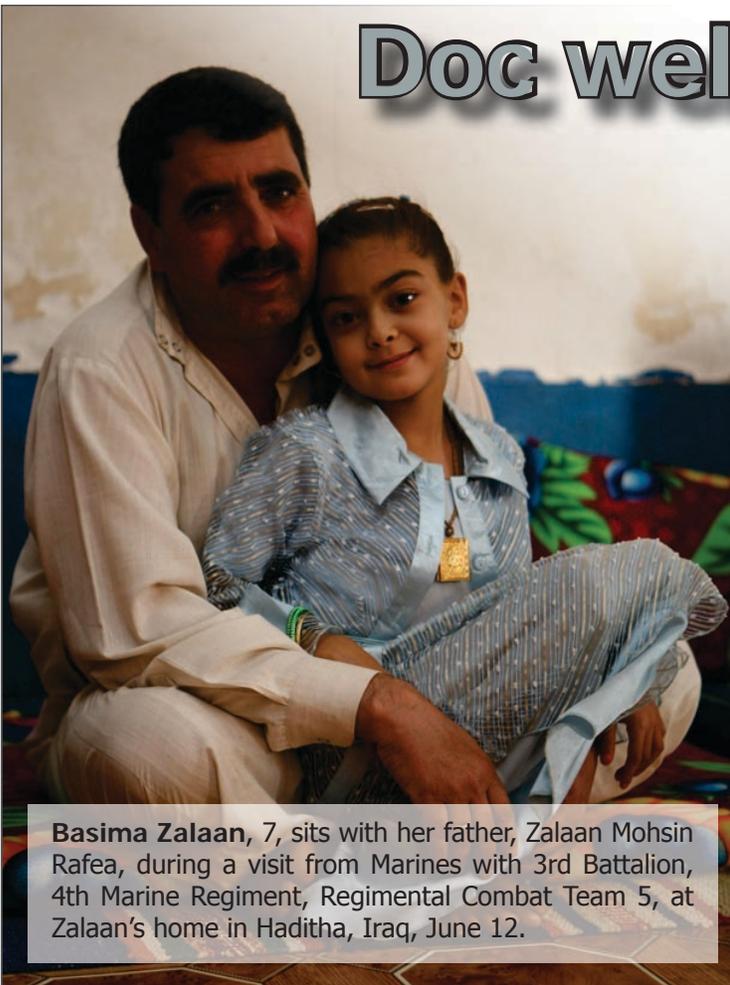
The soldiers who stayed held no grudges against those who chose to leave.

"Some soldiers had losses, maybe their wife was sick and they had small children, so they had to go," Morkunas said. "They didn't want to go..."

The soldiers were optimistic about their final two months, but did not plan to make things permanent.

"It's ok to stay for two months, but not one day more," Stasaitis said. "I am getting married in two months and one day, and I can't reschedule that."

Doc welcomes Iraqi girl



Basima Zalaan, 7, sits with her father, Zalaan Mohsin Rafea, during a visit from Marines with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, at Zalaan's home in Haditha, Iraq, June 12.

*Story, photos by Marine Cpl. Erik Villagran
Regimental Combat Team 5*

HADITHA, Iraq - Basima Zalaan, 7, is a young Iraqi girl that, in part, has Marines and a Navy doctor to thank for her new life.

Basima recently returned here after traveling to Jordan for heart surgery. Marines with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, and Iraqi policemen escorted Navy Lt. Benjamin D. Wind, the surgeon with 3rd Bn., 4th Marines, to her residence to welcome her home, June 12.

"The purpose of the visit was to welcome her and her father back, to show our concern and respect for their well being and to establish a medical follow

up," Wind said. "It was also to pass word of her health to the many people back in the United States who helped raise funding needed for her surgery."

When Wind and the Marines arrived at her home, they were greeted by Basima's father, Zalaan Mohsin Rafea, and a very happy family. Zalaan invited them in and immediately thanked Wind for his efforts. Before long, Basima was brought into the room.

She entered wearing her best dress and smiling at everyone in the room. She sat with her father and was initially timid but relaxed and enjoyed the attention she was receiving.



Navy Lt. Benjamin D. Wind, surgeon, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, explains the importance of a medication to Zalaan Mohsin Rafea and his daughter at Zalaan's home in Haditha, Iraq, June 12.

Her father has already noticed huge changes in her since the surgery. He says she can breathe easier now.

"She has been feeling very good since the surgery," Zalaan said. "You can really see her beauty now. The color in her face is back. Her face used to look blue."

The operation has allowed Basima to enjoy a much more normal life. She is the third child in the area who has received surgery to correct a heart defect.

Basima's case stands out from the other two in the fact that she only had to travel to Jordan to receive the surgical procedure. The first two children to receive the procedure traveled to the United States.

Wind was happy that Basima was able to get the operation from a country nearby.

"The new goal is to reach out to the surrounding countries with medical resources capable of performing

these procedures and ask for their assistance," Wind said. "This will have enormous logistical advantages of geography and funding, as well as encouraging the Iraqi population to use their local resources rather than traveling thousands of miles away from their friends and family support system."

The continued support Marines have provided for the local populace have made them popular in the community.

"I wish the Marines could stay," Zalaan said. "They were able to take my daughter to a hospital to get treatment. They are doing good here."

Although Basima doesn't understand how important the operation she received is to building relations with countries in the region, she plans on enjoying the benefits, nevertheless.

"Now that I'm better, I'm going to school," Basima said. "I want to go to school and become a doctor."



Spc. Scott Geiszler, an Albany, Ore., native, leads Iraqi children in some physical training by introducing them to the overhead arm clap in the East Anbar Province, northwest of Baghdad, June 6. Geiszler serves as an infantryman with Company B, 52nd Infantry Regiment. (Photo by Army Sgt. Brad Willeford.)



First Lieutenant Owen Mayo of Fox Troop, Second Squadron, Third Armored Cavalry Regiment rests after a long patrol June 10. (Photo by Navy Petty Officer Second Class Paul Seeber.)



Senior Chief Petty Officer Patrick Kelly, Riverine Squadron 3, Regimental Combat Team 5, provides security June 5 during a patrol north of Haditha Dam, al-Anbar Province, Iraq. (Photo by Marine Cpl. Tyler W. Hill.)



Pfc. Justin Assenat, a native of Roanoke, Va., with Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Regulars, maintains a security position June 18 at a closed store along Route Or-egon in the Jamilla Market neighborhood of Sadr City, Baghdad. (Photo by Air Force Tech Sgt. Cohen A. Young.)



Soldiers from 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry, a U.S. Army Working Dog team, and Iraqi army soldiers from the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division search the Ninewa Forest Junction for weapons and bomb paraphernalia during a cordon and search. (Photo by Army Pfc. Sarah De Boise.)



2nd Lt. Rawnaq Jawad, a dentist for the 43rd Brigade, 11th Iraqi army Division, peers into a young girls throat by giving the restless child a slight chin tug June 13 during a medical outreach operation in the Jihad community of southern Baghdad. More than 90 Iraqi citizens with common ailments and aches visited the doctors and medics during the day. (Photo by Army Spc. David Hodge.)

...alry Regiment,
...ldiers from 8th
...e 8 for weapon
... in Mosul, Iraq.

COALITION SPOTLIGHT

Four countries participated in the initial invasion of Iraq, which lasted from March 19, 2003 to May 1, 2003. These were the United States (250,000), United Kingdom (45,000), Australia (2,000), and Poland (194).



A Polish soldier with the civilian military cooperation team clears a hallway during a site survey for a new medical facility June 9 in Ad Diwaniyah. (Photo by Air Force Airman 1st Class Matthew Plew.)



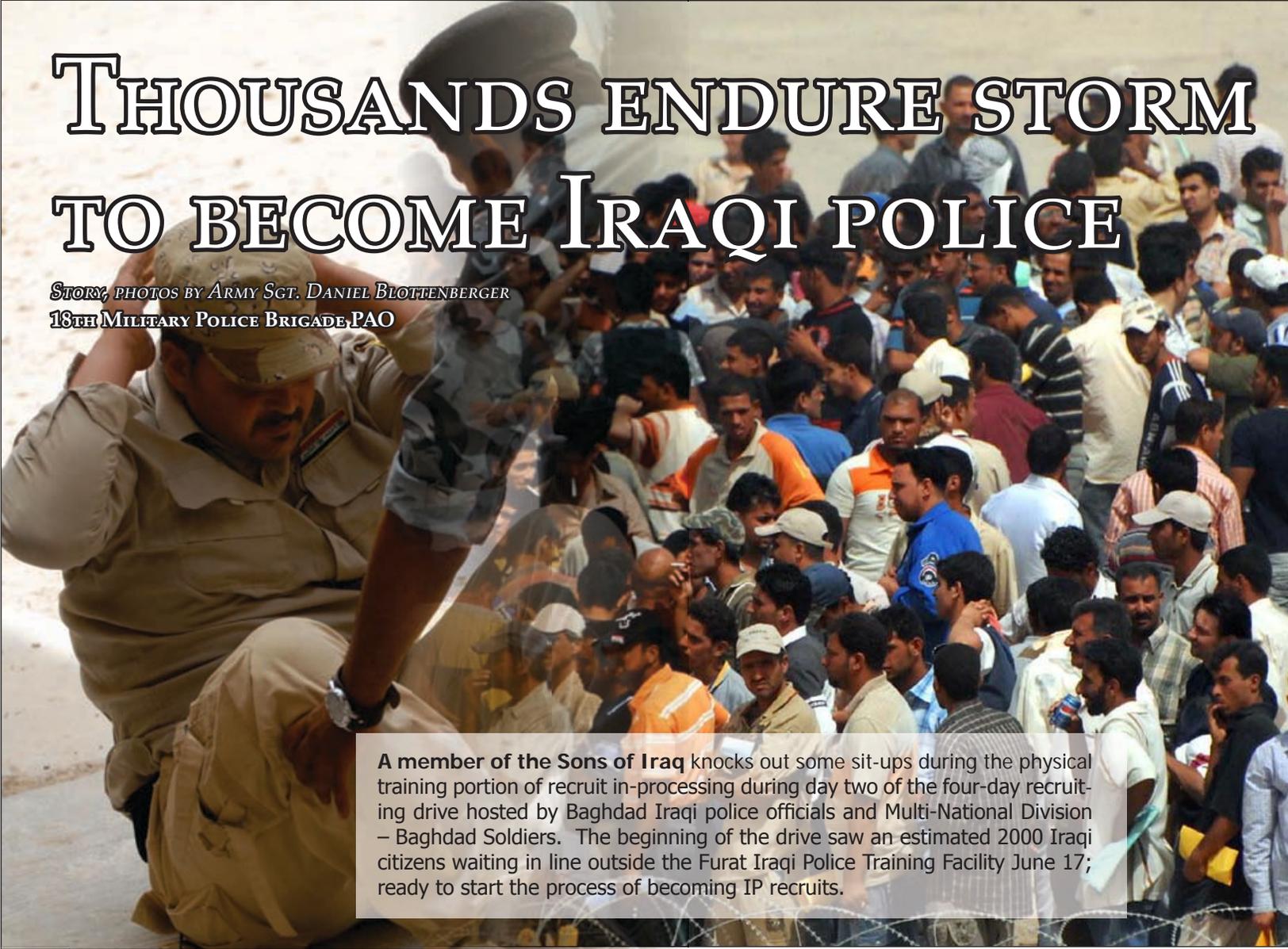
A Polish field medic provides medical care to an Iraqi man by taking his blood pressure during a humanitarian aid mission June 14 in al-Ghammas, Iraq. (Photo by Air Force Airman 1st Class Matthew Plew.)



Georgian army Sgt. Irakii Kordzaia, 13th Georgian Army Battalion, shares pictures with two young men during a meeting at the home of a local sheikh in Naba al-Safi, Iraq, May 24. The purpose of the meeting, a joint effort between U.S. Army Soldiers from Task Force Petro, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division and Georgian army soldiers, was to assess the needs and concerns of residents in the area. (Photo by Army Pfc. David J. Marshall)

THOUSANDS ENDURE STORM TO BECOME IRAQI POLICE

STORY, PHOTOS BY ARMY SGT. DANIEL BLOTTENBERGER
18TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE, PAO



A member of the Sons of Iraq knocks out some sit-ups during the physical training portion of recruit in-processing during day two of the four-day recruiting drive hosted by Baghdad Iraqi police officials and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers. The beginning of the drive saw an estimated 2000 Iraqi citizens waiting in line outside the Furat Iraqi Police Training Facility June 17; ready to start the process of becoming IP recruits.

As a sandstorm blanketed Baghdad June 17, an estimated 2,000 Iraqi citizens endured the elements to start the process of becoming Iraqi police at the Furat Iraqi Police Training Facility.

Iraqi police officials and military police Soldiers with the 18th Military Police Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad set up a four-day recruiting drive at the Furat facility to reach a goal of 1300 new recruits to send to basic recruit training to become IP.

“A little over 2,000 civilians showed up today,” said 1st Lt. Christopher Gehri, a native of Edmond, Okla., and officer-in-charge of the Furat IP Training Facility. “We can process through about 400 recruits a day with a total goal of 1300 recruits in four days.”

The Police Transition Team was ecstatic to see the number of civilians who braved the weather to become IPs.

“The benefit of having so many people show up today means we have a lot of hope, we see the benefit of so many people showing up despite the sandstorm,” said Gehri. “They are trying to get jobs and take care of their

communities and families.”

The new recruits are part of MND-B’s plan to expand the IP force.

The increase in police force is intended to strengthen the overall security of Baghdad as part of a continued Iraqi police expansion program. This program is aimed to train more than 25,000 IP recruits by 2008.

Officials say more than 22,000 police have already been deployed in the Iraqi capital as part of the first phase of expansion.

“We are getting the job done,” said Gehri, referring to IP expansion. “We are providing the amount of Iraqi security forces to provide a stable Baghdad, which is our goal.”

As the citizens entered the facility perimeter they were separated into different groups according to the areas they were from.

Once through the lines, they put their names on a list and their credentials are checked.

Then they are given an in-processing packet to complete which includes: a literacy test, physical fitness test and medical examination.



Iraqi police commanders write down the names of citizens trying to become IP recruits at the Furat IP Training Facility June 17, during a four-day IP recruiting drive sponsored by IP officials and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers. More than 2,000 Iraqis showed up to participate in the drive.

Once they complete those steps their packets are stamped off by an IP official and sent to higher headquarters for background checks.

The recruits then receive orders on when they need to return to begin training to become IPs.

“The Iraqis are collecting the packets and information; they are the ones really making this day successful,” said Gehri, about the Iraqi led recruiting operation.

Gehri has been working with IP in Baghdad for nine months now and says he has seen a great improvement in the IP force since arriving.

“They are taking whatever we teach them and they are running with it,” said Gehri. “They are doing a great job.”

Staff Sgt. William Lile, squad leader, 223rd Military Police Company, Kentucky Army National Guard, and native of Louisville, Ky., agrees with Gehri on the improvements in the IP and Iraqi way of life since his last deployment.

“It’s amazing to see the difference in quality of life improvements for the Iraqi people,” Lile said. “They have electricity, ... and they have established a strong infrastructure since the last time I was here.”

“They are doing everything they can to rebuild for themselves,” Lile said. “We are just providing security in the process.”

The MP mission in Iraq is also moving into tactical overwatch for the IP, Lile said.

The mission Lile refers to is the MP mission to assist and mentor the IP force. By assisting them in developing and executing police competencies and operating systems, Iraq can continue building a police force that is capable and stands ready to protect and serve the citizens of Iraq.

“This is a totally different mission,” said Lile, a veteran of two deployments, who arrived in country a month ago. “We are here in more of a support role for the Iraqi people. Basically, we are just assisting them as they take control of their hometowns.”

As day two of the four-day recruiting effort came to a close, another 400 recruits were given orders and began to prepare themselves for BRT, which they will attend in the upcoming months.

“We are succeeding and we will be successful,” Gehrdi said. “We are America and that is what we do.”

Jackpot

Photos by Army Spc. David Hodge
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B

LOCAL CITIZENS AND MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION – BAGHDAD
SOLDIERS FISH 340 37-MM HIGH-EXPLOSIVE ANTI-AIRCRAFT
ROUNDS OUT OF THE TIGRIS RIVER.



Three Iraqi policemen haul a blanket full of 37 mm high-explosive anti-aircraft rounds up from the bank of the Tigris River June 3 in the Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad. A concerned Iraqi citizen led Soldiers from 2nd Platoon, Battery A, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, to the underwater cache.



t medic from Baton Rouge,
4th Battalion, 42nd Field Ar-
2nd Brigade Combat Team,
ational Division – Baghdad,
enemy activity June 3 in the



1st Lt. Kevin Smith, platoon leader, 2nd Platoon, from Sacramento, Calif., with Battery A, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, passes 37 mm high-explosive anti-aircraft munitions found in the Tigris River up a 70-foot embankment for proper disposal June 3 in the Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad. Five local citizens fished 340 rounds from the bottom of the river in approximately 35 minutes. Smith and the Soldiers of 2nd Plt. conduct daily dismounted patrols working with three local Iraqi police stations.

Surveillance team on the lookout

BAGHDAD – A surveillance team of the 76th Infantry Brigade Combat Team operating near the perimeter of Camp Liberty provides security overwatch on main supply routes, using a mix of the latest and not-so-new technology. The detachment operates the Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment system.

1st Lt. Jim Hensel, detachment commander, said the system is very simple, basically a camera on a balloon. Specifically, the balloon is an aerostat, a stationary balloon permanently tethered in place as opposed to a blimp that is usually powered by a motor and is navigable.

But simple doesn't mean ineffective. The RAID operators can observe supply routes which run through densely populated areas, covering a much larger area than guards in watch towers.

Hensel, a military intelligence officer with the Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Targeting Acquisition Squadron, 152nd Cavalry Regiment, is one of only a handful of the detachment that has prior intelligence experience. The Ft. Wayne, Ind., native said his troops have taken to the new mission.

"Right now, we have the longest

operating balloon in theater," said Hensel. "I think they are proud of that."

One of these Soldiers just recently assigned to the unit is Pfc. Nathaniel Woerner, of Indianapolis. Woerner came to the unit with the long term goal of entering the active duty special forces. His time spent observing operations from a distance has only increased his aspirations.

"Not everyone gets this (mission), an ability to see outside the wall," said Woerner.

A fellow Soldier, Spc. Josh Trautman, says the technology of the RAID system is a resource that can help free up more Soldiers to focus on counterinsurgency missions and sustainable security.

"When we can take some of the emphasis off security, they can direct more attention to others areas," said Trautman, a full-time nursing student studying anesthetics.

The 24/7 mission can grow challenging when there is nothing to report, but Trautman says that can

change quickly.

"This room fills up pretty quick," said Trautman, as the smallest indication of trouble generates a lot of attention. "That's good. That means we have people who care and are paying attention... keeping people safe."

Recently, the unit

thought it had become the target of hostile action when tracer rounds from small arms fire were observed near the aerostat, but after a quick check with higher headquarters they learned the rounds were the result of celebratory fire after the Iraqi national soccer team won an important match.

"I guess they do that," Trautman said with a shrug and a smile.

Hensel said recent security gains by the Iraqi government and a trend toward normalcy have made his primary mission, to provide actionable intelligence to units operating in his area, less demanding.

"There's been a significant drop," said Hensel of the reportable incidents in his area. "They find a couple of IEDs... but it's improved."

For that, Hensel said the unit is grateful, since the operators have hundreds of fellow 76th BCT Soldiers providing convoy security on the supply routes.

"They feel like they're doing a great service here" Hensel said. "Every one of them, they feel like they're making a difference."



Spc. Joshua Trautmann operates the winch control of the 17M Aerostat June 13 at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

IN MEMORIAM

NAMES OF COALITION SERVICE MEMBERS WHO DIED BETWEEN MAY 16 AND JUNE 12, 2008 WHILE SERVING IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS: THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.

JOHN 15:13

May 18

Pvt. Branden P. Haunert, 21.

May 23

Pfc. Kyle P. Norris, 22.

May 25

Sgt. 1st Class Jason F. Dene, 37.

Sgt. Blake W. Evans, 24.

Staff Sgt. Frank J. Gasper, 25.

May 30

Cpl. Christian S. Cotner, 20.

June 1

Cpl. Justin R. Mixon, 22.

Spc. Christopher D. McCarthy, 28.

June 3

Spc. Quincy J. Green, 26.

Pfc. Joshua E. Waltenbaugh, 19.

June 4

Sgt. Cody R. Legg, 23.

Spc. Jonathan D. A. Emard, 20.

Sgt. Shane P. Duffy, 22.

Georgian Squad Commander Irakli Kordzaia.

June 7

Sgt. 1st Class David R. Hurst, 31.

June 8

Staff Sgt. Tyler E. Pickett, 28.

June 9

Spc. Thomas F. Duncan, III, 21.

June 10

Sgt. Steve A. McCoy, 23.

June 11

Sgt. 1st Class Gerard M. Reed, 40.

Lance Cpl. Javier Perales Jr., 19.

Lance Cpl. Kelly E. C. Watters, 19.

Eugene D. M. Kanakaole, 19.

June 12

Sgt. John D. Aragon, 22.

Sgt. Vincent Ruiz, a native of Toms River, N.J., with the 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, talks with an Iraqi child May 30 outside a school where Iraqi men are signing up for a local neighborhood watch program in Muhallah 512, Thawra 2 neighborhood of Sadr City, Baghdad. More than 100 young Iraqi men showed up at the school to apply for an opportunity to join the neighborhood watch program. (Photo by Air Force Tech Sgt. Cohen A. Young.)

