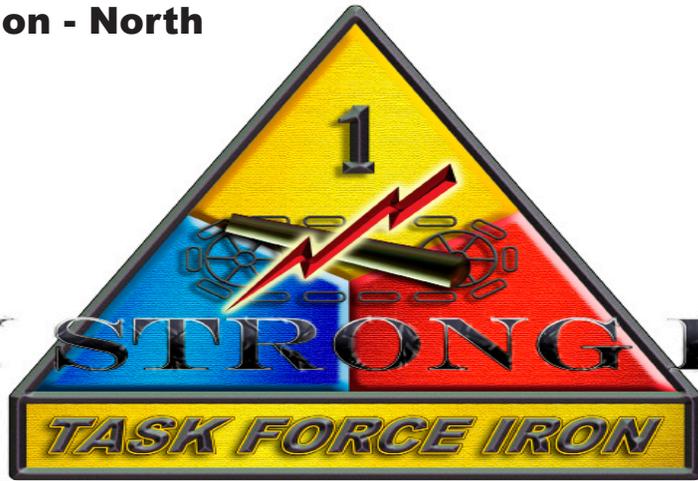


IRON STRONG DAILY



Bastogne “sappers” conduct operations to secure restive cities Tikrit, Owja

**Story and Photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division**

It is 2 a.m., and the streets are empty as calm resides over the once restive city of Tikrit.

The only sounds are stray dogs howling and the echoing of messages transmitting from the speakers of local mosques.

In just a few hours the silence resonating throughout the city will be shattered with the thundering sound of helicopters carrying a combined force of U.S. Soldiers and Iraqi Police to a remote location where the enemy seeks refuge and plans attacks inside Tikrit.

The mission on this morning: to kill or capture extremists seeking safe

haven in the desert areas west of the restive city.

The helicopter blades turn faster and faster as last minute checks are completed, and the stoic looks show men ready for battle.

The aircraft launch and are quickly hidden in the pitch-black Iraqi sky.

During flight, the sky begins to turn to light gray as the sun begins to rise.

As the sun peeks over the horizon, a reddish-orange glare engulfs the extremist hideout.

From out of the waning darkness, the helicopters swoop down and its occupants swiftly dismount the aircraft and assault the al Qaeda safe haven.

This operation named “Himera”, a combined air assault with Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team and Iraqi Police, targeted al Qaeda fighters seeking safe haven near Tharthar Lake in the western portion of the Salah ad Din province.

The operation showcased the ability of Coalition and Iraqi Security forces to assault multiple targets in different locations throughout the province during a single air assault operation.

“We are disassembling the terrorist network that is trying



A group of Soldiers from 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, provide security over watch as other Soldiers and Iraqi Police clear a known al Qaeda hideout during Operation Himera. The Soldiers were positioned via helicopter during the air assault to set up a blocking position to ensure no enemy threats could escape from the area located in the desert areas near Thar Thar Lake in the Salah ad Din province, Iraq.

to negate any progress my Iraqi counterparts are making inside the city of Tikrit,” said Capt. John Gabriel, Alpha Company commander.

While adept at fighting the enemy in the open desert, for the Soldiers of Alpha Company it is not always helicopters and bullets.

In the days leading up to this operation these same Soldiers were confronting the enemy threat using a different method; social interaction.

This technique has become synonymous with Soldiers in this counter-insurgency fight.

By getting out amongst the people to expand relationships and trust,



Soldiers from 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, alongside their Iraqi Police counterparts, take up a defensive kneeling position while they wait for helicopters to take them to another al Qaeda hideout in the Salah ad Din province, Iraq, during Operation Himera.

Class 08-04 IP trainees arrive at RTC

Story by
1st Lt. Joseph E. Faulkner
728 Military Police Battalion

The Regional Training Center welcomed approximately 750 new Iraqi Police as trainees begin their initial training with the goal of becoming an Iraqi Policeman in the Diyala Province.

The trainees in attendance typically are male, but this class begins a new epoch where female trainees from surrounding Iraqi Police stations throughout Diyala are now participating in the training at the RTC. As AQI continues to use females to perform terrorist acts, there is now a need for female police in the ranks. In the Arabic culture it is forbidden for a male to search a female; as a result, now more female trainees are stepping up to perform this duty while serving the people of Iraq.

The class of about 750 trainees is the fourth class conducted in Diyala at the Regional Training Center. Upon completion of the 4-week training, the trainees will be certified after graduation by the Ministry of Interior to become Iraqi Police persons.

The Iraqi Course is a four week course that trains basic police skills to include basic rifle marksmanship training. During this training task all students will be trained on how to shoot a Glock pistol, AK-47 automatic rifle and PKC machine gun on the local weapon ranges.

Iraqi Police trainers or 'cadre' will instruct over 400 hours of instruction on police skills that will provide the trainees the ability and capabilities to work as a certified policeman in their stations and neighborhoods.

Topics the trainees will be certified on are: basic personal defensive tactics, human rights and ethics, democratic policing, Iraqi Rule of Law and basic first aid.

"This Academy is fully led by the Iraqis," said Capt. David Castillo, Regional Training Center officer in charge, 728th Military Police Battalion, 18th Military Police Brigade. "There instructors lead all training and they are doing an excellent job at it." Castillo added, "They are getting better and better with each BRT rotation."

This class and the training is an important step for the IP as they prepare to attend the Iraqi Police Academy. The training is very important within the province. There is a need for more and improved



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Patricia Baiocchi, 1178th Co., 278th Bn., 18th MP Bde.

As new trainees' in-process at the Regional Training Center in the Diyala Province, Iraqi Cadre will search the trainees' equipment bags and personal items for illegal items and ensure they have the proper equipment to train. Part of the course teaches discipline to new IP and selected items are not allowed at the RTC. Here, IP trainees begin their initial training with the goal of becoming an Iraqi Policeman in the Diyala Province. The training is a four week course that trains basic police skills to include basic rifle marksmanship training.

security at checkpoints in and around the IP stations.

Security checkpoints have become an important measure in the security of the local villages and in the metropolitan downtown areas in Diyala. The checkpoints are another tool used to prevent the rise of female suicide bombers of getting into the city centers. As the IP perform their duties at these checkpoints, it provides the citizens of Iraq the opportunity to live a normal life as they go about their daily activities.

The training is paying off and to date after three classes, the CF support and assistance at the RTC is well received by the leaders of the Iraqi Police.

"We are being told with coalition forces working with the trainees, this training environment is producing Iraqi Police who are confident and disciplined in their jobs and it is paying dividends in the overall security of Diyala in Iraq," said Castillo.

The 728th MP Bn, working with the Iraqi Police established the RTC in early March 2007. To date, over 1556 IP have been trained at the RTC. The 728th MP Bn is deployed in Iraq from its home station in Hawaii and supports the Multi- National Division North and 1st Armored Division.

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Secure from Page 1

these combat engineers can more effectively secure the population centers of Tikrit and Owja; while at the same time defeat the enemy outside of the cities.

“My Soldiers see the difference they’re making by treating the people in our area with respect and dignity,” Gabriel said. “The people in Tikrit and Owja have gone from a negative or neutral perception to Coalition forces, to an extremely positive one.”

The 1st Special Troops Battalion has a unique task and organization here in Iraq. A brigade special troops battalion (BSTB), are designed to, support the brigade and its subordinate units with communications, intelligence, chemical reconnaissance, military police and engineer assets. For the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, the BSTB still provides the standard combat support to the brigade, but was also given the additional responsibility of securing a large portion of the Salah ad Din province, centered on the greater-Tikrit area. As a result of this nonstandard mission, the battalion was given the additional assets of two military police companies and an infantry company to help assist.

“Task Force Spartan brought together a diverse mix of companies and military specialties that have contributed to the overall mission success,” said Maj. Timothy Povich, 1st BSTB executive officer. “We have infantry, engineer, military

police, intelligence and signal companies as well as a Headquarters

company all working in harmony to accomplish the mission. Every company brings a unique perspective and skill to the fight which sets us apart from your normal maneuver task force.”

The routine combat engineer mission in Iraq is often tied to conducting route clearance operations. This mission is extremely vital to safety of U.S. Forces traveling on the dangerous Iraqi roads as well as the overall safety of the local Iraqi populace. Upon arrival in Iraq in September 2007; Alpha Company initially had this task. Taking on

more and more civic responsibilities, the company recognized it needed to focus on the people and their security, rather than tackling both tasks.

“Combat Engineers performing a maneuver mission is not new to the Army, however in the last few years our ability to provide mobility through route clearance has overshadowed the other skills we bring to the battlefield,” said Gabriel. “Sappers pride themselves on their ability to

fight like Infantry when called upon to do so, and still accomplishing their doctrinal tasks of providing mobility, counter-mobility and survivability to other maneuver elements.”

Over the past several months, Gabriel’s combat engineers have routinely conducted local leader engagements in addition to census and clearing operations in both Tikrit and Owja. Meetings with “mukhtars” or heads of villages or neighborhoods, occur almost daily. These meetings allow them to pass information along, as well as gather information on the needs of the people there.

“We realized early on that the majority of the population was either not informed or misinformed of their government’s progress and the intent of Coalition forces in their city,” said Gabriel. “They also needed a chance to vent and discuss issues with us. We routinely go through neighborhoods to inform them of the progress being made in the city and to answer questions.”

Although proud of the combat proficiency of his Soldiers and his Iraqi counterparts, Gabriel acknowledged that one day he hopes lethal operations won’t be necessary and all of the focus can be placed on the populace.

“The population is pleased with the security their police are providing them,” Gabriel said, “I look forward to the day when lethal operations are not needed.”



Captain John Gabriel, commander of Alpha Company, 1st Special Troops Battalion, pulls security during Operation Himera, as two UH-60 Black Hawks prepare to land to pick up his Soldiers during a joint-air assault with Iraqi Police in the Salah ad Din province, Iraq.



A Soldier from 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), braces himself from the high winds created by a UH-60 Black Hawk during Operation Himera. Operation Himera was a “joint” air assault with Iraqi Police conducted in the desert areas near Thar Thar Lake in the the Salah ad Din province targeting known al Qaeda hideouts.



(LEFT) Col. Danny Baldwin, 345th Combat Support Hospital commander, addresses a small gathering during the ground breaking ceremony for a new Combat Support Hospital being built on Contingency Operating Base Speicher.

(RIGHT) A ground breaking ceremony was held beside the main dining facility for a new Combat Support Hospital on Contingency Operating Base Speicher. The structure is scheduled to be ready by June, 2009.



(LEFT) Col. Danny Baldwin, 345th Combat Support Hospital commander, and Col. Patrick Sargent, 62nd Medical Brigade commander out of Camp Victory, and other Servicemembers dig in at a ground breaking ceremony for the new Combat Support Hospital being built on Contingency Operating Base Speicher.

ZIMBABWE

(VOICE OF AMERICA) Zimbabwe's main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) is denying media speculation that it has reached a power-sharing agreement with President Robert Mugabe's ruling party. The opposition party says the latest talks on power sharing with the ruling ZANU-PF that resumed last Friday in South Africa did not reach an agreement. The MDC blames the ruling ZANU-PF party for speculating on reaching a power sharing deal.

The peace talks are, however expected to continue despite a deadlock on the power sharing deal. Nelson Chamisa is the spokesman for Zimbabwe's main opposition MDC. From the capital, Harare he tells reporter Peter Clotey that although the party is committed to the talks, its stance on the power sharing deal remains the same.

"The reason why they (the MDC negotiating team) went to South Africa was to have bilateral consultations with the South African team as instructed by President Mbeki. At no time did we have a face-to-face meeting with the negotiators of ZANU-PF. It was basically to try and articulate our position and to check if there has been any change of circumstances or facts on the ground vis-à-vis the whole dialogue process. But as it is there hasn't been any change," Chamisa noted.

He said the main bone of contention has been the issue of power sharing.

"We are deadlocked on key issues around the issue of power. We have said it is unheard of to have a prime minister without powers to execute the business of government and that was the case, they (ZANU-PF- didn't want Mr. Tsvangirai as prime minister to have powers, to chair cabinet to have power to discipline people who do not perform in cabinet. And we have had a situation where Mr. Mugabe has had bable authoritarian powers compared to Mr. Tsvangirai's flat file of responsibilities. So, that remains the bone of contention," he said.

ENGLAND

(BBC NEWS) A third body has been found in the remains of a millionaire businessman's mansion destroyed in an arson attack.

The bodies of Jill Foster, 49, and an unidentified man were found in the ruins of Osbaston House in Maesbrook, Shropshire, days after Tuesday's blaze.

Kirstie Foster, 15, and her father Christopher, 50, remain unaccounted for.

Police specialist search teams found the remains of a third person on Sunday evening, a spokesperson said.

Detectives have said they are

treating the case as a murder inquiry.

Post-mortem tests revealed Mrs Foster had been shot in the head prior to the blaze, which police said was started deliberately at about 0500 BST last Tuesday.

Tests were being carried out to establish whether a rifle, which was legitimately owned by Mr Foster, was the murder weapon.

Officers said the cause of death for the second body, believed to be a man, still had to be established, along with the dead person's identity.

Three horses and four dogs were also found dead in different parts of the house. All had been shot.

The Fosters were last seen the night before the blaze at a friend's barbecue and Kirstie had been online until about 0100 BST on the morning of the fire.

LOUISIANA

(AP) Hurricane Gustav lashed the US state of Louisiana with torrential rain and gale force winds Monday after forcing nearly two million people to flee.

Fearing a repeat of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, hundreds of troops were sent into New Orleans after what is being called the biggest evacuation in US history.

Three critically ill people were reported to have died as they were being moved from the danger zone. Oil production platforms were shut down, the Republican party suspended the start of its presidential election convention and President George W. Bush headed for Texas to monitor emergency preparations for Gustav which has killed more than 80 people in Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica.

FOOTBALL



Defensive end Jerome McDougle drove up the New Jersey Turnpike Saturday night, his stint on the N.F.L. unemployment line lasting only until he reached Giants Stadium.

McDougle, a former first-round draft pick by the Philadelphia Eagles who was released Saturday, signed with the Giants on Sunday, providing them badly needed depth at a position that had once been their greatest strength.

"It is great," McDougle said Sunday. "Defending Super Bowl champs — I look good in blue."

McDougle was considered something of a bust for the Eagles, for whom he never started and had just three sacks in 33 career games. He was the 15th overall selection in the 2003 draft, but his career has been hampered by a series of

injuries, the most notable of which came in 2005, when he missed the entire season after being shot during a robbery. A triceps injury kept him out of the 2007 season.

But Coach Tom Coughlin is obsessed with a pass rush that can get up the field to pressure the quarterback and McDougle had a superb preseason in Philadelphia with two and a half sacks. The Giants were especially impressed by how he played against the Patriots' starters in a preseason game.

McDougle, who was signed to a one-year contract, will play in the defensive end rotation on passing downs with the starters Justin Tuck and Mathias Kiwanuka. When he was coming out of the University of Miami, the Giants had hoped to draft him.

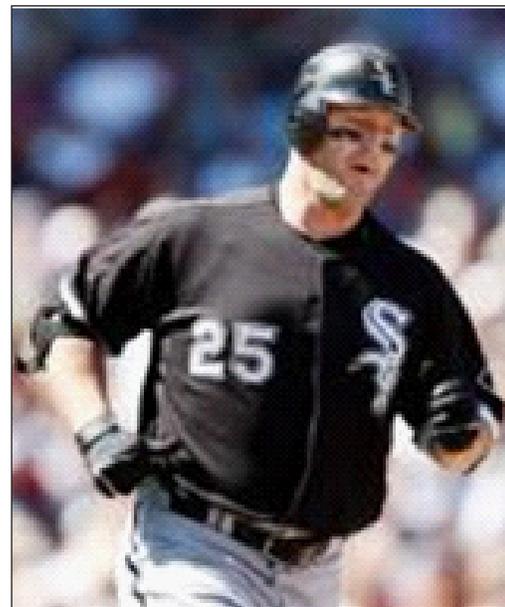
"He can be part of any third-down or second-and-long package," Coughlin said. "Some attention had to be spent on the defensive end spot. We think this is going to be a real good investment."

The Giants' sudden woes at what was, until Osi Umenyiora sustained a season-ending knee injury a week ago, their most dominant position have contributed to a sense that they are a diminished team from the one that won the Super Bowl.

Even though the offense is intact and enhanced by receiver Plaxico Burress's return to good health, as the Giants began preparing for their regular-season opener against the Redskins on Sunday, they are decidedly less than favorites to repeat. They have been eclipsed as favorites in the National Football Conference East by the Dallas Cowboys, who are a chic pick to go to the Super Bowl. The Giants

have even slipped behind the four-win Jets in the local headlines since Brett Favre's arrival. The team the Giants defeated in the Super Bowl, New England, is routinely picked to return to the Super Bowl.

BASEBALL



With all due respect to Mickey Mantle, Jim Thome's 536th career homer was more significant for what it did for the White Sox than what it meant for Thome's place among the game's great sluggers.

Thome tied Mantle for 14th on the home run list with a two-run shot in the first inning Sunday, helping Chicago end a three-game slide with a 4-2 win over the host Boston Red Sox.

"Every home run he hits is a milestone," Chicago manager Ozzie Guillen said. "But I think he's worried more about us winning than his milestones."

Minnesota beat Oakland 12-4 to remain a half-game back of the White Sox in the Central and moved within 2 1/2 games of Boston in the wild-card race. The Red Sox fell 5 1/2 games behind Tampa in the AL after the Rays beat Baltimore 10-4.