4th Inf. Div. CG thanks Soldiers for their service in Baghdad

ISF stand tall in wake of increased attacks in Sadr City

Soldiers help improve security in Sadr City

IP transition to Baghdad’s first line of defense

Mission continues as new security agreement takes effect

A look back in time
Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09

From TOA to Security Agreement, 4th Inf. Div. & MND-B Soldiers are ‘Steadfast and Loyal’

4th Inf. Div. assumes control of MND-B

By Sgt. Jason Thompson
4th Inf. Div. PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Under the clear, morning skies of a promising new day in Baghdad, the 4th Infantry Division took the reins of Multi-National Division – Baghdad from the 1st Cavalry Division during a transfer of authority ceremony Dec. 19, 2007.

The ceremony honored the hard work and sacrifices of the departing ‘First Team’ and looked forward to future challenges and successes soon to be earned by the ‘Ivy Division.’

Pressing over the ceremony was Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commanding general, Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

Odierno said that the battle in Iraq changed significantly during the last year and the success could be directly linked to the 1st Cav. Div.’s efforts in and around Baghdad.

“Significant events are often a result of the right people being in the right place at the right time,” said Odierno. “In the case of Baghdad in 2006 and 2007, the right people were the magnificent men and women of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and their dedicated Iraqi Security Force partners.”

Odierno said all Soldiers of the First Team should be proud of what they accomplished during their tenure in Baghdad. He said the Soldiers had a direct positive impact on the community.


IA, MND-B secure checkpoints, patrol markets ensure safety of local citizens

By Sgt. James Hunter
2nd BCT PAO, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD – Prior to fighting breaking out in Kadhimiyyah, there were no signs of the possibility of Special Group cells targeting Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces. The biggest threat at that time appeared to be vehicle-borne improvised-explosive devices.

However, once violence began in Basra and east Baghdad, local citizens in the area began acting differently themselves. Apparently, criminal elements began spreading the word to the local Iraqis to go into their homes and not come out. These criminals even marched in Kadhimiyyah chanting, “Death to Maliki. Death to Maliki.”

Coalition Forces even received a tip March 28 that ISF checkpoints would come under attack, said 1st Lt. Sam Rosenberg, a native of Fort Myers, Fla., platoon leader for 2nd Platoon, Company D, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment. In response, three platoons pushed out into sector and took their positions to help reinforce the checkpoints – where they sat for a few hours until it was determined there would not be an attack.

“The streets were empty, but it was quiet and the (Iraqi Army) was doing what they were supposed to be doing,” said Capt. Brad Henry, a native of Andover Township, N.J., who is the commander of Co. D, 1-502nd Inf. Regt. “It was weird, but nothing was out of the ordinary.”

Once Henry got back to the base, he received another tip that 20 – 25 men were massing in Kadhimiyyah. He ordered the company’s 4th Platoon to investigate the tip. As soon as the platoon came to the intersection, they were ambushed by special group criminals.

“They called out ‘we are in contact; we are in contact.’” Rosenberg said. “Fighting broke out throughout the area. The platoon was attacked with rock-rocket-propelled grenades and PKCs, and immediately started laying down fire on positively identified enemy combatants, said 1st Lt. Paul Brown, a native of Canfield, Ohio, who is the platoon leader for 4th Platoon. “As soon as my gunner was able to PID a guy, he just started engaging him. They did an awesome job.”

“We weren’t running from the fight,” said Henry. “We were going to secure the intersection and engage targets of opportunity.”

With Brown’s platoon under contact and decisively laying down the enemy, Rosenberg sent his platoon forward to support the Soldiers in their engagements.
MND-B CG thanks service members for time, effort while deployed

Hammond reflects on division's progress in Baghdad

From Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Hammond
Commanding general of MND-B and 4th Inf. Div.

To all Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines:

It is my honor and a privilege to serve as the commander of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division. As our transition with 1st Cavalry Division approaches, I expressly want to convey how humbly I am to have served alongside each of you as we continue to serve our great Nation abroad, apart from our loved ones.

You are all servicemen and servicewomen of character and moral courage. While you represent less than one percent of the country you so selflessly serve, the positive impact you are having on behalf of the American and Iraqi people can not be understated.

On December 19, 2007, nearly 15 months ago, the 4th Infantry Division assumed command of Multi-National Division – Baghdad in order to protect the Iraqi people and bring stability to the people of Iraq.

Together, as a team, we have killed or captured more than 3,540 enemy fighters, seized more than 2,690 weapons caches, defeated a militia uprising and denied terrain to extremists and criminal militants. We built schools, improved essential services, improved local businesses, provided significant and lasting employment, fostered local governing capability and improved the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces to protect and serve their citizens.

It is through our patience, persistence and perseverance that the nation of Iraq has moved from a failed state in 2006 to a more stable state today. Al-Qaeda in Iraq and criminal networks are degraded, a Security Agreement was ratified and Iraqi Provincial Elections are fast approaching.

Together, we provided hope for a brighter future for the people of Iraq.

These gains have come with a solemn price. Ninety-three of your brothers and one sister were killed in action and 638 of your comrades were wounded in action. These Soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice for their buddies, for their Nation and for Freedom. We will never forget those who have fallen.

I ask that you remember them and their Families in your prayers.

In the time ahead, I ask that each and every one of you take care of one another. Leaders, ensure your Soldiers have an opportunity to reach back to loved ones as Steadfast and Loyal Families were deployed on the home front as well, taking care of their Soldiers and each other. And through it all, remember our Army Values and Warrior Ethos.

On behalf of a grateful Nation, I want to thank you for serving your country with character and moral courage in defense of freedom. You are the strength of our Nation – our Nation’s Credentials.

May God bless you, your Families and the United States of America.

Mission – Soldier – Family – Team

Ironhorse 6

"Steadfast and Loyal"

IN HONOR OF OUR FALLEN COMRADES

Spec. James D. Guadridge
Spec. Todd Davis
Staff Sgt. Jonathan Dozier
Staff Sgt. Sean Gual
Spec. Zachary Mincher
Spec. Jon M. Schoolcraft III
Staff Sgt. Robert J. Wilson
Maj. Alan G. Rogers
Spec. Matthew F.C. Straughter
Spec. Jeral A. Whinhunt
Sgt. Gary D. Willett
Sgt. Conrad Alvarez
Cpl. Albert Bilton
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Cpl. Robert T. McDavitt III
Cpl. Scott A. Mcintosh
Capt. Ronald C. Blystone
Spc. Christopher T. Fox
Spc. Ashley A. Bartkiewicz
Sgt. Shaun P. Tousha
Cpl. David M. McCormick
Spc. Adam L. Marion
Pfc. Marcus C. Mathiex
Spc. Mark A. Stone
Staff Sgt. Bryan E. Bolander

Pfc. Andrew J. Habsieger
Staff Sgt. Christopher M. Hake
Sgt. Steve A. McCoy
Cpl. John A. Rubischmenetz
Spc. Joseph D. Gamboa
Spc. Steven I. Candelo
Spec. Gregory B. Rundell
Sgt. Joshua A. Molina
Cpl. Durrell L. Bennett
Pfc. Patrick J. Miller
Sgt. Terrell W. Gilmore
Sgt. Dayne E. Dhanoolal
Staff Sgt. Travis L. Griffin
Staff Sgt. Emanuell Pickett
Staff Sgt. Jeremiah E. McNeal
Cpl. Jason C. Kazarick
Sgt. Michael T. Lilly
Sgt. Timothy M. Smith
Sgt. Richard A. Vaughn
Maj. Mark E. Rosenberg
Sgt. Shaun P. Tousha
Sgt. William E. Allmon
Sgt. Joseph A. Richard III
Sgt. Lance O. Eakes
Staff Sgt. Ronald C. Blystone
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Pfc. Adam L. Marion
Sgt. Marcus C. Mathiex
Spc. Mark A. Stone
Staff Sgt. Bryan E. Bolander

Pfc. Clay A. Craig
Spc. Jonathan Menke
Sgt. Kenneth B. Gibson
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Sgt. Tony J. Gonzales
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Spc. Ronald J. Tucker
Capt. Andrew R. Pearson
Sgt. John K. Daggett
Spc. Corey L. Hicks
Sgt. J. Richard E. Jay
Sgt. Richard A. Vaughn
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THE IVY LEAF

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4th Inf. Div.
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2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.
3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.
CAB, 4th Inf. Div.
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div.
4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div.
2nd BCT, 1st Armored Div.
2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.
2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div.
3rd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div.
4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.

Task Force XII
8th MP Bde.
18th MP Bde.
1st Sustainment Bde.

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Iraqi people’s day-to-day lives, which is apparent by the increased activity in all the Baghdad market places, traffic on the streets, numerous soccer games played in all the local neighborhoods, and the smiles on the children’s faces.

“The biggest success was the complete, full partnership they formed with their counterparts in the Iraqi Army, National Police, station police, patrol police and local leaders,” continued Odierno. “Because of their shared concern, genuine care and daily engagement, they earned the trust and confidence of Baghdad’s people. In turn, it sparked a grassroots movement among the millions of residents and empowered them to feel in control of their own destiny.”

The 1st Cav. Div. commander then addressed the audience of Iraqi and Coalition leaders, looking back on a year’s worth of successes and sacrifices by his MND-B forces.

“Although the cost has been high, and the toll on the lives of our Soldiers has been great, our cause was just and noble, and we have prevailed,” said Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, Jr., as he somberly addressed the crowd. “We have fought together, side by side, and have won every time. Our Soldiers know it, and the enemy knows it. There is not a place in Baghdad where the enemy feels free or a place to call his home.”

Fil then thanked the Iraqi Army soldiers that the success of the First Team came with a partnership between the Iraqi and Coalition Forces.

“We have done this in partnership. Whatever progress we have made, whatever success we have secured, is a testimony to that partnership and the result of our combined strengths.”

With the colors of his division cased and ready to accompany him home, Fil’s thoughts were focused on the efforts of his Soldiers and on the continued success of the 4th Inf. Div.

“As with always at the end of a challenging tour, we leave with mixed emotions. It is quite reassuring to know that we are handing the battle over to such a capable division, and that’s the Steadfast and Loyal 4th Inf. Div. led by the supreme command team of Maj. Gen. Jeff Hammond and Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia.

“I’m leaving totally confident that you’ll be able to quickly build and expand upon the efforts and that the Ironhorse Soldiers are ready for the tests that lie ahead.”

With the clear, crisp notes of the 4th Inf. Div. Ironhorse Band accompanying the ceremony, Fil passed on the mantle of MND-B with pride for his Soldiers and optimism for his successors.

Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, commanding general, 4th Inf. Div., uncased his colors and assumed command of the MND-B mission as the division colors changed position in the honor guard procession.

“As we, the 4th Inf. Div., return to Baghdad for our third deployment, we truly feel we have two homes. One in Fort Hood, Texas, and our other is clearly here in Baghdad. We look forward to once again serving with our Iraqi brothers.

With obvious pride in the troops of his new command, Hammond closed by thanking the 1st Cav. Div. for their great efforts in providing a smooth transition with the 4th Inf. Div. and took a moment to recognize all the forces that make up MND-B.

“Thank you, Maj. Gen. Fil and the 1st Cav. Div., magnificent job. Your Steadfast and Loyal efforts have improved security across Baghdad, but more important, I see hope for the future. We must build on this and continue progress. We still face determined enemies who threaten peace and security. There is still much work ahead. Our job, alongside our Iraqi counterparts, is to provide stable security and set conditions for improving life in Baghdad.

“This, we will do as a team.

“It is my honor to represent the men and women of Multi-National Division – Baghdad. Steadfast and Loyal.”

4th Inf. Div. takes control of MND-B
Local citizens volunteer for police force

Sgt. James Hunter  

BAGHDAD – Local citizens stepped up to answer their nation’s call for a standardized, uniformed police force to be available when their neighbors and fellow Iraqi citizens called for help.

A three-day volunteer drive was held Dec. 10-12 in the Dawoodi, Dur Sud and Andulus muhallahs (neighborhoods) of northwest Baghdad to recruit candidates.

They came in swarms, nearly 100 men per muhallah, all seeking the same thing – a job in the community. Two very distinct reasons stick out to why these men came. First off, because of their love for country. Secondly, so they can feed their families.

“They want jobs,” said 1st Lt. Matthew Nicholl, platoon leader and native of Lawrence, Kan., with Company D, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment. “The biggest thing we are going to do for this muhallah is give 75 guys jobs; because if they’re not working for us, they’re working for other guys.”

Though this area isn’t necessarily poor, comparatively to other communities, their work alone will help boost the economy. If a man brings in his two sons, and all three gain jobs, then they bring $1,200 a month into their household. That is $1,200 into their pockets and then into the economy.

“That’s a lot of money; it has to improve the economy,” said Nicholl. “There is going to be second and third order effects. It’s keeping the money in the muhallah. You will see it in ways of businesses opening and businesses expanding.”

The troops of Company D worked with the local Neighborhood Advisory Council members to come up with a list of names for possible candidates. The NAC members chose the candidates, and invitations were sent out to each individual, welcoming them to come out for the recruitment drive.

Each individual went through a series of in-processing procedures. They were fingerprinted to check if they had any criminal background and medics gave them a physical screening to check their health status. Afterwards, they conducted a physical fitness test, consisting of push-ups, sit-ups and a 100-meter dash.

Finally, they were interviewed by Iraqi National Police commanders who approved or disapproved them for recruitment into the volunteer force.

The final list of possible candidates goes to the Ministry of Interior, where they choose the 75 best candidates per muhallah, said Nicholl.

But one thing must be taken into consideration when selecting these men. In these areas, 60-70 percent of the populace is Shia.

“Out of the 75 volunteers, we have to make it reflect the demographics of the actual muhallah,” said Nicholl. By doing this it will better balance the force.

Once these 75 men are selected, they will be uniformed and integrated into training with Iraqi army and National Police members, manning checkpoints alongside them and patrolling through the muhallahs.

Placing these volunteers into their home cities, where they know and have built trust with the local citizens, puts a known face on security issues.

One man, Yaser Abdul Satar, sported a tattoo of Iraq with the nation’s colors in it. He said it’s a symbol of his love for his country, which is one reason Satar wants to be a part of this volunteer force.

Secondly, however, his lack of job is preventing him from doing the one thing he has wanted to do for some time – marry. His country, his family and the people of Dur Sud come first.

The area is safe, said Spc. Chris Johnson, driver and native of Richmond, Va., with Company D, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment. They patrol often, going to the local schools and talking with the children.

If these men are in place to identify those who do not belong and are known criminals they will be successful, added Johnson.

Local governance center opens in Sab Al Bor

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp  
1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div.

CAMP TJAI, Iraq – Tribal sheiks joined members of government of Iraq ministries, officials in the Taji qada, Taji naheyah representatives, senior ranking Iraqi Security Forces leaders and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers, to open the Sab Al Bor Governance Center of Taji in Sab Al Bor Dec. 13.

The governance center offers the local populace access to government services offices which fall under the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works that include electricity, water, communications and education as well as a post office.

The center also has under its purview two civilian health clinics that staff six doctors and boasts six ambulances which serve a city that once had only one clinic and one doctor.

“We’re providing them capability they haven’t had which is a single place for the people of Sab Al Bor to go where they can address issues and problems with regards to essential services and education – a place they can go where they expect to get some results,” said Lt. Col. Kevin MacWatters, commander, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, whose squadron has been working with Iraqi government officials and tribal sheiks along with the 1st “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division’s embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, ePRT Baghdad-5 and the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion to aid in the reconstruction of infrastructure in Sab Al Bor.

“The visibility of this reopening and dedication of the new government center shows the local people and others in the province that Sab Al Bor is ready to receive residents back home and that the government is providing a place for them to go to receive government services of all types,” said Col. Mike Bridges, a government group advisor for ePRT Baghdad-5, who bails from Anchorage, Ala. “It is also a visible presentation that the community is returning to life.”

Sab Al Bor was formerly a retirement community at its peak had a population of nearly 65,000 residents.

After sectarian violence erupted in the town in 2005 and early 2006, the population fell to 2,600 – a level at which it stayed until six months ago.

According to Bridges, tribal sheiks, Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi security volunteers, concerned local citizens and Iraqi government officials at all levels working with troops from the 1st Sqd., 7th Cav, the Ironhorse Brigade ePRT, the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion and Estonian troops have greatly improved security in the city allowing for a transition from a focus on mainly security-related efforts to those involving the reconstruction of critical infrastructure and essential services.

“Now that the security situation has changed so dramatically, people are coming back in large numbers and the population today is anywhere from 25,000 to 28,000 people and growing daily,” said Bridges.

“The government of Iraq has identified Sab Al Bor as a key city for the return of displaced persons and as a model example of that program and the return to normalcy in a community that was once marred by violence,” Bridges added.
SUNNI, SHIA CITIZENS JOIN TOGETHER IN KARKH DISTRICT TO RECONCILE DIFFERENCES

By Sgt. James Hunter
2nd BCT PAO, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD – Approximately 1,000 Iraqi citizens, of both Shia and Sunni religions, gathered on the sectarian fault line in Rawaniyah, the Karkh District of Baghdad, to march with one another in what they called a “Peace March” Dec. 19. It was an Iraqi initiative to ease sectarian tensions, solely driven by Iraqi Neighborhood and District Advisory Council leaders and Sheiks from both religious sects in the area, said Capt. Marcus Melton, native of Atlanta, Ga., commander of Pale Horse Troop, 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

With Iraqi army and Iraqi policemen maintaining the security on the streets and within the crowd during the event, they were able to successfully complete the march for united peace among all Iraqis.

Melton, who is in his second tour in Baghdad, said “I know they are moving forward and making progress. Certainly they have issues and problems and growing pains, but they have made a tremendous amount of progress.”

One Iraqi boy, Omar, 11, said because of the continued peace in his homeland, he came to celebrate with his fellow Iraqis.

Awaiss, with the Iraqi flag draped over his body, carried himself with much enthusiasm and excitement in his journey in Karkh.

He said the flag – one he is very proud to display – describes his great country. Red is for the blood shed, White is for “our handshake,” Green is for their land, and Black is for their oil.

“We thank our God, our families and our friends that our neighborhood is safe and free of Violence,” an Iraqi man who participated in the march said.

They marched for their peace, for their friends and for their brothers, said the Sheik. “Today we march for us being brothers forever.”

Solar lights make Baghdad market safer for shoppers

By Staff Sgt. Mike Pryor
2nd BCT PAO, 82nd Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD — Up until recently, the Rabi Fish Market – a thoroughfare crowded with little shops and stands in Northeast Baghdad – cleared out when the sun went down. But these days, things are different. Thanks to the illumination provided by rows of new, solar-powered streetlamps, vendors can continue to ply their wares and shoppers can keep browsing the shops for hours after night has fallen.

The new lights were supplied by the 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment – the U.S. unit responsible for security in Rabi – as part of an ongoing effort to revitalize the market area. Since early December, 40 of the 18-foot-high lights have been installed throughout the marketplace.

The new lights will allow businesses to remain open longer and make the market safer and more enticing for customers, with the end result being a boost to the local economy, make the market safer and more enticing for custom-

ers, with the end result being a boost to the local economy, and debating life. Little children hurried forward on urgent business to pick up one or two last items for dinner.

For Richardson, the ordinariness of it all was a pleasant sight. “I don’t think you can overstate the importance of feeling like things are back to normal and you can go out and enjoy time out in public with friends and family,” he said.

Several shop owners told the paratroopers the lights were having a positive effect.

“Business is better now,” said Abbas Mohammed, the owner of a cosmetics shop. “People can shop longer. It is good for the community.”

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MRAP training precedes fielding

By Sgt. Zach Mott
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – More than 1,600 improvised-explosive devices detonated on 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, patrols in Iraq from December 2005 to November 2006, according to the official brigade tally.

In efforts to prevent deaths and injuries caused by IEDs, the military added armor, both to personnel and vehicles, lawmakers in the United States urged Defense Department officials to make a change. The Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle is the result of that push.

The sheer size of an MRAP is nearly enough to scare an IED into submission. The MRAP stands over 10 feet tall.

Striker Soldiers participated in a week-long training course devoted to teaching them the necessities of the MRAP prior to conducting missions in the new vehicle. In the past, the 3rd BCT’s vehicle fleet consisted of Humvees, Light Medium Tactical Vehicles and various tracked vehicles.

This added behemoth required specialized training for its future operators.

“I think it’s a pretty nice little vehicle. Just the way it’s set up and some of the capabilities; it’s really nice,” said Sgt. Jonathan McNemar, a gunner with Company B, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, who is on his third trip to Iraq with the 3rd BCT.

McNemar has witnessed first-hand the advancement of troop transportation in Iraq. During his first trip, from March 2003 to March 2004, most of the humvees were ‘soft skin,’ or un-armored. During his second tour, from November 2005 to November 2006, vehicles that went outside the wire were required to be up-armored. Now, MRAPs fill the next evolutionary step.

“Each time it gets better as it goes along,” said the Spencer, W.Va., native.

Striker Soldiers will be some of the first in Iraq to field the new vehicles. Although, prior to being sent to combat each MRAP is put through rigorous tests stateside at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. All vehicles must pass this testing before being issued to troops, said Derrick Cockford, the lead field service representative at Camp Taji from DynCorp International.

Cockford said the concept behind the MRAP is simple: protect the war fighter.

“It basically involves putting more protection around the Soldier within the vehicle,” the Baton Rouge, La., native said. “That being said, it puts them at a better advantage against IEDs, (vehicle borne) IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades, mines, that kind of thing.”

After a week of classroom-style learning, Soldiers of the Striker Brigade are eager to put the rubber of the MRAP tires on the roads of Iraq.

“They’re a smooth ride,” said Cambridge, Mass., native Pfc. James Fleming, a driver from Company D, 1st CAV, 68th AR.

“‘They’re pretty nice. It’s pretty much like driving a Humvee just swollen up.’”

With that eagerness also comes an appreciation for the added protection an MRAP is said to provide.

“I think with the safety capabilities upgraded on it I think it’s going to (mean) less patients (for us) as more units get these vehicles,” said Spc. Jennifer Ward, a medic from Company C, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, and King, N.C., native.

Patriot Brigade assumes command from Strike Force Brigade

By Spc. Grant Okubo
4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – The leadership of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light), conducted their first official duty in Baghdad as they accepted command from 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division in The Tomas Sotelo Jr. Soldier’s Theater here Dec. 29.

The Patriot and Strike Force brigades have been working side by side for the past month, with Strike Force Soldiers preparing the Patriots to take control of operations. Now, after the official relief-in-place/transfer of authority ceremony, Strike head home after a 15-month deployment and Patriot’s work begins.

“Today, the Patriot Brigade takes over the responsibilities of Karada, Rusafa and 9 Nissan (eastern Baghdad) from Strike Force,” said Col. Mark Dewhurst, 4th IBCT commander.

In his speech, Dewhurst discussed the impact Strike Force has had on the region and the effects it will have on the Patriot Brigade’s current mission.

“Through their efforts, in partnership with the Iraqis, they have established a much more stable environment that has opened a window of opportunity for the Patriot Brigade to seize upon,” said Dewhurst.

“We realize that we now have the ball, and we must keep moving it down the field. From day one of our arrival, they have treated us as a band of brothers and sisters, imparting their expertise, lessons learned and TTPs (tactics, techniques and procedures) to all of us.”

Dewhurst spoke about what the focus will be for the Patriot Brigade during their time here.

“For the Patriot Brigade, security is our watchword and is job number one,” declared Dewhurst. “Only when the population feels secure can we get after essential services, sustainable employment and improved governance. We can only accomplish this with our Iraqi partners.”

One significant act that took place during the ceremony was the casing and uncasing of the unit colors. The colors are a part of a time-honored tradition, which represent the Soldiers comprising the unit and the lineage and traditions of the unit.

The act of casing the out going unit’s and uncasing the incoming unit’s colors symbolizes the transfer of responsibility for the operational environment from the outgoing unit to the incoming unit.
Reconstruction continues in Baghdad
Local Iraqi business owners receive micro grants to boost economy

By Sgt. Mark Matthews
MND-B PAO

JOINT SECURITY STATION KHADRA, Iraq — As security in Baghdad continues to improve, Soldiers remain vigilant in their mission to not only protect the Iraqi people, but to provide them financial assistance as well.

Local Iraqi business owners and future business owners lined up in front of Joint Security Station Khadra to receive micro grants from the U.S. military in order to repair their shops, start a business, or buy goods to restock the shelves Jan. 13.

“We paid out 13 micro grants worth about $31,500,” said Cpt. Jason Alday, Battle Creek, Mich., native, 1st battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division.

“This basically helps stimulate the economy throughout the Khadra area.”

Each local business owner or hopeful business owner in Khadra must meet basic requirements and go through an application process in order to be eligible for a micro grant.

“Business owners looking to receive a micro grant must first fill out an application and state what their business is and where they live, and as long as long as they own a business, rent a store or plan on renting or owning a store in Khadra, the grants are available to them,” said 1st Lt. Raymond Ashworth, a Redlands, Calif., native, Company C, 1st Bn., 64th Armor Rgmt.

These micro grants not only help local business get back on their feet, but also provides business owners with peace of mind in knowing these grants do not have to be paid back and they are contributing to positive way of life, absent of terrorism, for the Iraqi people.

“These are something they do not have to pay back,” Ashworth said.

“We’re handing them out in order to start up the economy, which helps us fight terrorism because as long as people are enjoying their lives and starting businesses they are not going to want to support (terrorism).”

Each individual micro grant was worth up to $2,500 and was given to a Khadr citizen to help improve their existing business or start a new business.

“Business owners can use these funds to buy supplies and merchandise for their shops or fix broken windows and broken doors,” Alday said. “This basically revitalizes the economy in this area.”

These 13 micro grants were the most recent of 182 micro grants made with security in the communities, are now being held once a month for the leaders to share ideas on how to tackle violence in their respective areas.

“These meetings have been exceptionally helpful in assisting us reduce the amount of violence in West Rashid,” said Lt. Col. Patrick Frank, commander of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment “Black Lions,” 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

“Before we started these meetings, we had a significant level of violence, but with these meetings and the cooperation of the leaders the violence has dropped dramatically, so we want to continue with the momentum of the reconciliation process,” said Frank, a Cuba, N.Y., native.

Part of the success with these meetings is how they are conducted. During the meetings the Black Lions show each local Iraqi business owner the appropriate identification and paper work prior to receiving his $2,500 micro grant. Micro grants like these help fight terrorism by allowing Khadra citizens to enjoy their lives and start businesses, said 1st Lt. Raymond Ashworth, Redlands, Calif., native, Company C, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment.

The micro grants seem to really be paying off for other business owners who have received grants.

Other financial districts in Baghdad have begun to flourish as a result. The hope is Khadra will be no different.

“(Micro grants) have really been taking hold and everyone seems to always ask about them,” Alday said.

“Phone Card Road, for example, has about 1,000 stores in a two mile stretch and maybe 50 of these stores were open. Now, due to our micro grants, we are seeing upwards of 300 of these stores open.”

A local Iraq business owner provides the appropriate identification and paper work prior to receiving his $2,500 micro grant.

By Spc. Elvyn Nieves
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Northwest Rashid hayy (community) leaders, senior Iraqi Security Forces leaders and Iraqi government officials gathered in a reconciliation meeting, at the Baghdad International Airport, to find solutions to their problems Jan. 6.

These meetings began in September and, due to the progress made with security in the communities, are now being held once a month for the leaders to share ideas on how to tackle violence in their respective areas.

“These meetings have been exceptionally helpful in assisting us reduce the amount of violence in West Rashid,” said Lt. Col. Patrick Frank, commander of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment “Black Lions,” 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

“Before we started these meetings, we had a significant level of violence, but with these meetings and the cooperation of the leaders the violence has dropped dramatically, so we want to continue with the momentum of the reconciliation process,” said Frank, a Cuba, N.Y., native.

Part of the success with these meetings is how they are conducted. During the meetings the Black Lions show each leader specific community problems with security in their area, whether it is indirect fire, small arms fire or improvised explosive devices.

The leader is among his peers when his area is shown and discussed, which adds some peer pressure on him as the problems are addressed.

“We found peer pressure is also a way to reduce violence in these areas,” said Frank. “The Shia and the Sunni have not normally fought the way we’ve seen recently, so bringing them together into a forum like this has assisted in the dialog between those two groups.”

Now they would like to take it to the next level, which is to turn the economy around by providing jobs to their citizens and providing essential services like electricity, trash removal and sewers, Frank said.

“The number one goal of the Black Lions is to stabilize security,” said Frank.

“If we can provide that sustainable security in west Rashid, then the Black Lions will have achieved their goal successfully.”
Task Force XII Soldiers work ‘round the clock to provide fuel, ammo for aircraft

By Sgt. Brandon Little
Task Force XII PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – As soon as the vehicle pulls in, and is safe to approach, a crew rushes out to do their job. They work together in a swift yet synchronized motion pumping gallons of fuel into the gas tank, air into the tires and refilling other crucial items.

They’re not a professional racing pit crew; they are Multi-National Division – Baghdad’s Task Force XII Soldiers working at the Forward Arming and Refueling Point here.

Every day these FARP Soldiers transfer hundreds of gallons of fuel and thousands of pounds of ammunition into aircraft to keep them in the fight and the enemy on their heels.

An aircraft can land on the FARP, be refueled and reloaded with ammunition, and get back in the air to continue with its mission all in the same time it takes to microwave a bag of popcorn or listen to a song on the radio.

By Cpl. Ben Washburn

Iraqi medics led the training.

Many times they would work with US Air Force medics and other Coalition Forces, but this time it was all Iraqis.

“We’re kind of like a NASCAR pit crew,” said Sgt. 1st Class Freddie Epting, the platoon sergeant for the Distribution Platoon in Renegade Troop, 4th Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. “We average about 3.5 minutes per aircraft, that’s including loading ammo and giving fuel.”

Since assuming control of the FARP in December, Renegade Troop Soldiers have refueled more than 2,500 aircraft and pumped more than 500,000 gallons of fuel.

“This is especially unique because this FARP pumps hundreds of gallons of fuel into Air Force, Marine and other Coalition Forces aircraft, said Epting, a native of Gulfport, Miss.

“We pride ourselves on making sure the aircraft (move through quickly) because the more time they spend on my pad equally less time for them to fly around and make sure the area’s safe,” he said. “Speed is important, but we always make sure safety’s first.”

In addition to dealing with highly flammable liquids and explosive munitions, the Soldiers also have to constantly be aware of the spinning rotor blades on the aircraft they are refueling.

“There are cold refuels, but most of the time (flight crews) are like ‘we have to go, and we have to go right now, and we need fuel,’” said Spc. Myisha Treadwell, an Atlanta native, who serves as a petroleum supply specialist in Renegade Troop. “So, (we provide aircraft) the opportunity to land, keep everything on, get fuel and get back out to their mission.”

Treadwell is part of the three-person bag team responsible for pumping fuel out to the FARP line. After the fuel reaches the FARP line and the aircraft has been connected to a grounding cable, Soldiers attach a special nozzle to the helicopter and begin fueling.

“We have to use a D1 nozzle for hot refuels for most aircraft in the military,” said Spe. Kyle Porteous, also a petroleum supply specialist in Renegade Troop and a native of Lawrenceburg, K.Y. “The D1 is designed to prevent any vapors from escaping, this reduces the chances of a fire breaking out.”

Having a fire break out could be disastrous, especially while Soldiers are loading the aircraft with rockets and flares.

“These rockets have a large amount of explosives inside them, and if everyone’s not extremely careful, someone could get seriously injured or killed,” said Pvt. Tommy Walker, a Converse, La., native, and an AH-64D Apache Longbow armament and systems repairer in Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Troop, 4th Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Having the Soldiers take their time to be safe and do things right is more important than them racing through steps to get done faster, said Epting.

The Soldiers might not move vehicles out quite as fast as a racing pit crew, but they have developed a system to get aircraft back into the fight safely.

“We have a great system set up to quickly get aircraft refueled, rearmed and back in the sky so when ground units are under attack, or going to on a very high risk convoy, they’ve got air power supporting them,” said Porteous. “I know that by us being here, doing what we’re doing, we’re helping to save lives – and that’s what matters.”

National Police medics take lead in life saving class

By Cpl. Ben Washburn
4th BCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Transition Teams have conducted combat lifesaver classes for several years teaching Iraqis.

At Joint Security Station Jazerra, from Jan. 27-30, the classes were different because this time, medics from the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, took the lead in the class, teaching their colleagues.

“There have been two main individuals I’ve been using throughout the class, that I identified early on from a previous class to be my instructors,” said Sgt. Jason Kun, a medic with Company C, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, Task Force Dragon, and a Silver Lake, Kan., native.

“I was able to bring them back and utilize them to teach several classes themselves.”

The NP instructors are medics with their unit and were charged with teaching their fellow “shurta”, Arabic for police, basic CLS skills including basic bandaging, vehicle extrication, and inserting an IV.

The students are now able to take their skills back with them to their respective units within their brigade, and also to the people of Iraq.

“We’re trying to depend on ourselves from now on. ‘The Coalition is helping us, but we’re trying to do our things by ourselves,’” Karim said.

The training conducted by the National Police medics was the first step, but it was a successful step.

“I just stood back there and monitored them, and they did an outstanding job!” Kun said.

This step in training the National Police is important.

A major part of U.S. strategy in the war is training the Iraqi Security Forces to be self-sufficient.
IP cadre trains recruits to become future police

By Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger
18th MP Bde. PAO

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq – More than 1,000 Iraqi Police recruits cycled through the small-arms range at the Furat Iraqi Police Training Academy here Feb. 19.

The IP cadre jumped from recruit to recruit while providing assistance to those on the range; for many of them, the event was the first time they had the opportunity to fire their assigned weapons.

Thus it went throughout the day as the new recruits underwent weapon familiarization, which is, but one of many tasks recruits receive instruction on during their IP Basic Recruit Training.

“With IP cadre overseeing the training, the day went by without incident,” said Sgt. 1st. Class Stephen Horn, non-commissioned officer in charge of the Furat IP Training Academy. Horn is a Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier assigned to the 18th Military Police Brigade.

“Things are going a lot better then day one here,” said Horn, a military police Soldier and a native of Forest, Miss., who said he has seen vast improvements in the training once the IP cadre arrived from the Provincial Directorate of Police, Patrol Headquarters Baghdad.

“The IP cadre are doing a very good job keeping things organized and keeping the recruits motivated,” said Horn. Horn has had his share of experience of training young Soldiers in the past, having previously served as a drill sergeant at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., where he taught U.S. Military Police students the basics on how to conduct police operations.

Prior to moving to the range, the recruits went through a weapons training and range safety class.

During the range familiarization, the IP cadre required the recruits to fire 25 rounds from the kneeling position and 25 rounds from the prone position with AK-47 assault rifles.

“The pre-training for the range by the cadre paid off and made things run smoothly,” said Al Gauthier, an Iraqi Police Advisor’s liaison officer. Earlier in the year, Gauthier trained the many IP cadre on how to conduct the training.

“This is the first time many of these recruits have fired a weapon,” said Gauthier, who added that his IPA team trained the IP cadre team during a train-the-trainer course months ago and that the cadre has come along way in their ability to train IP recruits.

While observing the Furat IP Academy, Gauthier said the IPA’s main objective is to mentor, offer advice and instruct Iraqi law-enforcement recruits.

“This cadre is the best we have trained thus far. They are very professional and squared away,” said Gauthier, a native of Bowie, Md., and former Prince George’s County, Md., police officer.

Gauthier and his team are now limiting their involvement in the training, he said, and they are very pleased in the job the cadre is doing in training the IP recruits.

“Personally, I take a lot of pride in this cadre. I put a lot of time into their earlier training,” said Gauthier, who has been part of IP training for more than a year.

The IP cadre were required to attend, and be certified at, an intensive 80-hour train-the-trainer course. They were then required to complete months of on-the-job training at Patrol Headquarters Baghdad and Camp Fiji, where they trained more than 4,000 IP recruits going through BRT.

The cadre had to earn their certification by going through the course in a “go” or “no-go” system. Several did not make it through, said Gauthier.

Since the cadre have proven they are able to train IP efficiently, they have been tasked to head the new Furat IP Training Academy that trains more than 1,000 IP recruits per class. They are preparing for their biggest class yet – 1,500 recruits which begins in March, said Gauthier. It will also mark the third class under which ‘Sons of Iraq’ recruits are undergoing in their bid to become IP.

“The cadres are ready to take on the challenge. They are very motivated and take a lot of pride in their work,” said Gauthier, about the upcoming class at the Furat facility.

Gauthier said that he and his team see a lot of promise and fulfillment in their work alongside the IP cadre they trained.

“This IP cadre is highly effective, efficient and professional,” said Gauthier. “It will, in turn, enhance individual performance, safety, unit effectiveness and mission readiness of the Iraqi Police force.”

The first class of recruits nearing the end of its training and preparing for graduation.

Do you have a story to share?
We want to hear about it.

Watch for the Ivy Leaf to transform into
Crossed Sabers in the coming weeks.
Taji rail lines open
Railroad operating for first time since start of war

By Sgt. Jerome Bishop
2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — The railroad lines of the Taji Qada, north of Baghdad, have laid dormant since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, but as a result of the efforts of Multi-National Division — Baghdad Soldiers, the train first ran loose a thunderous blast of its horn March 5 as it slowly rolled through the gates into Camp Taji.

"This particular train ... is part of a proof of principle," said Capt. James Kerns, a Harrison County, Ky., native, who serves as the assistant operations officer for the Base Defense Operations Command, 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, "Warrior," 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division — Baghdad. "I think it helped everybody. I hope it helped out those decision makers."

McQuown has been a medic for more than 16 years and is currently serving a second tour of duty in Iraq. As a flight medic, he has seen a number of injuries occur around the aircraft during a medical evacuation and, at times, they have been fatal.

During the first class, the heaviest Soldiers were picked to be casualties. Everyone took turns putting them on and taking them off the aircraft.

"That’s reality. The way to be a more proficient Soldier and fighter is to have the best realistic training that you can," McQuown said. "The reality is it’s hard to put people in that bird."

Some of the Soldiers struggled during the cold-load training, where the aircraft is at a stand still, but they completed the task.

"They did meet my needs. It was very well done. I was kind of hoping for more examples or stories, some experience from the MEDEVAC medics to the ground medical personnel," said Wild. "It’s not that they’re better medics, they’re just more experienced medics." Wild said. "They’ve seen a lot more triage than ground medics, and they see higher risk patients more often than a combat medic does."

"We’re facilitating the force protection requirements to bring the train in safely," he explained. "Along with the benefits the Government of Iraq is likely to gain, getting more equipment from place to place without the requirement of putting Iraqi Security or Coalition Forces on dangerous roads is among the highest."

"This is going to help out a lot if the train makes it every time. If you have two or three guys in a truck, you’ll have 50 guys driving a bunch of smaller trucks. (With the rail system operational), you’ll have less guys out there on the road and less chances of casualties happening," said 1st Sgt. Dwaylyn Dasher, a Jessup, Ga., native, who serves with Battery A, 2-11 FA Regt. Battery B provided the bulk of the force protection measures at the Camp Taji train yard.

In addition to contributing to military operations throughout the country, a functioning railroad system also provides the potential for a larger benefit for the average Iraqi. "If you bring business into the area; it’s going to bring economic goods into the area, and it’s going to allow the Iraqi Army to facilitate and sustain their own operations in the future — and hopefully, in the not-so-distant future, improve security operations for the Iraqi Army by allowing them to bring military equipment into the area and more sustainment items to Camp Taji and further north into Iraq," Kern said.

Despite the short-lived spectacle of watching the green and yellow locomotive slowly roll through the almost-abandoned railroad tracks, the bellow of the engine’s horn echoed yet another promising addition to the growing list of successful changes taking place to benefit the future of a free Iraq.

1st Sustainment Bde.

Soldiers learn MEDEVAC safety

By Spc. Andrea Merritt
1st Sustainment Bde., PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — Flight medics of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, put the skies on hold to team up with the 1st Sustainment Brigade and teach 62 of its Soldiers about safety during a medical evacuation.

"It’s important to have this training because a lot of the Army training that we have is based around the nine-line," said Maj. Henry McNealy, a Dewey Beach, Del., native, who serves as the operations officer for the BDOC, 2nd Bn., 11th FA Regt. "I’ll become a consistent train; hopefully, over time, the infrastructure of Iraq will be rebuilt."

"The train is a big piece of getting Iraq back on line," McNealy added.

"Every year, something big usually happens — last year it was getting the oil lines back up — the electric lines running again, and this year it’ll probably be getting the rail going all the way from Mosul to Baghdad — being unimpeded by criminal elements, al-Qaeda in Iraq or special groups," he explained.

Soldiers of the 2nd Bn., 11th FA Regt., took part in the operation by providing security alongside their Iraqi Army counterparts.

The leg work, as far as conducting, maintaining and navigating the locomotive to Camp Taji, was performed by the Government of Iraq with minimal Coalition Forces assistance, said Kern.

"It’s never a dull moment," said McQuown. "We try to give (the class) to whoever we come in contact with … we can, at times, they have been fatal."

"It’s not that they’re better medics, they’re just more experienced medics." Wild said. "They’ve seen a lot more triage than ground medics, and they see higher risk patients more often than a combat medic does."

"We have no problem giving a class on the MEDEVAC because all that’s going to do is make everybody work as a cohesive unit and have a fine-tuned machine instead of controlled chaos.”

"Decision makers needed to know this asset is here and that they have this support. This unit is here for them and to support their operations," Wild said. "Also, the Soldiers know if they get wounded, this medical asset is there to get them to an echelon-three clinic as quickly as possible."

"I think it helped everybody. I hope it helped out those who mostly go outside the wire because that’s who we did this for," Wild concluded.
Streets get back to life, market gears up in Adhamiyah

By Spc. Elvyn Nieves
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

ADHAMIYAH, Iraq – During a joint dismounted patrol with the Iraqi Army on Chem Street, Multi-National Division – Baghdad_Soldiers witnessed the changes and progress in the area and its bustling market.

The Soldiers of 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, attached to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, along with the 1st Infantry Division, the Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq), have been working hand-in-hand to provide Adhamiyah residents with enough security for them to feel safe walking the streets.

“What we’ve been doing in the last four months is working with our IA counterparts and putting them in the front so people can see their IA is out there to help secure as much as we are,” said Capt. Erik Kjonerod, a Fairfax, Va., native, who serves as commander of Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment. “We wanted to show them our Iraqi Security Forces are out there as much as we are. They’re not sitting on check points doing nothing. They go out on patrols just like the Americans do.”

The awakening of the market on Chem Street is attributed to the progress in security in the area.

“When we first got here, we could see an average of 15 to 20 shops open,” said Staff Sgt. Germaine Seabrook, a Charleston, S.C., native, who serves as a cavalry scout in Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment. “With the help of Iraqi forces, we helped keep the security tight. Most of the Iraqi people started coming back, opening up shops, and the economy started rolling better. The people from Adhamiyah can see how safe it is now.”

The advantage of joint, dismounted patrols is getting Soldiers to talk to people and letting the people know they are there for security, and they do care about their concerns.

“In the beginning of our work here, the streets were pretty much desolated,” said 1st Lt. Matthew Jensen, a Camarillo, Calif., native, who serves as platoon leader in Troop A. “We didn’t see many people walking around. People were scared to get out of their homes. Through civil affairs, micro grants, the Sons of Iraq and our presence, people started coming out. Most of the stores on Chem Street are opened now.”

The populated market in Chem Street proves the success of joint dismounted patrols. The Iraqi people feel more confident to get out of their houses, walk the streets and approach the ISF with their problems and concerns. The Sol keeps the security and peace in the area when the Coalition Forces are not around. Thus far, it’s a method the Iraqi people can see and feel.

ISF stand tall in wake of increased attacks

By Sgt. Zach Mott
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Iraqi Security Forces manned their positions at checkpoints across northeastern Baghdad March 31 to show terrorist forces in the area that they will not back down.

Violence across the capital and southern city of Basra has spiked in recent days, but ISF members continue to provide security to the people they are sworn to protect in this part of Baghdad.

“We are National Police first. We must protect and defend the people in the area,” said Capt. Jallal Farris, a commander at an Iraqi National Police checkpoint in Baghdad, who serves with the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st National Police Division.

The checkpoint is in a busy part of the city; several cars, trucks and emergency vehicles pass through the area in the course of the day. Because of this, Farris and his men remain vigilant in their checks and duties. There is no time to squabble with secular divisions.

“We don’t believe in separate people. We are all one,” he said.

Coalition Forces and Iraqi Army troops also pass through this checkpoint, which serves to bolster the security in this region and displays the partnership between various groups.

“Criminals of special groups are trying to destabilize the progress made by the Government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces, but the Iraqi Army and Police forces, supported by Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers, are successfully containing the violence until a peaceful resolution can be achieved,” said Maj. Michael Humphreys, the public affairs officer for the 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Dragons welcome Raider brigade torch

By Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4th BCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – It’s a beginning of an end in southern Baghdad, and for some as far away as Kansas, there couldn’t be better news.

With the end of their deployment nearing, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division welcomed the advanced party of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division of Fort Hood, Texas, to Forward Operating Base Falcon in South Baghdad’s Rashid District March 20-21.

The “Dragon” Brigade, the second of the “surge” brigades, is scheduled to return to Fort Riley, Kan., later in the spring after spending 14 months in the Iraqi capital.

Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th BCT and native of Austin, Texas, said while his Soldiers may be on the stretch run, they still have a lot of work to do.

“The ADVON’s arrival is an important milestone for transition between the Dragon and Raider brigades,” Gibbs said. “We’re glad to see the Raider Soldiers here at Falcon, and everyone’s working hard to make sure we conduct a proper battle handover.”

With her replacement showing up with the advanced party, Spc. Chemique Walker, an intelligence analyst with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th BCT, said she is trying to maintain her focus even though her replacement is now on the post.

“It’s hard to concentrate,” the Birmingham, Ala., native said. “It’s not ‘They’re in Kuwait.’ They’re actually showing up at FOB Falcon.”

Walker added that to keep her mind on the task at hand, she is teaching her replacement everything that she knows.

“I’m letting them ask me questions and that’s keeping me focused. Whatever they want to know, I show them,” she said.

For Sgt. Barbara Tobin, the training non-commissioned officer attached to HHC, 4th BCT, who plans to stay with the 1st BCT, the arrival of the “Raider” ADVON means meeting her new co-workers.

“I find it easy to get along with most people; there shouldn’t be any problem with the transition,” said the Anaheim, Calif., native.

“I’ve been looking forward to helping the new training NCO. Regardless of where they have me, I’ll do the best I can.”

The “Raiders,” who are on their third deployment after deploying to Tikrit and Taji will assume responsibility of the Rashid District.
"We sent our trucks right in behind them," Rosenberg said. "They had interlocking fire on the enemy. There was a lot of fire, mostly RPGs."

As the platoon moved toward the site, its Soldiers were also fired upon at an intersection. With the amount of RPGs and small-arms fire being fired, said Henry, and the numerous caches hidden by the criminals in the area, the right side of the road caught fire. The Soldiers of Rosenberg's platoon then saw an opportunity to push forward into a market to get a better angle of fire on the enemy. Fourth platoon shifted fire as Rosenberg's platoon pushed up into what they now call "Death Valley."

"On the right side, there was a huge fire, and to my left were alleyways," Rosenberg said. The Soldiers pulled security down the alleyways and were receiving fire from there also.

"It was a shooting gallery; guys were popping out of everywhere," he said. Criminals were popping out from corners and firing rounds, while others stood atop balconies and rooftops and snuck in pop shots; however, it had no effect on the Soldiers.

"The gunners did an awesome job," said Rosenberg. Initially, the platoon sergeant's truck was in the lead.

One RPG hit right in front of his truck; then, as the criminal came back from behind his corner to fire, he was hit with 50-cal rounds. The gunner, Pfc. Hunter Bruns, saved his fellow comrades from being hit with an RPG.

"He saved my truck," said Rosenberg. "Pfc. Bruns was absolutely incredible," said Rosenberg. "He was unloading on guys 150 meters away from him and shooting controlled pairs at their head."

He said he really couldn't say enough about how his platoon and the rest of the company performed that night and over the next couple of days.

"My guys did awesome."

"With the exception of four guys, it was everyone's first time in contact," said Rosenberg, "so you expect everyone to be nervous, but their training kicked in.

"They proved they were there to stay and fight," Henry said. "The first night out, all their guys were manning their (tactical check-points); they were securing the intersections they needed to secure."

The Iraqi Army battalion is responsible for manning checkpoints in the out muhallahs around Kadhamiyah, said Henry, who added he felt they did a good job not letting anyone within.

They secured alleyways, which the criminals were using to maneuver and fire upon Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces, Henry said.

"They are reliable," he declared. "Perhaps it is a true testament of how far the Iraqi Army has come. Nearly a year ago, when Co. D, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division conducted the area, the Soldiers also faced a similar attack from special groups' forces, said Henry.

The Soldiers in the unit went to arrest a group of criminals at a building in Kadhamiyah and were ambushed as well, he said. At that time however, the IA did not help with the fight at all.

"We didn’t see any of that happen this time. They were here to fight," said Henry. The IA Soldiers played vital role securing a key checkpoint during the engagements, he said. Along the Tigris River, on one of the main routes in Kadhamiyah, the IA secured the tactical control point, which allowed freedom of movement for Coalition and ISF combat power into the fight at any given time.

"I think the IA did very well during the incidents," Brown said. "They manned their checkpoints and didn’t run and leave. They did what they thought was right."

"The Iraqi Army withstood enemy contact and helped secure key terrain during the conflict."

The attacks set by the criminal elements were very complex, to say the least, said Henry, adding that he believes the special groups set themselves up around the Kadhamiyah Shrine and set up boundaries around them as their defensive perimeter.

The terrorists used explosively formed projectiles as a protective barrier on the outside perimeter, he added, hoping Coalition and ISF would cross their outer boundary, at which point they would come under attack from EFPs and other explosives, with RPGs and small-arms fire used as their inner perimeter security.

However, that was not the case. "We smacked them pretty good," said Henry. We were very careful not to push into their perimeter."

As a result of the damage inflicted on the criminal forces, Henry said he believes they have either left town or gone into hiding, which is allowing life to get back to normal in Kadhamiyah.

Local citizens are once again moving throughout the area, and the shops are open. The markets are not as busy as they usually are, which is understandable because people are still a bit apprehensive.

Iraqi Army soldiers will continue to man checkpoints in Kadhamiyah to deter any enemy combatants from entering the area as the daily lives of the people return to normal, said Brown.
NP takes lead in combined cordon, search operation

By Spc. Grant Okubo
4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTA-MIYAH, Iraq — Iraqi National Police took the lead during a combined operation with Multi-National Division — Baghdad Soldiers in the eastern Baghdad neighborhood of Kamilayah April 21.

NPs from 2nd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st National Police Division, in Beladat, worked with Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, and 2nd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st National Police Division, National Police Transition Team, during the cordon- and search mission; the Soldiers from both supporting units are attached to 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division.

“The operation went perfect,” said Bilal Jahnem Ahmed, a National Policeman with the 2nd Bn., 4th Bde., 1st NP Div. According to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s orders, the objective (was) to halt the bad activities carried out by Jaysh Al Mahdi members and other terrorists, explained Ahmed.

A recent change to security policies was the focus of the cordon and search, said Ahmed. In the past, residents in the area were allowed to carry weapons; however, the policy has changed and now all weapons in the neighborhood must be collected.

“There was actually our first time going out with them on a cordon and search of this magnitude,” said Capt. John Coligado, an Elk Grove Village, Ill., Native, who serves as the executive officer for 2nd Bn., 4th Bde., 1st NP Div. NPTT. “It’s not an abnormal operation, but it is the first time that they are going out and conducting a mission of this size.”

Coligado said the NP’s ability to follow the orders of their chain of command was key to mission success. The NPs held themselves to the same standards of the rules of engagement MND-B Soldiers do, and they were able to reassure area residents of their safety and security, he added.

These missions are a preventative measure against the establishment of weapons caches in the area.

Cougars Squadron kicks off Raider Typhoon

By Staff Sgt. Brent Williams
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq — Knocking on doors; greeting the Family; talking about politics, the neighbors or just the weather over a hot cup of overly sweet chai — a pleasant side of operations for Multi-National Division — Baghdad Soldiers who have operated in the southeastern Rashid district for the past eight months.

For Soldiers of “Fox,” Company F, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, MND-B, interpersonal relations, consensus information and the pictures Soldiers conduct point raids April 16-17, acting on military intelligence and information from Sons of Iraq (Abna, terrorists and criminal elements a safe haven in the area that is home to approximately 1.2 million citizens in Baghdad.

“The units then transitioned into the second phase of their operations, conducting ongoing atmospherics in the neighborhoods, working with the Sol, the sheiks, and members of the local community, to gather data with the intent to build better relations with the predominately Shia and mixed Sunni-Shia communities, he explained.

“We are conducting point operations to improve security for the people of Iraq,” said Capt. Kevin Ryan, commander, Co. F, 2nd Sqdn., 2nd Stryker Cav. Regt.

“Once security improves, we can focus on improving the quality of life for the people of Abu T’shir and southeastern Rashad.”

The ongoing clearing operations are part of 1st “Raider” BCT’s first effort since assuming its mission April 13, to deny terrorists and criminals, said Ryan, who is on his third deployment to Iraq.

“In the meantime, the Soldiers of Co. F, occupying a combat outpost in northeast Rashid, want to take a few more bad guys off the streets before they leave Baghdad.

“People who are sitting on the fence, and don’t know which way to go, will go our way just because we talked with them,” Ryan explained. “If we do this right, we will build relationships with the people which will empower them to be able to keep these bad guys from coming back into their neighborhoods.”

Conducting census operations, checkpoint inspections, joint patrols, combined operations and traffic control points with Iraqi Security Forces is nothing out of the ordinary for the Stryker Soldiers, said Sgt. 1st Class Roberto Huie, a platoon sergeant assigned to Co. F, 2nd Sqdn., 2nd Stryker Cav. Regt.

“We are walking through the neighborhoods – that is an everyday thing,” he explained.

Early morning operations hunting down 1st BCT’s most wanted criminals is just an added bonus for the “Fox” Soldiers, said Huie, a 19-year veteran, who hails from Brooklyn, N.Y., and is the company’s acting first sergeant while his senior non-commissioned officer is on environmental leave.

“Our preferred method is to knock, and 90 percent of the people are more than willing to let us in,” stated Huie. “Conversely, if we find a house that looks suspicious to us, or a Family that looks suspicious to us, and they don’t want to let us in their house, sometimes we have to cut their locks.

“We may not see the results in the next three weeks, but I think this operation is going to generate a lot of tips and a lot more houses, and eventually we will get them,” added Huie. “Whether the people like it or not, we are coming through their whole neighborhood to get these criminals off the streets.”

The company’s mission has varied greatly during their time as a “surge unit” operating in southern Baghdad since August of 2007, said Huie.

“The Fox Soldiers have worked throughout Saha and Abu T’shir in south-eastern Rashid to assist with essential services, force protection for Iraqi contractors to fix sewage or electricity issues in the Iraqi maisals (neighborhoods), as well as providing over watch for ISF and SOI manning checkpoints, providing security for the local communities, he said.

Staff Sgt. Scott Campbell, squad leader, Co. F, 2nd Sqdn., 2nd Stryker Cav. Regt., said that he hopes to see more changes for the better as the unit prepares to leave Baghdad for the unit’s future mission in Baqubah.

“There’s a better peace now, than there was before the ‘surge,’” said Campbell, a native of Orlando.

Campbell a veteran of 11 years, said that in three deployments in support of OIF, from 2003 to today, he has seen many changes, especially in the security situation around southern Baghdad.

“I think that when we go around and meet the locals and get to know them better on a personal basis, they become more at ease with us,” he explained. “The more we get to talk with them the better they trust us; the more they like us.”

Campbell said that in addition to improving security, units must continue to work to improve the infrastructure to better meet the needs of the Iraqi people.

“They need to improve faster,” he said. “Iraqis need to start pushing a lot more effort into rebuilding their infrastructure; power, water, medical treatment, jobs, ways to create jobs. Stuff that could be making them money is not making them money right now, and I believe that we need to pursue those endeavors more.”

The Cougars will begin their third phase of the operations in May, as they begin to transition the Abu T’Shir and Saha neighborhoods to 7th Sqdn., 10th Cav. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B.
Soldiers help improve security in Sadr City

By Spc. Joseph Rivera Rebolledo
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Multi-National-Division – Baghdad Soldiers, along with their Iraqi Security Forces partners, helped improve security in the southern portion of the Sadr City district of Baghdad during a barrier emplacement mission May 3.

During the shift, the Soldiers from Company A, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, transported more than 90 concrete barriers so that engineers from other units could clean the areas and place the barriers that will separate one Sadr City neighborhood from another, said Sgt. 1st Class Shaun Prior, a native of Quincy, Ill., and who serves as a driver with Company A, 64th BSB.

The emplacement of these barriers will help improve the living conditions of the residents there and is aimed to keep criminals operating the special groups in Sadr City from crossing to this area as well as minimizing the planting of improvised-explosive devices, mortar attacks and rockets used by special groups, said Prior.

“Hopefully it makes the Iraqi people safer,” said Prior.

On the other hand, as a sign of improvement and collaboration, the Iraqi Army is assisting in this operation by transporting barriers and by bringing them to the barrier yard, said Prior.

“This was a kind of the new things for us. I have watched them get out there, they hook up the chains; they work with the civilian crane operators and put the barriers in place and all that good stuff. I think is really helping them in many different ways,” said Prior.

The barrier mission in the area has shown an improvement in the security for the citizens living in the surrounding areas.

“I see people are more active now; they are getting out of their houses. This is the first time I’ve seen kids outside playing soccer,” said Sgt. Damon Chatterton, a native of Quincy, Ill., and who serves as a driver with Company A, 64th BSB.

Prior said he feels the Soldiers are merely demonstrating their true professionalism.

“Soldiers did a great job,” he said. “Their motivation is there, and they want to continue doing the mission. They are doing an outstanding job. The Soldiers drive is awesome – they do a great job.”

Iraqi police continue to train, prepare for future missions

By Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger
18th MP Bde. PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq – Only four miles west of the criminal spurred violence in Sadr City, more than forty Iraqi policemen arrive early in the morning to begin training at the al Rashad Police Station in the New Baghdad District May 15.

Despite being in the shadow of violence in neighboring Sadr City, a stronghold for criminal militias in Baghdad, the al Rashad Iraqi policemen show up to work with smiles on their faces and eager to conduct the days training.

The IP recently completed a Basic Recruit Training and are now conducting a two week on-the-job training program before hitting the streets of al Rashad to police their community.

“This area (New Baghdad District) was bad about a month ago. This was a real big hot spot for crime during the Baghdad uprising,” said 2nd Lt. James Shaffer, native of Cumberland, Md., who is a platoon leader with 3rd platoon, 54th Military Police Company, and oversees Police Transition Team operations in the New Baghdad District.

Violence has begun to decrease in the past month in the New Baghdad District.

“Crime is down lately in the New Baghdad area and around the IP station that we work at,” said Sgt. Paul Tran, a native of Anaheim, Calif., who is a military police team leader with 3rd platoon and conducts PTT operations at various New Baghdad IP stations.

The military police team at the station credited the drop in violence to diligent leadership at the station and the New Baghdad IP taking a more proactive approach to deterting crime.

“This training teaches the IP how to be more proactive in policing their communities,” said Shaffer. “The station commander is also very proactive by seeking out guidance from Coalition Forces and constantly trying to improve his station.”

The training Shaffer refers to is a two-week long, on-the-job training program that the IP work through in order to become certified policemen. The classes are taught daily for approximately six hours at the station by Iraqi Police advisors. The IPAs are contracted law enforcement personnel, who came to Iraq to help build the IP force from their knowledge and experiences in law enforcement positions.

“Today, we are teaching the IP how to maintain basic police training, foot patrols, dynamic take-down and suspect control, apprehension techniques and responding to an ambush,” said Mike Ridgell, an IPA, and a native of Baltimore.

“The training provides the IP a better background and understanding of their daily duties,” said Shaffer.

Although the violence has gone down in the area in the past month, the IPA and PTT Soldiers are equally surprised that the IP still chose to join the force in such great numbers when Sadr City is right in their backyard.

“Knowing the violence is going on, and still wanting to come out here and try to make a difference, really shows how much these IP want to improve their community,” said Shannon Edson, an IPA and a native of Dayton, Nev.

In the past two improvised-explosives devices, one carjacking and one kidnapping were reported to the IP at the station, said Tran.

“Every day, the Rashad police work while knowing they are in harms way,” said Tran. “It is our job to train, advise and guide the IP to help them defend their communities.”

The team leader (Tran) said he is surprised by the amount of courage the IP have in fighting crime when the shadow of violence in Sadr City is only a few miles away.

“It takes a lot of courage to join a police force during this time of violence,” said Tran.

The 54th MP Co. is deployed from Fort Lewis, Wash., and is currently assigned to the 95th Military Police Battalion, 18th Military Police Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.
Iraqi businesses display wares at expo

By Sgt. Jeremy Todd
4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.


Entrepreneurs and shopkeepers met at the hotel to display their products and services and to meet other Karadah business owners and community leaders. Participants setting up booths represented businesses in the fields of retail sales, construction, durable and industrial goods and even a beekeeper selling honey. In addition, several non-government agencies and municipal officials set up and visited booths, and various Arab media organizations covered both days of the conference and expo.

The Iraqi Chamber of Commerce and Industry hosted the two-day event, which Baghdad-2 embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team officials estimate more than 2,000 visitors attended. Conrad Tribble, leader of Baghdad-2 PRT, a Washington, native, said this was the largest event of its kind to take place in Baghdad outside the International Zone in a long time.

“The event was a success because it sent a strong message to government leaders of Baghdad that business owners are an important voice of the community,” proclaimed Tribble. The business owners of Karadah have a positive message, he said. Baghdad-2 e-PRT, based at Forward Operating Base Loyalty, sponsored 10 booths at the expo for local small-business owners, while the main Baghdad PRT, based in the IZ, sponsored 10 booths.

In addition to leading the team, Tribble serves as the e-PRT’s political specialist, drawing on his 20 years of experience as a State Department foreign services officer. He said his mission is to bring civilian development and diplomacy to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division operating environment.

“What we are trying to do through our participation is to stimulate the private sector as well as see what kinds of businesses would come out,” explained Tribble, crediting the Iraqi Chamber of Commerce and Industry for planning and executing the expo and conference.

Madeeha Hasan Odhaib, a Karadah business owner and member of the Karadah District Advisory Council, whom Time Magazine recently named one of the world’s top 100 most influential people of 2008, attended the event. She employs 100 Iraqi women in the sewing factory in the district.

“I’m happy that Iraqi ladies of Karadah are allowed and encouraged to participate in events such as these,” said Odhaib, whom Queen Rania of Jordan nominated for the Time Magazine honor.

Baghdad’s provincial governor, Hussein al Tahan; Sabir al-Ihsawi, the mayor of Baghdad; and Mu’in Hamid Abd al-Majid al-Kadhimi, Baghdad Provincial Council chairman, attended the event to support Karadah businesses.

Baghdad e-PRT-2 and Baghdad PRT sponsored the Business-2-Business trade show in February, in which more than 300 businesses from throughout the capital participated. That “monumentally successful” event, explained Tribble, spawned the idea for each local district to have its own expo, highlighting local business owners and addressing their concerns.

Next month, the Rusafa district of Baghdad will host its expo, and it won’t be long before every district in Baghdad has celebrated its inaugural business expo.

Tribble commented that “this is sort of developing a Baghdad-wide wave of enthusiasm and attention to the private sector, which we all like to think is the primary stimulus for economic growth … the main potential for employment growth over the next several years.”
Roderick that something was found.

A nearly three-month project to renovate Baghdad Al Jadida Pool Complex was officially complete when the swimming pool reopened to the public June 7.

A mixture of area residents, local Iraqi officials and religious leaders, and representatives of Multi-National Division – Baghdad, Multi-National Division (Light), attended the event to see if the grand opening would make a big splash. All indications are it did.

“It was an excellent ceremony, and the sheikhs (are) very appreciative of all the effort that went into the renovation of the pool and the ceremony,” said Sayyid Abdul Hadi al Jazairy, a prominent Imam from Baghdad al Jadida. “We hope for continued positive events in the future.”

In a joint effort between Government of Iraq officials and Patriot Brigade leaders from 4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (L), the existing Baghdad Al Jadida pool site was identified as one of four pools in Baghdad to renovate and put into operation for the summer months, explained Maj. Jeffrey Smith, Patriot Brigade civil-military operations officer in charge.

“The renovation of the pool with Commanders Emergence Relief Program funds assists the Government of Iraq in a return to normalcy for the civilian populace and, as a joint effort, became a major non-lethal offensive,” said Smith.

“The brigade’s objective is to ensure all remember and continue to look out for the kids of Baghdad: the future of Iraq,” said Smith.

The purpose of the CERP-funded project is to support Iraqi efforts to generate tangible signs of normalcy while initiating training and employment opportunities for Iraqis, emphasized Smith.

Patriot Brigade leaders nominated pools within their operational environment to be refurbished based on justifying why the pools would provide the greatest benefit to their neighborhoods. The brigade coordinated with three political district’s beladiyahs, directors general, neighborhood councils and district councils in selecting and nominating pools, explained Smith.

The project began March 19. Renovations included replacing a broken diving board, painting the exterior wall, repairing and maintaining plumbing, cleaning bathroom facilities, demolishing buildings and creating a parking area. Officials spent more than $375,000 and employed 45 locally contracted workers during the project.

The brigade continues to coordinate efforts with the GoI to get pools operational and is working on refurbishing two more pools, said Smith.

“Our number one priority is security,” he stated, “and an operational pool will contribute to visible signs of normalcy for everyone.”

Al Jadida pool opens, makes big splash

By Staff Sgt. Matthew Meadows
4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – Scouring a refreshing blow against impending sweltering summer temperatures, Al Jadida officials decided to get their feet wet and dive headfirst into meeting the needs of the local populace.

The “Bloodhounds” are the Soldiers of 4th Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment “Gimlets,” 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, photographs a weapons cache found in the Ayasha village, northwest of Baghdad, May 29.

Gimlet Bloodhounds ‘sniff out’ weapons cache

By Spc. Dustin Weidman

BAGHDAD – “No one will ever find it here,” may have crossed the minds of criminals who buried a cache of weapons next to a farm wall outside a home in rural Abu Ghraib, northwest of Baghdad.

But they did not count on the “Bloodhounds.”

The “Bloodhounds” are the Soldiers of 4th Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, “Gimlets,” 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and they are known for their uncanny ability to “sniff out” weapons caches and other hidden contraband.

The Soldiers of the platoon lived up to their reputation, finding a large cache of weapons in the village of Ayasha, northwest of Baghdad, May 29. With only their instincts and a metal detector, they successfully found the cache during a dismounted patrol through the village.

“I just had a feeling about this area. I knew something was here and we had to find it,” said “Bloodhound” team leader Cpl. Paul Roderick, resident of Wahiawa, Hawaii.

His team echoed his thoughts.

The “Bloodhounds” said they love to search and find weapons caches and are proud to have taken this cache and many others out of the hands of criminals and will continue to search for dangerous weapons, even if they don’t find any every day.

“Sometimes we are lucky and sometimes not,” Roderick said. “Today, we got lucky.”
IA, MND-B Soldiers light up Baghdad neighborhood

Story and photos by Sgt. Jerry Saslav
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – At first glance it doesn’t look like much: a construction site with a large wooden box strapped to a forklift, a crane, approximately 15 Iraqi Army and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers, and a small pile of equipment.

Such was the humble beginning of a project designed to deter militant and extremist activity, improve public safety and security, and ease the burdens on the growing Iraqi infrastructure.

Street lights are being installed – solar-powered street lights to be precise.

“The 4th Infantry Division has been the driving force through this project. (They) came in and said, ‘We want to do something to help the people, the Iraqi security Forces,’” said Capt. Adam Levitt, a native of El Paso, Texas, who is currently serving on a military transition team from 4th Inf. Div., MND-B, as the engineer advisor for the 6th Iraqi Army Division.

From day one, the project has come from the 4th Inf. Div. and MND-B, he said.

Levitt, along with Darryl Steadman, who is a civilian advisor, a translator and approximately ten IA soldiers, began to install the first four of 100 solar powered street lights June 19.

Since the lights are solar powered, they do not place any burden on the Iraqi electrical grid.

“Right now, the infrastructure won’t support it (this many new lights). Although Iraq is working on the electrical grid and the infrastructure … it’s not quick enough; we need something now, and this seems to be a pretty good solution,” said Steadman, a native of Denver, who is part of the military assistance team and Iraqi assistance group for the 6th IA Div., military transition team, 4th Inf. Div. Steadman is currently working with the 6th IA Div.’s engineer battalion.

The lights also have other benefits.

“We know this (project) is going to make a direct impact on the populace,” said Levitt. “It’s removing the darkness – the safe haven for the terrorists, for criminal activity.”

“The installation of the first lights went smoothly. A group of IA soldiers set the light pole into place and, with Steadman’s assistance, made sure it was level and secured into place. Two other IA soldiers, in a wooden box attached to the forklift, bolted the light fixture, solar panel and its support equipment into place.

“They want to be involved in this on a level that will show at least us, as advisors … that they can handle this on their own and that they’re ready to take on their mission with very little help or assistance from U.S. or Coalition forces,” said Steadman.

“This project has been extremely rewarding. There is something very special about seeing something evolve right in front of your eyes,” said Levitt. “Everybody’s picking up a wrench; everybody’s carrying heavy equipment. You don’t need a translator for that.”

For Steadman, who served in Iraq in 2003-2004 as a member of the U.S. military, said that although he feels Iraq still has work to do, the country has come a long way.

“I think this gives confidence to the people. People are driving up and down and seeing lights going in. What kind of message does this give to the people? We’re here to help, and we’re going forward; we’re not stagnant,” said Steadman.

The lights, which cost approximately $4,000 each, will eventually be placed in the Muthana, Douhra, Ghazaliya and Abu Ghuraib sections of Baghdad and in the city of Taji.
New children’s playground opens in Saydiyah

By Capt. Mark Miller
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – As daylights last remaining hours set over the horizon June 23, and the summertime heat of Baghdad’s Rashid district lost the spike of its intensity; a crowd could be seen forming even from a distance.

It was a special day for the gathering of citizens and children from Saydiyah, a community located in the southern part of the Iraqi capital, as they gathered for the long-awaited official opening of a new playground in their neighborhood.

“I think the children will really enjoy this, and I am honored to be here at the official opening,” said Maj. Peter Sicoli, the executive officer for the 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

The Saydiyah Support Council Chairman, Ali Abu Nebid, alongside others in attendance cut the ceremonial ribbon to officially open the playground.

While the children played on the newest addition to their community, Nebid made it a point to thank Coalition Forces.

“The people appreciate you being here, and I appreciate all the help from the Americans,” Nebid stated. “Not only with the logistics of helping to build this park, but for their assistance with the Iraqi Security Forces to make this area safe enough for a park.”

While many played on the swings and teeter-totter, Nebid hopped on the merry-go-round with a group of playful children.

Capt. Drew Betson, the commander of Company A, 4th Bn., 64th Armor Regt., is responsible for the Saydiyah area and has worked with the local support council as well as ISF to turn the playground idea into a reality.

Betson, who hails from Midway, Ga., was glad to see the day when children were actually playing in the park.

“These kids are great,” said Betson, as a crowd of children surrounded him speaking familiar English phrases. “They deserve a place like this to enjoy just being kids.”

The families enjoyed the cooling effects of the covered benches while watching their children play.

This is not the first improvement that has occurred in recent months in Saydiyah. The 4th Bn., 64th Armor Regt., “Tuskers” Battalion, working in conjunction with Nebid and their ISF counterparts, have recently provided generated power for Saydiyah’s Tejara Street and opened a swimming pool. More projects are tentatively scheduled to open in the future.

The Tuskers are a part of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, stationed out of Fort Stewart, Ga., and are currently serving a 15-month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Multi-National Division – Baghdad

Zawra Park’s pool re-opens after recent refurbishment

By Sgt. Jason Thompson
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Summer days in Baghdad often rival some of the hottest days from across the globe; and until recently, many residents of central Baghdad’s Karkh district did not have any place where they could visit to escape from the heat.

Zawra Park officials worked closely with Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, to re-open the park’s public swimming pool July 5.

“This is a great day for the citizens of Baghdad,” said Salah Abou El Lail, park director, Zawra Park.

“This pool will be a great and enjoyable destination for many Baghdad Families. Families already enjoy visiting the park and the zoo here, and the pool will be fun for everyone.”

The project to refurbish the swimming pool complex began more than four months ago and cost just less than $500,000 to complete.

Temperatures in Iraq regularly surpass 120 degrees during the merciless summer. But, for the Soldiers who patrol the streets in central Baghdad, the pool is a welcome scene which will help the people they’re here to protect.

“This makes me proud,” said Lt. Col. Fred Wintrich, a Union City, Texas, native, and executive officer, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. “Everyone worked hard together to reopen this pool for the Iraqi citizens.”

“This is a good example of what cooperation between the local officials, Iraqi Security Forces and U.S. Forces can accomplish,” said Wintrich.

“We’ve helped to improve the security of the region so that the local residents could enjoy a more peaceful community to raise their families.”

During the opening day’s festivities, children and young adults alike swam and splashed around in the water with large smiles, knowing that the pool signified more than just a new recreational activity in the already popular Zawra Park.

The Zawra Park’s public swimming pool in central Baghdad reopened July 5. The park recently went through a thorough revitalization with the help of Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, MND-B.
Istaqlal Iraqi Police graduate, join force

By Sgt. Zach Mott
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – More than 750 members officially joined the Iraqi Police force in Boob al-Sham in a northern Baghdad district during a ceremony held July 13.

As wind howled and the dust kicked up by the marching IPs across the open desert, the men proudly smiled in their new uniforms.

Once the ceremony was complete, these new members of the Iraqi Security Forces began operations in the Istaqlal district’s Husseiniya, Boob al-Sham and Sheik Sa’ad.

“Obviously it puts more security personnel on the street which always helps us because we partner with the Iraqi Security Forces in everything we do,” said Capt. Matthew Jensen, an Omaha, Neb., native who serves as the commander of Company B, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armored Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad. Jensen, his troops and the ISF work together to bring security and stability to the people in this district 10 miles from Baghdad’s heart.

The added police presence will also serve to help bolster the economy in this fertile agriculture region. “These IPs are from this area. It brings security to these families as well because they know where their next meal is coming from,” Jensen said.

The IPs also present a friendly face to the people of the area. “It’s very important to have IPs in this area because that’s who the community looks to, that’s who they recognize as somebody that’s here for them to help them,” said 1st Lt. Charles Houston, a platoon leader with the 108th Military Police Company which is attached the 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Members of the Istaqlal district’s police hold the Iraqi flag during graduation ceremony activities in this northern Baghdad district July 13.

3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

CAB medics hone MASCAL scenario skills

By Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt
CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – At high noon the call came.

With temperatures sizzling at 130 degrees, on a make-shift temperature gauge, 14 injured American Soldiers were unloaded off a Blackhawk helicopter with only minutes to spare.

The time had come for the medics of the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, to throw on their combat gear, grab their medical bags and rush to the airfield in their combat quarters Co., CAB. Victims were unloaded of the Blackhawk helicopter with only minutes to spare.

Once the ceremony was complete, these new members of the Iraqi Security Forces began operations in the Istaqlal district’s Husseiniya, Boob al-Sham and Sheik Sa’ad.

“Obviously it puts more security personnel on the street which always helps us because we partner with the Iraqi Security Forces in everything we do,” said Capt. Matthew Jensen, an Omaha, Neb., native who serves as the commander of Company B, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armored Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad. Jensen, his troops and the ISF work together to bring security and stability to the people in this district 10 miles from Baghdad’s heart.

The added police presence will also serve to help bolster the economy in this fertile agriculture region. “These IPs are from this area. It brings security to these families as well because they know where their next meal is coming from,” Jensen said.

The IPs also present a friendly face to the people of the area. “It’s very important to have IPs in this area because that’s who the community looks to, that’s who they recognize as somebody that’s here for them to help them,” said 1st Lt. Charles Houston, a platoon leader with the 108th Military Police Company which is attached the 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Members of the Istaqlal district’s police hold the Iraqi flag during graduation ceremony activities in this northern Baghdad district July 13.

3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

CAB medics hone MASCAL scenario skills

By Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt
CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – At high noon the call came.

With temperatures sizzling at 130 degrees, on a make-shift temperature gauge, 14 injured American Soldiers were unloaded off a Blackhawk helicopter with only minutes to spare.

The time had come for the medics of the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, to throw on their combat gear, grab their medical bags and rush to the airfield in their combat quarters Co., CAB. Victims were unloaded of the Blackhawk helicopter with only minutes to spare.

CAB treated a collapsed lung, shrapnel to the abdomen and a patient with second and third degree burns.

After the patients were treated and evaluated, Soldiers secured the injured to gurneys and loaded them in the ambulances.

Medics from the CAB train evacuating and treating patients constantly because if a mass casualty situation ever occurred they could do their job with confidence.


U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.
Wall murals change Sadr City skyline

By Maj. Mike Humphreys
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – The meandering concrete monoliths of the Sadr City district of Baghdad got a welcomed facelift Aug. 2 thanks to local talent and beautification projects initiated by the Government of Iraq and Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

During the height of combat operations in Sadr City, barrier emplacement was an effective tactic to isolate Special Groups and criminals from their revenue extorted from the people and businesses of the Thawra 1 and Thawra 2 neighborhoods, home to some of the largest markets in Baghdad.

“We were emplacing barriers day and night, 24/7,” said Lt. Col. John Digiambattista, of Colorado Springs, Colo., operations officer for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, MND-B.

On this early August day, calm has been restored to the district.

Markets are flourishing and essential services are returning where less than three months ago rubble and sewage filled the streets.

Purposely constructed gaps in the wall now allow access in and out of the city for residents, where Iraqi Army stand guard at checkpoints to ensure the ill-minded can no longer hold the city hostage.

Though in parts of Sadr City the wall remains a gray scar, a testimony to recent battles, it’s a perception that is changing thanks to the bravery and talent of Iraqis like Abbas Ahmed Jaffer.

Jaffer recently completed vocational training that allowed him to build on his hobby of painting. He’s now part of a $100,000 contract to beautify the barriers that protect Sadr City with murals that represent Iraq’s culture and heritage.

“I’m doing something beautiful for my city,” Jaffer said painting a camel in a developing desert scene. “Instead of bad writings on the wall, when people drive by they will see pictures about Iraq.”

Progress on the wall and the effect it is having on the people even comes as a surprise to the MND-B Soldiers funding the project.

Maj. Byron Sarchet, of Colorado Springs, Colo., information operations officer for 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., said it doesn’t even look like Sadr City anymore.

He said the activity, the shops and the traffic have created a sense of normalcy not seen there before and the wall, both as a physical barrier and now an object of pride, has had much to do with the success.

“Part of our campaign was to change the visible skyline,” Sarchet said.

“Here is one good message to the next. You can stand at one (mural) and see the other.”

A portion of wall from the famed Mudafer Square, where Mohamed Sadiq al-Sadr’s image stares out over his name sake, to the intersection of the Jamilla al Quds road at Circle 55 is nearly complete with more than 50 murals.

Sarchet said artists will continue to paint and beautify the rest of wall throughout the city, but he’s not worried to see that some Iraqi entrepreneurs have got in ahead of the contractors.

“Let’s get some ice cream,” Sarchet calls to the driver spotting through the rear window of his vehicle, a tempting ad painted on the wall near the Jamilla Market. “That’s progress,” he said.

A T-barrier wall provides security for residents of the Sadr City district of northern Baghdad Aug 2.

Jaffer Shaab, a Sadr City resident, paints the background of a mural on a wall around Joint Security Station Thawra 2 near Circle 55 in the Sadr City district of northern Baghdad Aug 2.
Tigers make ‘Big Roar’ in Baghdad Zoo

By 1st Lt. Lindsey Travis

BAGHDAD – In December 2007, the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad, began working with the Baghdad Zoo and contacts in the United States to foster a partnership that would bring two new tigers to the zoo.

After much communication with different organizations, Lt. Col. Robert Sindler, a veterinarian with Multi National Corps – Iraq, and Capt. Jason Felix, the project manager for 2nd BSTB, found the Conservators’ Center of North Carolina.

The Conservators’ Center is a nonprofit educational wildlife organization that preserves threatened species through responsible captive breeding, helps rescue and place wildlife in need and offers resources for educators and scientists.

The center had two Bengal cubs, Hope and Riley, who were taken in after the zoo they lived in closed in 2007. The Baghdad Zoo passed intense scrutiny by the Conservators’ Center, which initially expressed concern over the safety and welfare of the tigers. However, they recognized the tigers would be in a safe environment where they would be highly appreciated and bring enjoyment to the people of Iraq. The center decided to donate Hope and Riley to the people of Iraq with the approval of the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife to export the tigers.

After months of work, the tigers arrived in Baghdad Aug. 4 and were welcomed by U.S. Army veterinarians and the Soldiers of the 2nd BSTB.

The tigers were unveiled to the public at the Baghdad Zoo Aug. 8. Hope and Riley were in playful form as the cameras snapped and Iraqi families walked by, enjoying the sight of Baghdad’s newest residents. They are one more attraction that will bring visitors flocking to the peaceful environment of the zoo, proving once more that security is continually progressing throughout Iraq.

“I think the zoo’s progress, culminating in today’s arrival of the two tigers, exemplifies that there is significant good news coming out of Baghdad as life continues to return more to normal here and in many other areas of the country,” said Felix, a native of Tucson, Ariz.

Dr. Addele Salman Moussa, the director of the Baghdad Zoo, said it means a lot to him and the people of Iraq to receive such a gift.

“This day is a historical day for the Baghdad Zoo,” said the director. “We are really happy today. We want to bring smiles back to the kids and the public, who faced years of deprivation.”

As the security situation in Baghdad continues to improve, so does the attendance at the Baghdad Zoo. At least 2,000 Iraqis visit the zoo each weekday, with tens of thousands visitors on the weekends.

Radwaniyah IP achieve security milestone

New police station opens in southwest Rashid

By Staff Sgt. Brent Williams
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.


“The IP station has been functioning for almost a year now, recognized by the Government of Iraq until today.”


In his speech at the commemoration of the station, Kadhim said that the Iraqi people must stay aware and protect Baghdad by denying sectarianism.

The official opening of the Radwaniyah Iraqi Police Station signifies improved security in the area that is part of southwest Rashid, said Lt. Col. Johnnie Johnson, commander of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

“This event is a huge milestone for Radwaniyah,” said Johnson, whose battalion operates in the largely agricultural and predominantly Sunni community.

“The IP station has been functioning for the past four months but has not been recognized by the Government of Iraq until today.”

As security operations in Radwaniyah transition to the control of Iraqi Security Forces in Radwaniyah, the “Tuskers” Battalion will be able to focus on other priorities, such as economics and governance, said Johnson, who hails from Tampa, Fla.

“The Iraqis now have a local police force to protect the people and handle the routine activities and business related to security here in Radwaniyah,” he said. “That is a very, very big achievement.”

The police station has near to 100 percent of its staffing, comprised of people from Radwaniyah and from greater Baghdad, said Col. Ted Martin, commander of the 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

“This opening today is a great day and marks a new beginning for the government of Iraq and the people of Radwaniyah,” said Martin, a native of Jacksonville Beach, Fla.

“We have a very tight bond with the people of Radwaniyah. The tribal support council and the U.S. Army and Coalition Forces work hand-in-hand to provide security for this area.”

Partnered with local IP and the Iraqi National Police in southwest Rashid, the 1st BCT works with the local province support council to provide a solid umbrella of security for the residents of the Radwaniyah community, explained Martin.

Martin also noted that in the last 90 days, the Radwaniyah community has experienced almost no enemy activity due to the Iraqi people working alongside the Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces.

The Radwaniyah security forces of the Rashid district worked with the good people of Radwaniyah to achieve sustainable security, and we see that here today with the opening of the police station,” he said.
IP transition to be Baghdad’s first line of defense

An Iraqi Policeman mans a machine gun at a checkpoint in the Salhiya district of Baghdad Sept. 10. Salhiya was the first district in Baghdad to transfer from Iraqi Army to IP at all of its checkpoints.

By Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger
18th MP Bde. PAO

BAGHDAD – A large Iraqi Security Force convoy, which included several Iraqi Army humvees, exited the International Zone in Baghdad at midday Sept. 10. At the front and back of the convoy was an Iraqi Police patrol vehicle providing escort security for the convoy.

“That says something in itself,” said Capt. Nathan Brookshire, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion, while viewing the long line of humvees exiting the International Zone.

“Iraqi police pulling security for an Iraqi Army convoy – you don’t see that every day.”

At least you don’t in Baghdad where, until recent months the local populace security was provided by the Iraqi Army.

Now Iraqi Police are continuing the transition of becoming the primary ISF in Baghdad by taking over at checkpoints to provide the first line of security for the citizens of Baghdad.

In recent months the process of turning all Iraqi Army manned checkpoints over to the IP has been very successful.

Coalition Forces and IP leadership have seen great progress in this effort to make IP Baghdad’s primary local security force.

The Salhiya district is the first of the Baghdad districts to have all of its checkpoints turned over to IP control.

There are many key terrain features in the Salhiya district, which makes it an important district in the overall security of Baghdad.

One of these landmarks is the Salhiya Railway, which is Iraq’s main railway that runs from Mosul to Basra.

“The trains have been running successfully for about a year now,” said Capt. William Macugay, commander of Alpha Battery, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Along with the successful security of the railways, the police transition team that works in Salhiya said the transition has gone smoothly for the IP.

“The transition from IA to IP has been extremely smooth because of the connection between Iraqi Police leadership and the IA,” said Brookshire, a native of Richmond, Ken. “The ISF in Baghdad conduct joint security meetings so all the key leaders are in the same room talking about how to keep the area secure.”

Aside from Salhiya, the transition continues to spread throughout Baghdad.

“Within the next year, I predict we will have all of Baghdad transitioned to IP taking the lead at providing rule of law in their communities,” said Macugay, a native of Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

Macugay credits the IP success to the time the IA spent preparing the IP for the transition. The IP have gone through months of training and planning to be ready for this transfer. Now it was time for the Coalition Forces to see if the IP were ready to provide for their communities.

“A lot of planning went into the transition,” said Brookshire, who conducts police transition team operations, mentoring IP, at four Salhiya IP stations, including the district headquarters.

The initial phase of transitioning was to test the IP to make sure they were able to provide adequate security for the area.

IP leadership and CF inspected the checkpoints to make sure they had all their proper equipment for the checkpoint to operate successfully.

They continued the inspection by conducting rehearsals to test communications and response time of the IP force in emergency situations.

Since the transition took place the IP have been tested several times by criminal elements and have responded by providing law and order during every situation.

“In the past few months, the IP have responded to incidents on their own with minimal CF support,” said Brookshire. “The situation now is IP are in the lead; they respond to incidents within the district. They are the initial responders we act as more of a liaison for them now.”

The IP credit their success to the local community coming forth with information to reduce criminal activities in the area.

“The people in the community have an awareness of what is supposed to be there and what is not supposed to be there,” said Brookshire.

“We have seen increased reporting at the station level because the IP know the area.”

“We have a good working relationship with the citizens,” said Iraqi Policeman Capt. Nasser Abed, the Salhiya district headquarters operations officer.

“Our door is always open for citizens to report problems and they use a tip line where they can report criminal activities to us.”
Warhorse Brigade arrives in Iraq

By Sgt. Rodney Foliente
2nd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP ECHO, Iraq – Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, based out of Fort Carson, Colo., arrived to Multi-National Division – Central South and Camp Echo and assumed responsibility of Qadisiya Province.

“The Warhorse Brigade will provide overwatch with assistance by, with and through the Iraqi Security Forces as they continue to secure the Iraqi population in this province,” said Col. Butch Kievenaar, commander, 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

The Warhorse Brigade’s 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 67th Armor Battalion will be operating in northern Iraq, and the 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, will operate in eastern Iraq.

The battalion and squadron will each fall under different units; however, the Warhorse Brigade will continue to provide all of their support and logistics.

“We’re ready to do our mission and help the Iraqi people take over and get their country back on its feet,” said Sgt. David Barnes, armorer and gunner, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd CAB, 8th Inf. Regt.

Barnes, who calls Colorado Springs, Colo., home, is on his second deployment with 2-8th Inf. Regt., and patrolled some of the areas that currently fall under the Warhorse AI in 2005-2006. He said it’s a completely different mission than the last deployment and is eager to personally see how far security and stability have progressed.

The Soldiers of 2-8th Inf. Regt. hold the main responsibility for Coalition Forces’ presence in this province.

“We’re here to help the Iraqi people to better their local communities and country as a whole and help ensure they have a better way of life,” added Spc. Josh Dalland, scout, HHHC, 2-8th Inf. Regt., and a native of Grand Island, Neb.

Ironhorse sergeants inducted into NCO Corps

By Staff Sgt. Scott Wolfe
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As the official party exited the floor of the Camp Liberty Field House Sept. 29, the ceremony inducting the latest group of newly promoted Ironhorse sergeants into the Non-commissioned Officer Corps was complete.

Command Sgt. Maj. Edward Parker, a native of Warsaw, N.C., who serves as the senior enlisted leader with Division Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, welcomed the 26 Soldiers into the Corps.

“This is something one of my first sergeants or sergeants major came up to me about before we deployed,” said Parker. “They said they wanted a ceremony for 2-8th Inf. Regt., and patrolled some of the areas that currently fall under the Warhorse AI in 2005-2006. He said it’s a completely different mission than the last deployment and is eager to personally see how far security and stability have progressed.

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Instead of prepared remarks from behind a lectern, he walked up to the Soldiers being inducted and spoke to them of the powers that were attributed to them by their subordinates because they now wore the stripes of a noncommissioned officer – and of the responsibilities that went with those stripes.

He closed his speech and made eye contact with every new NCO in front of him and left them with something to think about.

“I can’t lead where I don’t go,” he said. “I can’t teach what I don’t know.”

Each of the new inductees signed a statement of understanding of the responsibilities of an NCO, with a sponsor from their unit and Parker as co-signers, symbolically showing the contract between leaders and those they lead.

The ceremony focused on the history of the NCO and the ties that connect the current Army to armies of the past.

“The tradition of commemorating the passing of a Soldier to a noncommissioned officer can be traced to the army of Fredrick the Great,” said the narrator. Gifts of bread and brandy, beer and tobacco were placed on a table with red, white and blue candles.

When lit, the candles represented the past and the blood that has been shed, the present and purity, and the future and loyalty for the country.

“This is the third (ceremony) – the last one,” said Parker.

The original plan had been to hold four induction ceremonies during the deployment, one a quarter, but that schedule had to be adjusted due to mission constraints on time.

“We will continue to do them when we return to home station,” he said.

“And believe it or not, a lot of sergeants major are doing this now. I wish they had them back when I got my stripes.”

The ceremonies have come to be a source of pride for the “steadfast and loyal” NCOs of the 4th Inf. Div. and will continue once again after the division redeploy early in 2009.
Life at Baghdad Zoo returning to normal with stable security

By Staff Sgt. James Hunter
2nd BCT PAO, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD – The Baghdad Zoo opened its doors to Iraqi citizens in 1971. Since then, it has been a key centerpiece to the lives of many Iraqis. Many travel from throughout Iraq to enjoy a peaceful day at the zoo with their families.

Due to the potential threat of violence and security issues in Iraq, however, the last several years have not brought many people to the zoo as many feared leaving their neighborhoods and, for some, the safety and security of their own homes.

"After Coalition Forces pushed into Iraq, ousting the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, the zoo and surrounding park were left unattended and desolate," said Staff Sgt. Paul Sanford, with the 2nd Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad. "Animals were abandoned, stolen or freed by looters and the park grounds were vandalized."

It was nearly two years before Coalition Forces began to seriously focus their efforts on the zoo after troops gained a foothold on the adjacent International Zone, which provided the opportunity for Dr. Salah, the Zawra Park Director, and Dr. Adel Mousa, the zoo’s director, to truly begin rebuilding the area.

Their efforts, combined with the efforts of Multi-National Division – Baghdad, have brought life back into the zoo.

"The people of (Iraq) visit the zoo quite frequently," said Sanford, who works closely with the zoo’s director. "It is a central location that helps them see the future of Iraq as a revitalized society and continues to build family relationships and a sense of normalcy in an area so often torn by hardship and conflict. Visiting the zoo and the surrounding Zawra Park area is as much a family outing here in Iraq as it is in the United States."

This time to forge friendships and strengthen family ties would not be where it is today without the efforts of Iraqi Security Forces and MND-B troops positioned throughout greater Baghdad.

When Iraqi Security Forces and MND-B cracked down on Special Groups extremists and sent many fleeing the area, it brought new life and a sense of normalcy back to the Iraqi people.

"The continued efforts of both Coalition Forces and the Government of Iraq have allowed people who once only ventured out for necessity to stray far from their homes at times, even if just to see the new tigers, Hope and Riley, now being proudly displayed there and considered a large success by both the zoo staff and Coalition Forces."

Mousa said he now sees a secure place for people from all over Iraq to visit.

"The people are all smiling; they are happy," said Sanford. "The security situation has made many Iraqis happy people, but none may be as happy as those children who walk through the gates of the Baghdad Zoo daily to see the lions, tigers, bears, an array of fish, flamingos, crocodiles, alligators or even a little girl favorite, a Pony."

Many are seen smiling, maybe some a bit frightened by those larger animals, as they walk across the green grass or the natural or manmade paths during their leisurely strolls.

Sitting atop the freshly cut green grass are many families with picnic baskets and soda cans in tow. The children seem to run endlessly until exhausted from the heat of the sun or the endless life breathing through their lungs.

Many young couples sit along wooden benches, perhaps even discussing their next steps together in life. It is unbelievable to think that a zoo can provide so much to a land stricken by endless war.

When Sanford visits the zoo to meet with his Iraqi counterpart, he too feels a difference in his surroundings. As he walks onto the grounds on the zoo, just as many do daily, he finds himself walking along a marbel walkway with an array of birds and fowl on either side surrounding him.

"As you walk from cage to cage, you will almost definitely notice the significant difference in cleanliness of the area," Sanford said. "Trash is placed in trash cans and sidewalks are kept swept and clean.

"As you make your way around, you will see families laughing and smiling, couples holding hands and children tugging on their parents to point out some fascinating creature. It is truly an experience – just as fulfilling for Soldiers often surrounded by the frustration of war and the rebuilding of a country as it is for families often thrown into chaos by acts of seemingly random violence."

When leaving the zoo’s grounds, one will most likely be reminded of how much every nation has in common no matter how different they are seen.

"The building of families and friendship is the core message provided by the Baghdad Zoo, and it is a message certainly not lost on those of us lucky enough to be a part of that," Sanford said.

Like many nations across the globe, families play an important role in the everyday lives of Iraqi citizens. The Baghdad Zoo offers them a place to strengthen those family bonds.

With young girls in sundresses, families carrying baskets of food and children with smiles for miles, it’s a small world without any worry to the situation on the outside.
By Ken Griffin
2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — Residents of Tarmiyah, a small city on the Tigris River northwest of Baghdad, stood tall with smiles on their faces Oct. 22 as they spoke words of hope and reconciliation; according to those gathered, the date was yet another dramatic turning point in their recent history.

Led by Sheik Sa’ed Jassim al-Mashadani, chairman of the Municipality Committee of al Tarmiyah Qada, Tarmiyah’s local officials hosted a number of provincial and Government of Iraq representatives at their first Civic Expo.

City residents hope to accomplish a number of tasks in the future, and they chose a unique, effective way to accomplish their goals, such as bringing Government of Iraq officials to them so they could show, firsthand, the economic and political progress they’ve made in the area.

“Two years ago, an event like this would not have been possible,” said Capt. Calvin Kline, a native of Cincinnati, who serves as an information operations officer with 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment “Golden Dragons,” 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “Even one year ago, the security situation would not have allowed it.”

Kline, who played a key role in supporting Tarmiyah’s planning for the event, should know. He’s witnessed the gradual transformation of Tarmiyah from one of the “worst places in Iraq” to the booming economic center it is today.

Soldiers from 1st Bn., 14th Inf. Regt., shared the brunt of the work with residents to get the city where it is. During the past year, they’ve seen their role in the area shift after effectively training Iraqi Security Forces in the area and witnessing the Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) stand up for their security. They now serve more as advisors in an overwatch position with Iraqis responsible for their own security.

This is also true of the construction there. The majority of reconstruction funds in Tarmiyah come from the GoI. As such, Iraqis are now planning and supervising their own projects in coordination with the GoI, explained Kline. Local officials recognize the Soldiers’ role in reconstruction but are anxious to continue on their own.

“I want this information to reach others,” said Sheik Qassim Khalifa, vice president of the Tarmiyah Qada Council. “Most of the armies around the world are used for destruction. The mission of the American Army is to construct, not destroy.”

As politicians and citizens spoke of progress inside the event, ISF, SoI and Coalition Forces representatives spoke of security outside. Soldiers supported the ISF and SoI guards as they secured the city. The two-day event was a coup against extremism. Despite being an inviting target for extremists and anti-Iraqi forces, everyone arrived and conducted business peacefully.

When the event kicked off, sheiks from the surrounding areas poured into Bukhari Hall, followed by government officials from Baghdad and their representatives.

Inside the packed hall, city officials and their guests talked about the display they’d worked all night to construct. There were presentations highlighting their struggles against the extremists, construction, industrial progress and more.

“Today we’ll show you all of our accomplishments,” Sheik Jassim announced.

“We’ll show you the huge burden and suffering we went through. With our Sons of Iraq efforts, we were able to defeat terrorists.”

The sheik may be one of Tarmiyah’s best examples of the blood and sweat residents have put into securing the city. He’s lost two sons to terrorism, and his eldest son was wounded by a suicide bomber.

“We have a large number of martyrs,” he continued. “All Iraqi Security Forces in the area, they put their hands together with our Sons of Iraq – we’re not going to encounter any obstacles that will keep us from achieving these goals.”

Among other things, Tarmiyah Qada representatives proudly displayed how packed their market is now. Not too long ago, there were only a few shops open. Currently there are no empty shops along Tarmiyah’s main drag. Industry is booming in the Tarmiyah area as well, and local companies advertised their services – some even showing videos on computer screens for visitors.

Toward the end of the event, it seemed Baghdad politicians were getting the message and sharing Tarmiyah’s enthusiasm.

“We should all help each other and cooperate to rebuild our lovely Iraq,” said Maji al-Sudani, representing the Baghdad Provincial Government. “The people of Tarmiyah are generous. They are honorable.”

As the expo wrapped up, attendees flood Tarmiyah’s main street and witnessed another great event: the grand opening of the Tarmiyah Media Center. Local residents were now broadcasting on the radio, continuing to produce their own newspaper and have the capability to broadcast television.

The overall message of the expo and opening of the media center was unity, said Lt. Col. Toma Boccari, a native of Colorado Springs, Colo., the Golden Dragon commander.

“Not only did it bring together the Sons of Iraq, Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army – it also brought the local government together with the tribes and Government of Iraq,” he said. “Bottom line, they had a vision that I interpreted as one of hope.”

Gimlets help plan to rebuild 1 of Aqur Quf’s oldest historical landmarks

By Sgt. Karl Schell

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Plans are in the works to help restore one of Aqur Quf’s oldest landmarks: the Ziggurat.

The Ziggurat of Aqur Quf, which lies west of Baghdad, is one of the best preserved religious landmarks of its kind in Iraq. It dates back to 1400 B.C. and was built as a monument to the local religion.

Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, attached to 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, are working in conjunction with the citizens of Aqur Quf and branches of the Government of Iraq to rebuild and repair the site and buildings in an effort to reopen the Ziggurat as a tourist attraction.

Once open, it will offer a promising future of commerce and a constant flow of tourists, which will provide business to other merchants in Aqur Quf, said Capt. Devon McRainey, native of Dublin, Ohio, and Co. C executive officer.

“It feels good to be a part rebuilding important historical sights of Iraq’s culture,” he said.

The project will begin with the repair to the fence that surrounds the Ziggurat. The next step is to ensure the safety of the historical artifacts, which will be brought back to the site from a holding place in Baghdad. The artifacts are currently held by the Ministry of Ruins until the completion of the repairs.

Once the project is finished the Aqur Quf Ziggurat will be the home to a new restaurant, park and tours guided by the locals.

“This will stand as an example that Iraqi security is improving,” said Capt. David Ulthuat, a native of Charleston, S.C., and Co. C commander. “If we leave any mark on the people of Iraq, this will be a great one.”

Soldiers conduct ‘Fat Cow’ operations for continued sustainment of MND-B forces

Two Soldiers from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, refuel an Apache attack helicopter during an Extended Range Fuel System II training exercise at Camp Taji Nov. 10. The ERFS is a system integrated into a Chinook helicopter, or “Fat Cow,” that provides increased mission flexibility by providing a highly mobile forward area fuel source.

Sgt. Tyler Woodworth, Chinook helicopter crew chief, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, watches as two Apache attack helicopters takeoff after being refueled by a Extended Range Fuel System II integrated Chinook cargo helicopter during a training exercise at Camp Taji Nov. 10.

Story and photos by Sgt. Jason Dangel
CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Soldiers from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, executed a training exercise at Camp Taji Nov. 10 aimed to provide added versatility to refueling operations for both aviation and ground units operating in and around the Iraqi Capital.

With the implementation of the CH-47F Chinook cargo helicopter-based portable refueling system, respectively called the “Fat Cow,” the brigade’s refueling mission can now extend to virtually any location in theatre.

In an attempt to offset the heavy demand placed on MND-B’s various fixed refueling points, the Fat Cow will enable both forward-deployed air and ground assets to conveniently receive fuel directly from a Chinook integrated with a crash resistant internal 2,400-gallon fuel apparatus called the Extended Range Fuel System II.

“The helicopter can use the fuel itself or it can pump the fuel into other aircraft or vehicles. It provides the CAB the ability to place a Forward Area Refueling Point anywhere on the battlefield with a suitable landing zone. The capability can extend the reach of any aviation mission,” said Capt. Michael Cerchio, commander, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 4th Avn. Regiment, from Walden, N.Y.

This adaptable system makes it possible to set-up a fuel point anywhere the Chinook can land, he said, and for the CAB, this means aviation crews now have the ability to extend the range of attack or assault missions by providing a fuel stop that otherwise would not be there.

Despite the fact this mobile system is extremely convenient, it is limited in terms of how much fuel and security personnel it can carry. The prescribed range of the aircraft must also be taken into account when conducting Fat Cow operations. Lengthy mission specific planning is required when considering this type of operation in a combat setting.

In a tactical environment, the Forward Area Refueling Equipment, or FARE, can be set up in as little as 15 minutes, but during Friday’s exercise the set-up time took longer due to the implementation of additional safety features, Cerchio explained.

“Speed is extremely essential for the Fat Cow mission,” he continued. “Anytime an aircraft is stationary on the ground in a combat operation, it is vulnerable. A great deal of pre-mission planning goes into any Fat Cow mission to limit the amount of time aircraft spend on the ground.”

the Fat Cow mission is extremely applicable and beneficial on the modern battlefield, said Sgt. Tyler Woodworth, a native of Missoula, Mo., who is a Chinook crew chief and participant of the training exercise, assigned to Company B, 2nd Bn. 4th Avn. Regt. This training exercise is just another example of the brigade’s combat power and sustainment capabilities, he said.

A popular phrase heard around the U.S. Army is “We train like we fight.” For the Soldiers of the CAB, this mentality remains part of daily operations even when engaged in a war against a determined yet dwindling enemy.

This was the first time the ‘Iron Eagle’ brigade performed the exercise in combat, adding yet another bullet to its long list of combat aviation capabilities that are used to benefit the Soldiers of the 4th Inf. Div. and MND-B.
‘Copperhead’ troops increase area as ‘surge’ forces redeploy

MND-B Soldiers leave COP to ISF, move to JSS

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Williams
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq — As “surge” forces begin to redeploy, returning home after a 15-month deployment in support of Multi-National Division — Baghdad and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the units used to help bring stability and security to the Iraqi capital are not being replaced.

Consequently, the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, realigned within Multi-National Division — Baghdad, its companies across the Rashid district in southern Baghdad to assume more of the sector and assist Iraqi Security Forces enforcing the Rule of Law.

Picking up new muhallahs and areas of responsibility to patrol and secure is like starting all over again because every area of operations, every neighborhood is different, said Staff Sgt. Ryan Parker, a squad leader assigned to Company C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

“Working in concerted efforts in the neighborhoods, they have to provide for their citizens, and in order to do that, they need the resources,” explained Navarro, who was born in Washington, D.C., and who calls Washington home, said that his unit will undertake more combined patrols and operations with the ISF in ongoing efforts to prepare the Iraqi leaders to transition into independent operations and take over more responsibility throughout the Rashid district.

Working in concerted efforts in the neighborhoods, businesses and communities, the company established early rapport with the Iraqi citizens and the ISF in its eight organic muhallahs, said Navarro.

“I am not saying we took a radical approach to how we conduct business . . . but we used all platoons to go out into sector and create a presence — not at the expense of force protection though.”

Months prior to the move, Copperhead Co. cross-leveled personnel, attaching a platoon to the outgoing unit to gain knowledge about the area and help prepare the other platoons for the new area of operations, explained Navarro.

“The big challenge right now is getting the platoons familiar with the new battle space and getting the other platoons familiar with the old battle space,” said Capt. Christopher Watkins, commander of Co. C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt.

The Soldiers will continue to work, mentor and patrol with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police to increase proficiency and prepare the Iraqi Security Forces to take control of their neighborhoods and communities, said Watkins, an armor officer from New Orleans.

“We won’t go into tactical over watch for months to come,” he said.

Leaving its former patrol base in the care and control of the Iraqi Police, the company signed over its combat outpost in West Rashid to the control of the Iraqi Police as Soldiers moved into a nearby joint security station, shared with the Iraqi Police, the company signed over its combat outpost, explained Navarro.

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Leaving its former patrol base in the care and control of the Iraqi Police, the company signed over its combat outpost in West Rashid to the control of the Iraqi Police as Soldiers moved into a nearby joint security station, shared with the Iraqi Army soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 53rd Brigade, 14th IA Division, said Capt. Nathan Wilson, executive officer, Co. C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt.

“The unit left the COP in better condition than it found it, improving the quality of life for the IPs and providing generators, air conditioners and other supplies to the ISF.

“A lot of people did tasks that they wouldn’t normally be doing,” said Wilson, who was responsible for planning and organizing the move. “They understood that there was a task that needed to be done, and they pulled together to make it happen.”

Wilson thanked his Soldiers, as well as members of Headquarters Platoon and Forward Support Company E, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., for their tireless efforts in getting the job done.

The move meant long hours for the Soldiers, who maintained their patrols and operations in face of the move— even after they lost an organic platoon, which was attached to another unit, he explained.

The endeavor resulted in 12-hour patrols for the Soldiers, who would return to base to refit and then help pack and prepare the unit for the move, said Wilson.

The Soldiers inspect checkpoints to ensure that the IA, IP and Sons of Iraq forces are conducting proper inspections at traffic control points, properly searching vehicles and operating with the latest military intelligence and tactics, techniques and procedures, said Sgt. 1st Class Pedro Sotomayor, an armor crewmember from Bayamon, Puerto Rico, and platoon sergeant assigned to Co. C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt.

Sotomayor said SOI and IA soldiers manning checkpoints and conducting patrols and operations together is a good formula for success.

“The two forces working together is a good thing. Every day, we stop at checkpoints and talk with the ISF, and having more people on the checkpoints ensures that everyone is searched,” he explained. “I would rather have more people than less."

The checkpoint inspections also provide the Iraqis the opportunity to voice concerns and bring valid issues to the attention of the Coalition Forces, said 1st Lt. Jonathan Muir, a platoon leader from Pittsburgh, assigned to Co. C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt.

“The Iraqi Army soldiers talked about pay issues,” Muir said. “The U.S. commander addresses the issues with their command.”

The armor company, part of a combined arms battalion, deployed to the Rashid district in southern Baghdad, increased its presence in the muhallahs surrounding areas to disrupt potential enemy activity and plans to duplicate its efforts in the new battle space to ensure that the transition runs smoothly, said Muir.

Sgt. 1st Class Pedro Sotomayor, an armor crewmember from Bayamon, Puerto Rico, directs Iraqi Army soldiers from the 14th IA Division at a security checkpoint bordering the Hayy Shurta and Hayy Jihad communities Nov. 11.
MND-B engineers build historic protective screen

By Capt. Angela Smoot and Sgt. 1st Class James Dean
46th ECB (H), 926th Eng. Bde.

The planning and design of the final MOASS included input from numerous engineers from the 46th ECB (H) and the 926th Engineer Brigade based in Montgomery, Ala., serving with Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“The MOASS is engineering at its best,” commented 1st Lt. Chad Baecte, 926th Eng. Bde. project engineer, and a native of Durlington, S.C. “Once we had the initial design, it then became about how can we make this design better and still accomplish its original purpose.”

With designs finally approved, Company A and equipment platoon of Headquarters Support Company, 46th ECB (H) Soldiers began work in the peak summer heat and commonly referred to the structure as a large bucket set.

By early October, the final phases of construction were underway, which included excavating materials for the emplacement of the gigantic footers which were 8 foot by 8 foot by 4 foot slabs of concrete with metal flange mounted on the top side.

Within six days, the motivated engineers assisted by two civilian crane operators, employed 32 of the 4,000 pound footers. At the same time, the welding team, led by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Langston Washington, engineer technician, 46th ECB (H), a native of Houston, worked rigorously to weld the large I-beam frames together.

Crane operators hoisted 16 large steel structures into the air while the welders worked to fuse together the flanges that were mounted on the footers. The first section was an end section that was made up of three A-framed I-beams. This phase took an additional five days to complete, but this was the end of the mission for the welders.

Next engineer Soldiers went to work in bucket trucks, suspended 40 feet high above the protective barrier walls of the military compound. These are similar to the bucket trucks of electric companies in the states.

“This kind of work is great. I was kind of nervous at first, being suspended in the bucket of the truck, 40 feet in the air and knowing that there was a threat of sniper fire, but I’m good at my job and no one was hurt,” stated Pvt. Johe Tucker, a heavy equipment operator, who hails from Abboson, N.Y.

While high above the compound, the Soldiers placed the sniper screen, fence and cable onto the steel frame. There was a lot of trial and error as the Soldiers figured out what worked for the construction of the MOASS.

“This was the first time that any of us had ever constructed anything of this sort. We are horizontal engineers, truck drivers, generator mechanics and welders. Every phase of the project was different in its own way."

“In the end, the MOASS is a testament to the capabilities of brigade and battalion design cells, and the ingenuity of our engineer Soldiers,” declared Landreth.

The first of its kind project took engineers from all areas of MND-B; vertical, horizontal and surveying to make the MOASS a reality.

“It took a lot of hard work and the minds of every Soldier that went out on that mission. This was the first time that any of us had ever constructed anything of this sort. We are horizontal engineers, truck drivers, generator mechanics and welders. Every phase of the project was different in its own way."

“Today’s graduation and this training is for Iraq’s and Iraqi soldiers. These men and women stood up for Iraq. They put their lives on the line. They are heroes.”

Coalition Forces were impressed with the progress that the IPs have made in recent history.

“Two was a great day for the Iraqi people. We need to keep moving forward. We are making progress and this is a great day for them,” said Col. Byron Freeman, commander, 8th Military Police “Watchdog” Brigade, Multi-National Division – Iraq. If you think back to four years ago we were training Iraqis and now there are Iraqis training Iraqis.”

Ameel, who made her dreams of becoming an IP a reality, was one of three recipients of a gift presented by Kadhim. She received the award for best shooting during the marksmanship portion of the course.

“I am very happy,” said Ameel, one of the 19 newest female Shurtas, through an interpreter. “Words cannot express how proud I am today, all of my family is very happy. I thank the Coalition Forces for transferring the SoI and for making this opportunity.”

Another class of all SOI begin training at the al Furat Iraqi Police Training Center on Dec. 7. Approximately 1,100 more recruits will train to become Shurta fulfilling the government’s promise to transition the SoI.

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By Sgt. Jerry Saslav
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – It was supposed to be a quick patrol for the two M1A2 SEP Abrams tanks from 1st platoon as they left Combat Outpost Ford in Baghdad’s Sadr City district Dec. 17. It wasn’t quick at all.

The tanks of Company C “Team Steel,” 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, were conducting a route-disruption patrol, a random patrol designed to make it harder for terrorists to have the time to plant an Improvised Explosive Device or Explosively Formed Projectile.

The patrol route this day was over an area regularly traveled by Coalition Forces.

“Historically... it’s probably the densest concentration of EFPs that we’ve seen,” said Capt. Todd Allison, who serves as the platoon leader for 1st platoon, Co. C, 1-68 AR.

In the beginning, it was a quiet patrol; there were not many vehicles on the road, and no one wanted to be in the way of the tanks, so the patrol was making good time.

“It’s normal; we’ve done this several times,” said Allison, a native of Austin, Texas.

As the tanks drove down the road, they began to acquire a following: Iraqi drivers were following the path cleared by the tanks, similar to the way Americans might follow a fire engine. The turret of the second tank, Allison’s tank, swiveled its main gun to the rear to remind the Iraqi drivers to keep their distance.

Approximately thirty minutes into mission, the patrol passed by an Iraqi National Police checkpoint. On the left, there was a vehicle pulled to the side of the road.

Capt. Allison was crouching down in the tank’s turret in an area he said was a danger zone. The QRF headed to that location.

Explosion, the men entered a building on the right next to the scene of the attack. After the explosion, the men entered a building on the right next to the scene of the attack. After the QRF team arrived, the Soldiers searched of the area, the Soldiers found enough evidence to take two men into custody.

A little over two hours after the IED exploded, Allison and his men were able to clear the scene and continue their “quick patrol.” It’s a little unnerving,” said Allison. “I’m just glad no one got hurt. That’s the main thing.”

The M1A2 SEP Abrams tank of Staff Sgt. Joshua Everett, a native of Romney, W. Va., who serves as the section sergeant for Section A, 1st platoon Company C “Team Steel,” 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, sits on a road in Baghdad’s Sadr City district Dec. 17 after an IED detonated in front of it.

The EOD team arrived on the scene and, upon determining that there was no secondary device waiting to be detonated, investigated the scene.

When the QRF team arrived, the Soldiers found the men they were looking for. After a search of the area, the Soldiers found enough evidence to take two men into custody.

By Lt. Col. Wayne Marotto
2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armd. Div.

BAGHDAD – Local Mahmudiyaq civic leaders, Sheiks, villagers and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 63rd Combined Arms Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armd Division, held a ceremony for the installation of two Solar Powered Water Filters Dec. 16 at Lutfiayah Nahia, Mahmudiyaq Qada.

The $48,000 CERP water filters contract was awarded to the Ard Alaqqa Contracting Company of Lutfiayah and will provide the 400 citizens of the community with clean, quality water. Prior to the water filters, the rural community did not have access to clean potable water, which historically has not had access to centrally distributed water.

“The people here get very little water, so it is good that we will be able to have clean water finally,” said Tah Has sim Fadha the Chaka 1 Leader, the equivalent of a mayor. Leaders from 1st Battalion, 63rd Combined Arms Battalion, worked in partnership with the local government to determine the best sites for the two water filters. One filter was placed near an Iraqi Army checkpoint in a rural area with a population of 200. The other filter was located in another rural area with a population of 200.

Sheik Adnon Radhy, a local sheik, told the crowd that he was pleased that the community would now have access to clean water. After his speech, the large crowd waited to taste the fresh water. One Iraqi was overheard saying that the people were so used to dirty water that the clean water tastes bad and unfamiliar, to the laughs of his fellow villagers.

“The rural areas are the heart of Mahmudiyaq Qada, and they are often overlooked by both the GoI and CF. It is great to be able to get out to these isolated communities and make a difference,” said 1st Lt. Robert Bowe, a native of Helena, Mont., and the civil military affairs officer for 1-63 CAB.

MND-B Soldiers bring clean water to rural villages in Mahmudiyaq

By Lt. Col. Wayne Marotto
2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armd. Div.

Soldiers from Multi-National Division – Baghdad, 1st Battalion, 63rd Combined Arms Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armd Division, and residents of Chaka 1 work to install a solar powered water filter in Lutfiayah Nahia Dec. 16.

By Sgt. Jerry Saslav
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Jan. 5, 2009
Multi-National Division – Baghdad

Mission continues as security agreement takes effect

Sgt. James Bowhay, a cavalry scout assigned to Troop C, 7th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, touches base with Iraqi National Police patrolmen from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, at a new area of operations in the Rashid district's Abu T'shir community of southern Baghdad. The Soldiers partnered with the 3rd “Feather” Brigade to search for weapons and munitions in the predominantly Shia community, as part of ongoing efforts to enforce Baghdad's Fardh al Qanoon, or Rule of Law.

By Master Sgt. Guadalupe Stratman

BAGHDAD – As the Security Agreement took effect Jan. 1, Multi-National Division – Baghdad’s mission remains the same. “Our mission continues; we will protect the Iraqi populace,” said Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, commanding general, 4th Infantry Division and MND-B. “The significant difference is we will now conduct our operations with our Iraqi Security Force partners in the lead.”

We’re still here to help them but the weight shifts from our shoulders to the increasingly capable ISF.”

As the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1790 expires, the Security Agreement represents a request by Iraq for U.S. forces to remain in Iraq to assist with security and stability only as needed and requested by the Government of Iraq. “It means we’ll make a few adjustments in how we execute operations but for the most part, it reinforces transitions that are already underway,” said Hammond. “We will conduct all combat operations by, with and through our ISF partners.”

To ease the transition of the Security Agreement, MND-B has worked closely with the Baghdad Operations Center since early November for all combat missions said Brig. Gen. Robin Swan, deputy commanding general, MND-B. “We have spent a long amount of time with the BOC working out the every detail of the Security Agreement,” said Swan, a native of Pittsburg.

“All of our combat operations are done combined with our Iraqi Security Force partner, which is a flat rule that was initiated in November in advance of the Security Agreement,” said Swan.

Overtime Coalition Forces will reduce their presence in the city of Baghdad. The first step will be Jan. 1 with the transfer COP Calahan to the Ministry of Trade. Next, FOB Rustamiah will transfer to the Iraqi Army by March 31.

“Our coalition only outposts will be closing or transferring to Iraqi control. We will maintain some positions in Joint Security Stations in an advisory role, but the Iraqi Security Forces will be maintaining security in Baghdad.”

As far back as August, the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team, which works closely with MND-B and the Gov, has conducted tasks similar to what the Security Agreement requires. “(The Security Agreement) embodies legally a lot of what we, the PRT and the ePRTs at the brigades, have been doing – particularly partnering with Iraqi officials,” said John Bass, Baghdad PRT team leader.

Bass and his PRT first listen to the already identified needs of the Iraqi government. “All the projects that we undertake or the initiatives that we are engaged in are coordinated with the appropriate Iraqi government official and institution,” said Bass, a native of Chatham, N.Y. “Those are things that are now required. They were not required two and three months ago.”

The Security Agreement is the way Baghdad PRT and the division needs to go, said Bass.

“The environment in Iraq is changing and MND-B will adapt to that, and it reflects the increasing capability of the Iraqi government to start doing more for itself and for its people.”

“The Security Agreement is a testament to how far we have come with preparing the ISF and our Iraqi government counterparts to truly be in the lead,” said Hammond. “There are still some challenges ahead and the ISF needs to demonstrate they can handle the responsibility. But we will be with them as assistance when they need it. They have come a long, long way.”

3rd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div.

New Year brings Iraq to forefront of security role

By Staff Sgt. Alex Licea

3rd BCT PAO, 82nd Abn. Div.

JOINT SECURITY STATION ZAFARANIYA, Iraq – The Government of Iraq officially took charge of its nation’s security Jan. 1 when the U.S.-Iraqi security agreement officially came into effect.

Under the agreement, all U.S. military action in the country must be approved by the Iraqi Security Forces.

Offensive operations against suspected enemy forces will also be combined with ISF partnership.

The agreement has brought no significant change to how Paratroopers assigned to the 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, operate day-to-day business. The battalion has already been working in a secondary or “over watch” approach to its ISF partners since their arrival in Iraq in early December.

This was evident when Iraqi Army soldiers assigned to the 1st Company, 2nd Battalion, 37th Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, with assistance from Paratroopers assigned to Battery B, 1st Bn., 319th Abn. FA Regt., led a dismounted patrol Dec. 31, a day before the agreement took effect, in the Al Karradah district of eastern Baghdad.

Iraqi Army soldiers began the patrol by inspecting two Sons of Iraq checkpoints. The IA soldiers spoke with the SOL commanders at each point to discuss the checkpoint’s living conditions and evaluate its capabilities.

The IA, along with their U.S. counterparts, then turned their attention to patrolling a nearby populated neighborhood to conduct counter-improved explosive device operations. IA soldiers spoke to local residents and took a look at the neighborhood’s essential services. The IA soldiers also gathered any intelligence on suspicious activity in the area.

Paratroopers assigned to Btry B., 1st Bn., 319th Abn. FA Regt., based out of Fort Bragg, N.C., clearly saw a difference in how the IA operates now compared to their first deployment. This is their second deployment to Iraq for many Paratroopers in the unit.

They are more proactive now and really have a sense of their new responsibilities, said Sgt. Brandon Fellers, a team leader with Btry. B’s 1st platoon.

“They are leading patrols and taking care of business,” said the Fort Dodge, Iowa native. “It’s definitely a change from the first time I was in Iraq.”

Paratroopers asked their Iraqi counterparts for direction during the five-hour patrol in a clear sign that the ISF was in control of the operation.

“We make it a point that they tell us where we need to go as opposed to us telling them where they need to go,” said 1st Lt. Chris Hoffman, a native of St. Louis and a platoon leader for Btry B., 1st Bn., 319th Abn. FA Regt.

The atmosphere in the neighborhood was positive throughout the patrol as residents greeted the IA soldiers and their coalition partners with waves and smiles. IA soldiers were offered tea to drink and Iraqi children asked Paratroopers for handshakes and pictures during the patrol.

The Iraqi people clearly feel a change in their country due to the improved security, said one Iraqi Army soldier assigned to the 2nd Bn., 3rd Bde, 79th Inf. Div.

“Everything has changed, and the Iraqi people feel much better right now,” he said. “You can feel the difference in security from just a couple of years ago.”
By Staff Sgt. Michael Molinaro

MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – It’s hard to believe that we have been here fifteen months.

It’s even harder to believe that this is actually my last column for this esteemed newspaper.

As we all have found out, the world doesn’t stop moving while we are thousands and thousands of miles away from everything we love.

That holds true in the sports world.

When we first arrived, the New England Patriots were striving to join the 1972 Miami Dolphins as the only teams to go through an entire NFL season undefeated. It was November 2007 and they had just barely beaten Baltimore in a game most of us saw in Kuwait awaiting movement to Camp Liberty.

The cloud of the cheating scandal hung over the heads of the entire organization and, unless you were a Patriots fan, you were salivating at the chance of seeing those guys lose.

Karma finds its way into all situations sooner or later.

It struck the Pats hard and vicious.

First, when the team thought the Super Bowl was in the bag and was inviting players from the New York Giants to their parade in Boston, Eli Manning found Plaxico Burress in the end zone and the Pats found themselves like every other team in the NFL, watching the Giants lift up the Lombardi Trophy as Super Bowl champs.

To make matters worse, karma had a little left in the tank and struck the Pats two more times – first it took away the team’s franchise quarterback for the entire 2008 season and second it took away the world’s best wide receiver in Super Bowl champs.

So much can happen in 15 months.

Miami had one “W” in their record. Atlanta was a franchise in shambles. Detroit went winless.

Tony Romo had the look of a top-five quarterback. Cleveland was on the rise. Arizona was Arizona. Brett Favre was ready to retire a Green Bay Packer.

Who is going to be the story this year?

Today, Miami is the reigning AFC East division champs. Arizona isn’t the same ol’ Cards: they are Super Bowl participants. Brett Favre is a New York Jet.

All of that happened in pro football alone.

What if I told you when we boarded planes in November ’07 that the Tampa Bay Rays would be in the World Series next season; or that Roger Clemens may not make the Hall of Fame; or that John Smoltz isn’t an Atlanta Brave and Manny Ramirez got himself traded out of Boston; or that the Yankees would give three contracts totaling more than $300 million and still have a smaller payroll than when we left?

I bet you would ask me when I had my last urine test.

It gives you a chance to go back to a place where you can forget about the rigors of a deployment for just a little bit and get a dose of home.

When I look back on the past 15 months, in the sports world and life in general, I can’t help but want to take a peak to the future.

Who is going to be the story this year?

What team or teams are going to come out of nowhere and win a championship or make a name for themselves?

It was a performance so great that it clearly ranks as his top performance of all-time.

But while we were here Woods’ legacy grew even more when he won the U.S. Open on one healthy knee. Five days of walking for four hours straight and putting an excruciating amount of torque on that injured knee cemented his stature.

For the world of sports, Tiger Woods’ place in history was as firmly entrenched as the Ironhorse division’s place is in Multi-National Division – Baghdad forever.

I want to wish good luck and godspeed to our brothers and sisters from the 1st Cavalry Division as they take the reigns of MND-B.

These are big shoes to fill but you have done it before and will undoubtedly do it again.

Just remember to use sports as an outlet.
Security agreement provides hope

Story and photos by Sgt. Whitney Houston
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – As Iraqis continue to take steps toward making their nation autono-
mist, Iraqis possess new hopes and expectations for better things to come.

Following new protocol outlined by the new security agreement, Multi-Na-
tional Division – Baghdad Soldiers, accompanied by their Iraqi Army counter-
parts, conducted a foot patrol Jan. 8, passing out fliers in the Sadr City district of
Baghdad. The IA soldiers from the 45th Brigade, 11th Iraqi Army Division, and
their American counterparts were helping to inform the people of a criminal sup-
posedly in the area.

“All the patrols we do now are with the Iraq Security Forces, be it the Iraqi
Police or the Iraqi Army; we can’t just run patrols on our own anymore. It is very
important that it be this way because they are in the lead now,” said 1st Lt. Ken-
neth Jura, a native of Gulf Breeze, Fla., serving with 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry
Regiment “Wolfhounds,” 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th In-
fantry Division, currently attached to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry
Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

The combined patrol mingled with the Iraqi people as they went. The patrol not
only showed a friendly presence but alas showed the populace the Iraqi Security
Forces are becoming more apt to take control.

“The main part of the patrol was … let the population see the IA taking part
in a presence patrol to further increase trust between the ISF and the populace,”
said Staff Sgt. Douglas Fischgrund, a native of Linden, N.J., also serving with 1st.
Bn., 27th Inf. Regt.

Jura went on to explain some of the advances that Coalition Forces have been
able to make by gaining trust and showing the IA a military system that works. In
consequence to this efficiency and trustworthiness, the IA began to organize and
pattern their military after that of the U.S. military, which has enabled them to
move forward in “leaps and bounds.”

Although the IA has made significant progress, this grand of scale takes time
and attention to ensure solidarity.

“Just like with anything, this step forward will take time to develop – and it
will evolve with time. But the security agreement is set up in spirit to enable these
people to have the freest life possible,” Jura said.

Soldiers who have served multiple tours in Iraq have noticed the fruits of their
labors unfold, leading to the new agreement.

“It’s been good to see that things have improved,” said Sgt. Jason Stalnaker,
native of Newark, Ohio, serving with 1st Bn., 27th Inf. Regt. “Since my last de-
ployment in ’04 and ’05, I’ve been able to see all the steps, and it’s been a total turn
around. Being away for two years between my deployments and coming back to
progression feels like something has been accomplished.”

With much still to do, the new security agreement provides a glimpse of hope
in which Iraq will become a safe, secure and sovereign nation.