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SLINGLOAD!



Spartans establish a blocking position during Operation Himera near Lake Tharthar in the Western Desert of Salah ad Din province.



No Slack & Volunteers Keep Pressure on AQI

By Sgt. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

Al JAZZERA DESERT, Iraq – “Yesterday some men tried to kill me as I was driving my car,” said the man with a reflective belt draped across his chest. “They say that if I stay with the volunteers they will kill me, but I don’t care about that,” he said as he lit one cigarette with the stub of another. The man is part of an all volunteer force called the Concerned Local Citizens, or “Sons of Iraq” and he and his compatriots have had enough. The violence, the killing, the overall lawlessness that was a hallmark of Samarra a year ago, left these men to make a decision: apathy or action. They chose the latter.

Today, hundreds of volunteers, spread throughout the greater Samarra area have banded together to secure the once turbulent city and its people from enemy extremists. In doing so, they have allowed coalition forces to focus their attention on dismantling a waning al Qaida in Iraq.

“CLC leaders and IP leaders are taking care of a lot of the footwork in securing the population centers, which lets us take the fight to al Qaeda and their safe-havens,” said Sgt. 1st Class Jason Martin, Gator Company, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment.

Martin and his Soldiers are part of the famed “No Slack” battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, which has a reputation for an intense work ethic and exceptional Soldiering. Since arriving in Iraq in October of 2007, the battalion has seen the security situation in Samarra and its periphery go from fragile to firm due to greater cooperation and effectiveness of Iraqi Security Forces, the volunteers and Coalition forces.

“The last few months have been a huge change,” said Martin. “Between Iraqi police, Iraqi Army and CLCs, we’ve been able to push further, which has led us to more HVIs (high value individuals) and more caches.”

Martin said that in the last month alone, Gator company has unearthed five to six hundred military grade munitions

including rockets, mortars and artillery shells, which are commonly used by enemy fighters to make improvised explosive devices. Often times, villagers will walk Coalition and Iraqi Security forces right on to a cache site without fear, said Martin.

“What’s happening is the CLCs in the area have pushed out the major key leaders of al Qaida in the area out into the desert,” said Martin. “Now the villagers feel safe enough to say, hey look, these guys used to be here and they left this cache and Ill take you to it. They are huge caches, buried deep in the ground,” he said.

By manning checkpoints on the dusty roads outside of Samarra, the CLC volunteers are able to keep enemy fighters from permeating the population. They take pride in their work as protectors and are able to provide for their families as well. “The CLCs in Samarra are the best CLCs in Iraq,” boasted one volunteer working a checkpoint outside the city. “We do it for our family and country,” he said. “They are looking at the future. They are talking about schools for their kids and grandkids and they are starting to see the importance of that,” said Martin. “The hope is there and they are looking for results from their own government.”

The presence of CLCs and Iraqi security forces gives people the sense that Iraqis are securing themselves, said Spc. Mathew Gozalkowski, Gator company Soldier. “They know what right looks like,” he said. “They know where the insurgents might hide caches and possible safehavens and they know who belongs in their respective neighborhoods and who doesn’t.” As the population continues to turn against extremists in the Samarra area, groups like al Qaida are unraveling quickly, said Gozalkowski. “The CLCs in the area have caught on like wildfire,” he said.

“The people around the al Jazzera desert are standing up volunteer groups with out any contract,” he said, meaning that they aren’t getting the nominal fee of \$300 per month that is typically paid to CLCs across Iraq.

“They are doing it because they are tired of seeing what the insurgents have done to their homes.”



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Signs of Success in Balad



A “Bastogne” Artilleryman patrols the farmlands near Balad during Operation “Balls Pursuit.” The area has been used by insurgents in the past as an area from which the enemy fires mortars.

**Story and photos by Sgt. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO**

BALAD, Iraq – The gains can be seen everywhere. The wry smiles that were once fierce scowls worn on the faces of men and women here are subtle signs of Iraqi success. Once timid and withdrawn children flock to the sight of Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers in neighborhoods once thought to be lost.

However, Iraqi and coalition forces remain relentless in their pursuit of the enemy here and across Iraq. Together with Iraqi security forces, Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, recently conducted Operation Balls Pursuit.

The operation, which was part of a larger Multi-National Division-North effort, aimed to disrupt enemy activity in the Jissat and Jalam Deserts, said Sgt. Maj. Edward Estep, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, command sergeant major.

The area, vast and easily accessible, has been used by enemy fighters in the past as a place to reorganize and resupply in order to carry out attacks on the population centers of the Salah ad Din province.

“Operation Balls Pursuit was intended to deny enemy safe haven, limit enemy freedom of maneuver, and

interdict the flow of foreign fighters in the area,” said Estep, whose “Balls” Soldiers were joined by elements of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 327th Infantry Regiment in the operation.

“The Soldiers performed great,” said Estep. “There was not a house that didn’t get a visit,” he said. The “Balls” operation and continued efforts in the area have led to greater security for the people of Balad.

Many residents in the area said that they have not seen a terrorist presence there in months.

“The Son’s of Iraq and constant presence of Iraqi and coalition forces has made the area much safer, allowing people to travel to the markets to sell and purchase goods,” he said.

Recently, the township of Ad Dujayl has seen a dramatic increase in the flow of goods and services thanks to the security situation. Residents are enjoying the freedom to buy and sell goods at their leisure.

“On any given day the market place is very busy. With the added security the Iraqi police have stepped up patrols which make the people feel safe and the local government representatives are starting to make their

way to areas once not traveled,” said Estep. As the people of Balad become more comfortable and secure, Soldiers are seeing more wry smiles and eager children everyday. Sure signs of success.



Soldiers seek shade away from the intense Iraqi sun.



Iraqi children eager to show the Soldiers their skills on the soccer pitch.

Training Iraq's defenders

"Above the Rest" MiTT Trains to Win

Story and photos by Sgt. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

BAYJI, Iraq – Iraqis taking care of Iraqis. This is the shape of things to come here.

Garnering the trust and cooperation of the Iraqi people, Iraqi army battalions near the oil-rich town of Bayji, have made the turn.

No longer is the burgeoning Iraqi army being coddled by their American counterparts. Rather, according to Military Transition Team Soldiers of the 1st Battlaion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Iraq's defenders are confident, determined and capable of securing its citizens.

As violence tapers off across the country, Iraq's security forces are increasingly taking responsibility for the security of the people.

Seen as a critical component of success here, Iraq's army has grown from a pocket-sized force in 2004, to a military monolith that has earned the trust of the people and the respect of its coalition partners.

"In the last 11 months, they have made a 180 degree turnaround," said Maj. Oscar Pintado, who leads 1-327th's MiTT Team. "They are now conducting unilateral operations at the battalion level throughout their area of operations with little or no coalition support," he said.

The support they do receive comes from the Soldiers of Pintado's advisor team, who serve as teachers, trainers and mentors for the maturing army.

"We operate as a battalion staff, trainers and combat advisors," said Pintado whose 13-man team lives and works with their IA counterparts.

By design, MiTT teams encompass a wide range of

military specialties and ranks, which offers the IA a well rounded training experience. The Soldiers, who range from the rank of Staff Sgt. to Major, are experts in specialties like supply, infantry, medical, intelligence and communications. They seek to broaden the IA's toolkit by providing them the skills they need to operate at a level necessary to win the peace.

To see the IA conducting operations autonomously more than a year ago in the Salah ad Din province, was

unheard of, said Pintado. "They were heavily dependent for logistical and operational support," he said. "They had a lot of challenges due to the fairly young Iraqi logistical system," he said.

Today, as the IA continues to refine its supply and transportation systems, Iraqi soldiers are more willing than ever to safeguard Iraq from its enemies.

"They are now more proactive,

confident, determined and willing to take the fight to the enemy," said Pintado. "They are capable of securing the population."

According to Pintado the development of the IA has been a major factor in reducing violence in the province and demonstrates to the people that the IA is a legitimate and well disciplined force.

"Their presence has allowed the people to feel more secure and has opened doors for more cooperation between the population and the IA in general," he said.

For the 1-327 MiTT, leading by example has paid dividends that will have long lasting effects.

"They see you there sweating, operating, eating and training with them, and they will be more open to listen and learn from you, but most importantly, they will want to show you that they can do it and are as capable as you are," said Pintado.



Maj. Oscar Pintado, 1-327 MiTT, congratulates an Iraqi Soldier on a job well done after a mission near Bayji.



IRAQI SWAT SETS STANDARD

Story and photos by Sgt. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

SALAH AD DIN PROVINCE, Iraq- Whooping and whistling like children on a roller coaster ride, Iraqi policemen soared through the sun-soaked July sky on their way home from a successful mission. Their enthusiasm was not borne of the high-speed helicopter ride, but of the hard day's work, which helped save the lives of countless Iraqi civilians.

In the predawn hours of July 12, Iraqi policemen, along with Soldiers from the 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, conducted an air assault into the arid farmlands north of Balad. Throughout the burning July morning, the Iraqi SWAT teams moved with speed and discipline, to clear a suspected enemy hideout in the area.

The combined air assault mission resulted in the capture of six men with ties to the local insurgency, three of whom were known to be members of al Qaeda in Iraq. A thorough search of the area resulted in the discovery of two vehicles wired with explosives and a substantial amount of ammonium-nitrate; a chemical compound used to make homemade bombs. The vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, which have been used with devastating results in the past, were destroyed by coalition forces, along with the explosives. The operation aimed to deny enemy extremists the ability to carry out future terror operations against innocent Iraqis and coalition forces in the Salah ad Din province.

"Countless lives were saved today as a result of seizing and destroying these VBIEDs before al Qaeda could use them," said Lt. Col. Thomas Hauerwas, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division executive officer. "There is no way of knowing how many innocent people would have been killed or injured by these VBIEDs."

Increasingly, coalition forces are seeing Iraqis take the lead in the fight against extremists in the province of Salah ad Din.

Iraqi security forces actually outnumbered coalition forces on this air assault, said Maj. Phillip Borders, 1st STB operations officer. Borders said he believes that Iraq's success lies in the hands of the ISF.

"If we don't work with the (ISF), there is no mission success," he said. "You can catch all of the bad guys in the world but until we get the Iraqis to do it, the old standard is still there."

With every combined mission, the ISF are honing their ability to plan for and execute these types of missions autonomously. Their experience is extensive, considering that a fair number of the ISF have been battling the insurgency for a number of years, alongside their coalition allies.

Through the fight against a common enemy, a bond has formed between some ISF and their American counterparts. The Iraqi SWAT members often try to mirror their American counterparts in every aspect, from the way they clear a room, to the way they wear their kneepads. Their willingness to learn from 101st Airborne Division Soldiers is part admiration and part respect. No longer are the ISF seen as greenhorn troops by their mentors.

"Their sense of duty and their sense of patriotism are unquestionable," said Hauerwas. "What they lack in equipment, such as communications and mobility, they make up for in sheer will," he said.

The Iraqi police force participates in a majority of the 1st STB's combat operations in and around Tikrit and are becoming more skillful everyday. "We are out of the crawl phase and are into the walk phase," said Borders, referring to the training paradigm of 'crawl, walk, run.'

The two forces now walk side by side, through city streets and dusty roads in the fight against terrorism in the Salah ad Din province.





Iraqi Police SWAT members load onto a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during a combined Air Assault.



Bastogne Soldiers on the objective during a combined Air Assault mission in Salah ad Din.



Operation Balls DiMaggio a Homerun

**By 1st Lt. Jonathan Springer
2-320th FAR PAO**

JOINT BASE BALAD ANACONDA, Iraq – Since June 18, artillerymen from the 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), have been conducting a full-spectrum combat operation aimed at disrupting and limiting indirect-fire attacks in vicinity of Joint-Base Balad Anaconda (JBBA), Iraq.

The operation, dubbed “Balls DiMaggio”, is a large-scale operation solely focused on the security of the local population; it is being executed with continuous, 24-hour, combat-security patrols with the intent of denying and deterring IDF attacks targeted towards Iraqi civilians and personnel located on the JBBA.

“We have had great success in reducing attacks of all types within our area of responsibility; however, at this time, IDF is affecting the local populace more and it is detracting from economic opportunities and injuring civilians,” said Lt. Col. John F. Dunleavy, battalion commander of the 2-320th FAR.

Since 2004, over 2500 IDF attacks have occurred on or near the JBBA.

In the last 6 months alone, six Iraqi children have been killed and numerous civilians have been wounded due to insurgent indirect-fire attacks. The 2-320th FAR hopes to prevent these kinds of incidents from happening in the future.

“IDF in vicinity of this area has gone on since the war began, but we feel we have the momentum to crush it ... I want to get after the enemy and attack these IDF shooters,” said Dunleavy.

In addition to interdicting IDF attacks during “Balls DiMaggio”, Soldiers from the battalion have also been focusing on exploiting weapons caches, capturing munitions financiers, and eliminating any weapons trafficking occurring in “AO Balls”.

“We are doing this operation to deter mortar attacks and keep the JBBA and the local people here safe;

tracking down the mortar tubes and weapons caches the enemy uses really helps us do that,” said Pfc. Casey Burkheen, an ammo team chief with the “Balls of the Eagle” battalion.

Burkheen acknowledged that this operation has been very strenuous and demanding, but said that conducting “Balls DiMaggio” was worth it because it’s helping protect the local populace.

“The main reason we are doing (Balls DiMaggio) is stop the terrorist activities in this AO. Our goal is to keep the streets safe so the Iraqi Government can continue to build a better country,” he said.

Dunleavy agreed with Burkheen and went on to add that though this is not a major operation in regards to troop movement or a lot of traditional indicators, it is the focus and the assets the battalion is leveraging which make it significant.

He added, “We have done several operations of all types since our deployment began. The diversity of these is full spectrum, but the primary goals never change ... security of the population, pursuance of the enemy, and facilitation of the local government and security forces.”

The battalion has thus far been successful in decreasing enemy attacks in their AO since arriving in theater.

According to statistic’s given from the battalion’s intelligence center, the “Bastogne” artillerymen have seen a 27.5 percent decrease in IDF and a 50 percent decrease in IED attacks since 2007.

Dunleavy hopes to continue that downward trend with this operation. “We will leverage the relationships we have with Sons of Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the local population and government leaders to provide intelligence, gather sources, and jointly, when possible, attack targets.”

He added, “Iraq is on the verge of great change and it is starting at the local level. We are getting after it during this operation, and we are taking it to the enemy.”

Eye of the Eagle



Bandit Soldiers, 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, discover a cache near the city of Balad, Iraq.



A Bastogne rifleman patrols through the dust.



Taskmaster Soldiers conduct sling load operations.



Spartan Soldiers on the objective during an air assault operation near the Uzaym River Valley.



A No Slack Soldier takes up an elevated position in the city of Samarra, Iraq.



An “Above the Rest” Soldier provides security for a combined medical engagement near Balad, Iraq.



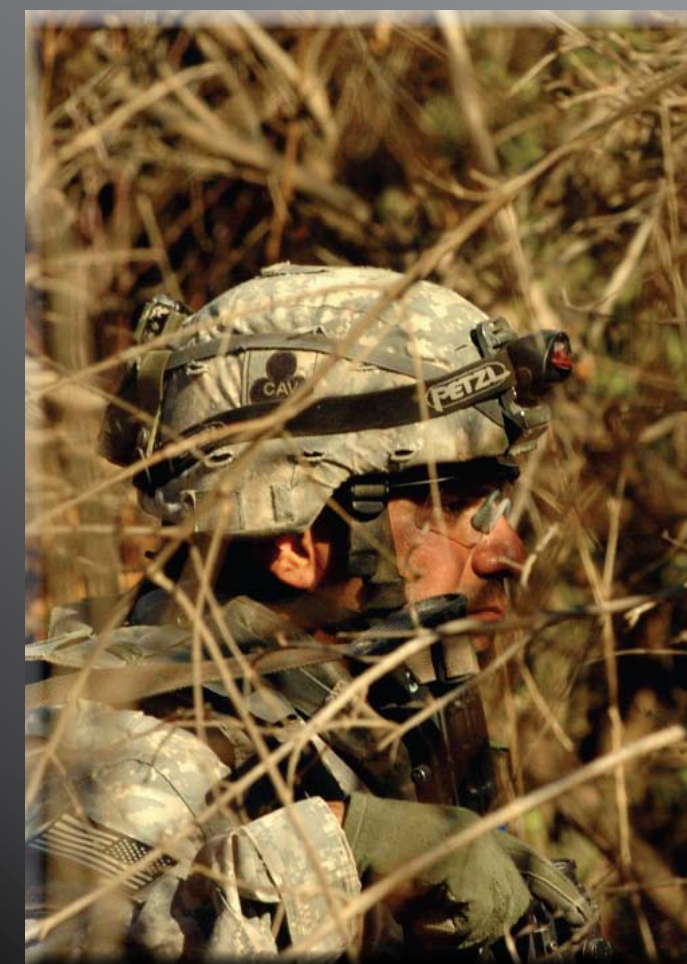
Bastogne and Iraqi Soldiers aboard a CH-47 Chinook Helicopter during an Air Assault mission.



A 2-320th Soldier lends a helping hand.



Iraqi Army Soldiers, post Air Assault.



A Bandit Soldier waits in the bush.



A Bastogne Artilleryman keeps an eye out.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR BASTOGNE RE-ENLISTEES!

JULY 2008

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SGT Sean Cannon-426 BSB

SPC Stephanie Choquette-426 BSB

SPC Kyle Ellis-426 BSB

PFC Deanna Hawkins-426 BSB

SSG Diane Kirchner-426 BSB

PFC Matthew Madison- 426 BSB

SSG Michael Morgan- 426 BSB

SSG Robin Richardson- 426 BSB

SPC Jason Woolverton- 426 BSB

SPC Troy Armstrong- 1STB

SPC Brian Burket- 1STB

SPC James Sims- 1STB

SPC Jarrad Steyr- 1STB

SSG Aaron Storeim- 1STB

PFC David Adams- 1-32

PFC Jason Avina-1-32

SSG Michael Barnette- 1-32

PFC James Booth- 1-32

SSG Billy Clark- 1-32

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SPC Brandon Howell- 1-32

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