

The North Star

Serving Task Force Marne
U. S. Division- North, Iraq



Volume 1, Issue 87

May 26, 2010

New life yields hope for displaced Iraqis

By Spc. Ry Norris
135th Mobile PA Det.

An estimated 1.21 million Iraqis were displaced before 2003 under the Ba'ath government, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

Since then that number has more than doubled primarily as the result of a rash of sectarian violence that gripped the country, according to the center.

The total number of internally displaced Iraqis who have yet to return home is estimated at 2.8 million.

Since the improvement of their national security, the Government of Iraq and other organizations, like the United States Department of Agriculture, are working to resettle internally displaced persons in Iraq. To facilitate this, agricultural advisors assigned by the

USDA to the Department of State's Diyala Provincial Reconstruction Team created the Hayat Jadida IDP Villages Agricultural Livelihoods. Hayat jadida means to give new life in Arabic.

"The program is intended to assist in the process of restoring the villages' destroyed orchards, vineyards and vegetable fields," said Russell Williams, a senior agricultural adviser with the Diyala PRT.

In order to help displaced persons who have returned to the area, members of the USDA, like Williams, have worked diligently with the GoI and local sheiks in the villages of al Bey'a, Qaryat ar Naqib and Ibrahim al Madhkur for the past year.

Escorted by 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, Williams meets regularly with the sheiks of

these villages to discuss the status of the program.

Smaller villages in Diyala province, like al Bey'a, have been deeply affected by sectarian conflict for the past seven years.

During a period of political unrest, al Qaeda in Iraq used violence and intimidation to turn Islamic Sunnis and Islamic Shi'ites against each other.

The resulting violence drove families to seek shelter elsewhere, leaving virtual ghost towns behind.

That was over a year ago, before security returned to the region and the villagers started making their way back home. Now towns like al Bey'a have set to the task of reviving their economic and agricultural way of life.

While some of the villages' basic infrastructure, e.g. water pumps, have been repaired and or replaced, each village still lacks many

of the tools necessary to rebuild livelihoods, said Williams, a Visalia, Calif., native.

One of the first tasks the USDA set out to do was order new farm equipment to replace the outdated equipment. This equipment includes a 90 horsepower, four-wheel drive tractor to assist with plowing the fields and a plastic covered greenhouse, called a hoop-house, that will allow farmers to grow crops the region normally couldn't support. An assortment of smaller implements and supplies has also been ordered to assist the villagers.

Farmers mainly rely on heavy rains in the winter and melting snow from the mountains of Turkey into the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to increase their agricultural production.

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Task Force Marne In the News

Read what is being said about Task Force Marne in the news. May 14, The Washington Examiner.com posted that Task Force Marne, along with Iraqi and Kurdish Security Forces struck against insurgent targets during Operation Chelan. The operation disrupted terror networks of all major insurgency groups - Sunni nationalists, Shi'ite extremists and al Qaeda in Iraq - at a time when they are trying to keep the recently elected government from being seated. To read more, go to the Task Force Marne's Web site and click on "In the News."

Visit the link at:<http://www.stewart.army.mil/tfm/inthenews/home.asp>



School opens, promises for peace in Rashad

By Pfc. Jessica Luhrs,
1BCT, 1st AD PAO

Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 37th Armor, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, along with their partners in 3rd Battalion, 47th Iraqi Army Brigade, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Kuna Riwi primary school, which will give quality education to more than 100 children around Kuna Riwi, near Kirkuk, Iraq, May 17.

The project, near Kirkuk, Iraq, began in November of 2009 and was funded by the Commander's Emergency Response Program, according to 1st Lt. Zachery Brown, a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, and fire effects officer with 1/37th Armor.

Citizens around Kuna Riwi and IA soldiers also played a critical role in the

building of this school, he continued.

The people of Kuna Riwi and IA soldiers made the plans for the school, chose the contractors, ensured the paperwork went to the right people and just took initiative to make sure this project happened, said 1st Lt. Brown.

Because they put so much work into this school we know they will take pride in it and protect it, according to Lt. Col. Geoffery Catlett, commander of 1/37th AR.

Lieutenant Colonel Catlett and leadership of Kuna Riwi began the ceremony with a ribbon cutting and speeches in front of the school.

Following the speeches, the children of the school received backpacks full of school supplies.

Then the dignitaries and teachers toured the new

school.

During the tour the English teacher at the school, Noor, who prefers to go by her first name, spoke of the differences of the old and new school.

"Just a month ago I was teaching 120 children in a single room school made

of mud, now thanks to the army (Iraqi) and U.S. forces our children have a school to make their education level grow," said Noor.

At the end of the ceremony, the children rushed to their new classrooms to open their bags and sit at their desks.



Photo by Pfc. Jessica Luhrs, 1BCT, 1st AD PAO

First Lieutenant Zachery Brown, fire effects officer with 1/37th Armor, 1BCT, 1st AD, assists Samad Shafik, principal of the newly opened school in Kuna Riwi, in handing out backpacks to the children, following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, near Kirkuk, Iraq, May 17.

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Water is distributed to the crops from the rivers with the use of an irrigation system that helps flood the fields during planting time.

Unfortunately rainfall has been scarce over the last two years. USDA Foreign Agricultural Service estimated only four inches of rainfall in September 2007 to April 2008 and four to eight inches in 2008-2009.

The soil was so dry that the government of Iraq requested Turkey to release more water from the hydroelectric dams in the north to feed the rivers and spread water to the farmer's fields.

In 2009, Iraq received an abundance of rainfall and unusually warmer winter months. The warm temperature combined with the rain has helped crops germinate at a faster rate.

This year's harvest yielded over 300 percent more than the previous year, according to USDA, and enough grain was produced for the villagers to sell to

the government.

However new equipment and favorable weather can only help so much. Local leadership in Diyala complained that companies in neighboring countries are able to export produce into Iraq to sell in markets at a cheaper price than the farmers.

As a result the farmers must find a more cost-effective way to grow their crops.

The USDA is trying to fix this problem by offering courses that teach techniques to maximize profit while cutting cost.

One example of this is the drip irrigation system. This system uses at least 60 percent less water to develop crops.

Drip irrigation uses a network of valves and pipes to deliver water slowly to the roots of the plants, thus enabling farmers to conserve water and fertilizer by delivering nutrients to the source of the plant, the root.

Although Williams has only worked

with al Bey'a village for a year, he has seen the village go from having nothing to one that is slowly starting to resemble its former self.

More families are planning to return after the school year is over.

With more families returning, new equipment coming in and modern techniques being taught, the village is well on its way to becoming a self-sufficient community.



Photo by Spc. Ry Norris 135th Mobile Public Affairs Det. **Sheik Ra'ad Majeed Ibrahim of Ibrahim al Madhkur village, Sheik Salal Abdullah Nasim of Qaryat ar Naqib village and other villagers of al Bey'a meet with agricultural advisers with the USDA in al Bey'a village, May 17.**

Chaplain born in Soviet Union defends America

By Spc. Michael Adams
TF Marne PAO

Arkadiusz Ochalek grew up playing soccer in Sztum, Poland, as a way to forget about the pressures he faced from the Soviet Union, which ruled his nation.

“The Russians took everything from our countries and gave it to Russia,” he said. The usurping of supplies led to families all over the Soviet Union having to wait in long lines for the most basic necessities, like food and clothing.

But he never saw his nation as ‘red,’ that color being the symbol of the Soviet Union. He saw it more as pink, meaning his home country had a looser association with the Soviet Union than other nations under Soviet control.

He knew many in Poland that had families in free nations, like America and

the United Kingdom. They would write home and send packages to their relatives in Europe, sparking an interest of many about life in those nations.

While his curiosity about America was strong, his faith was also very strong in his youth.

“The church was a very important part of my life,” he said. “It helped us to fight communism by showing our strength as a nation.”

He handed out brochures against communism as a part of his Catholic school campaign against the Soviet Union and their policies.

His faith helped him defy communism and led him to study divinity. He studied at three different universities across Europe and Asia before he came to America in 2004.

“It was love at first sight,” said Chaplain (Capt.)

Ochalek, who now serves as the Division Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division chaplain. “The culture, the landscape, the people - there isn’t one reason I love America so much. I am very lucky to be in this country.”

Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek didn’t just come to America to enjoy freedom, he came to this country to defend freedom.

“I came to America with the idea of being a chaplain in the Army,” he said. “I believe in Army troops, and I want to be a good chaplain to them.”

Even though he is stationed at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, he provides services all over United States Division - North, routinely leaving Speicher to be a spiritual guide for Soldiers. He has left his home base more than 10 times to give services to other posts.

When he is on another base, he provides two services a day. When he is on COB Speicher, he does services daily at different locations around the post.

He and Sgt. Keith Wright, who serves as his chaplain’s assistant, also work on prayer luncheons. This involves getting reservations, food, guest speakers and advertising the events. The process is long, but it serves the purpose of lifting Soldiers’ morale and fulfilling their spiritual needs in a combat zone.

They also sponsor retreats for Soldiers to get away, discuss problems they face, and relax in a combat environment. They have sponsored retreats for Soldiers from many diverse backgrounds on Speicher. Sergeant Wright sees the

events as a chance to bring Soldiers together in fellowship and spirit.

Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek also provides individual counseling to Soldiers on a daily basis. This can involve helping them to cope with long deployments, marriage, spiritual and other issues.

Even though Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek mentors a lot of Soldiers, he relies on Sgt. Wright to help him with the many events and tasks they are assigned to do.

“We’re like a Scottie Pippen and Michael Jordan of unit ministry teams,” Sgt. Wright said.

He added that he really enjoys working with Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek. “The two of us are new to the chaplaincy, so at times it can be challenging, but because of who he is as a person, it is a smooth transition through the challenging times.”

Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek also faces additional challenges, according to Sgt. Wright. He is one of the few Catholics chaplains in the Army and has to meet the religious needs of all Catholic Soldiers in USD - N. Even though Chaplain (Capt.) Ochalek, is a very proud American and a very proud Soldier, he remembers his roots and how they helped shape his beliefs.

“Poles will never submit themselves to anyone,” he said. “For many years, there were different forces trying to conquer Poles and we fought all of them. That fighting spirit was always alive in Poles and is very alive in me. That is why I joined the U.S. Army ... I believe in both countries’ spirit of freedom and I want to help others to be free.”



Photo by Spc. Michael Adams, TF Marne PAO

Chaplain (Captain) Arkadiusz Ochalek, a chaplain with DSTB, 3rd ID, speaks at a church service to Soldiers, May 22, at COB Speicher.

Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Sergeant Christopher Pike, of Pensacola, Fla., is with Company D, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. On April 14, his company conducted a combined clearing operation with the Kirkuk Emergency Services Unit. As part of the clearing operation, dismounted elements had the task of conducting combined raids in search of Battalion High Value Targets. After the initial raid on a target house, Sgt. Pike noticed an individual suspiciously observing his blocking position. Without hesitation, Sgt. Pike got the attention of an ESU clearing element. The ESU secured the individual and brought him to Sgt. Pike's position. When the individual was brought closer, Sgt. Pike was able to identify him as the battalion's number 2 high-value target. Had it not been for Sgt. Pike's situational awareness and overall mission preparedness, it is unknown whether or not Iraqi Security Forces would have been successful in detaining this high-value individual. Sergeant Pike's actions that day make him a truly deserving selection for today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.



Alvin Molina, of New Orleans, is one of two lightweight counter mortar radar field service representatives working in direct support of United States Division - North. He's responsible for ensuring all 41 LCMRs in the USD-N area are fully mission capable and provides force protection for both U.S. and Iraqi forces. He routinely travels across USD-N to ensure the items are fully operational and to assist in the preventive maintenance that is so crucial to the fleet. He provides Soldiers with instruction and guidance on operations, emplacement, and trouble shooting of the system. His attention to detail and hard work are crucial to the division's high indirect fire acquisition rate. Molina's skills are highly respected throughout the fire support community - he is considered the sensors "go to guy" - and his technical and tactical expertise have been invaluable to the Task Force. Molina's can-do attitude and untiring support of the task force make him a perfect choice for this week's Task Force Marne Service Provider of the Week.

Folk poetry in Iraq part of national culture

Cultural Tidbit Special to the North Star

Iraqi Folk poetry is different from classic Arabic poetry, which is written in the classic Arabic language. The folk poet does not necessarily know reading and writing; poetry is more like a natural gift rather than academic knowledge.

With classic poetry, the poet must have extensive knowledge of the Arabic language as well as the guidelines

for classic poetry. Folk poetry is very popular among the public in Iraq, especially in the South, because of the lack of formal education there, compared to Baghdad and the northern provinces.

During the Ottoman Era, Shi'as of the south were prohibited from getting an education, so they started to recite folk poetry as a way of entertainment. The Shi'a poets described their daily life and their troubles through these

poems, and the poems were very popular among the local communities.

During the 1920 revolution after the British occupation, Folk poetry became a more political tool used to incite Iraqis against British occupiers. Saddam Hussein payed poets to write propaganda for his regime.

Editor's note: The Task Force Marne Human Terrain Analyst Team contributed to this cultural tidbit.

Safety Thought of the Week: HAZMAT Exposure Awareness/Risks

- As we continue to transfer bases to the Government of Iraq, an increase in the discovery of hazardous materials may place United States forces at increased health risks.
- USF personnel must remain cognizant of their environment and avoid unnecessary contact with HAZMAT. Especially if the specific composition of the materials is unknown (markings).
- Incompatible storage techniques of hazardous materials increase respiratory and dermal exposure beyond acceptable levels when proper personal protective equipment is not employed.
- Avoid entering rooms or areas where HAZMAT is stored or discovered until accurate assessment of oxygen levels and explosive hazards are determined.
- Packaging, transport and disposal of identified HAZMAT should only be performed by trained personnel.



REGIONAL HEADLINES

Boy, 16, runs 113 miles in 24 hours

www.King5.com

SEATTLE - A Bellevue teenager can finally put his feet up. Blaine Lints logged 24 hours on the University of Washington track in the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life.

Lints battled through the overnight rain, chilly temperatures and dehydration, and he even went into hypothermic shock.

The 16-year-old ran 113 miles in 24 hours, which is just shy of his original 130-mile goal.

But it should still get him a record for his age and the distance ran.

The relay raised just under \$300,000.

Lints said his inspiration for the run was his grandmother, who died after a diagnosis of leukemia.

Wal-Mart employee foils a shoplifter — and loses her job

[The Wichita Eagle](#)

WICHITA, Kan. - Heather Ravenstein tried to save Wal-Mart some money Friday by foiling a shoplifter's plan to steal a \$600 computer, but it cost her her job.

"I'm a single mom, and I don't know what I'm going to do," says Ravenstein, who is 30.

She's worked at the West Kellogg Wal-Mart for almost two years, most recently as a customer service manager.

May 21, around 10:20, she was standing near some registers when she saw a man with a computer coming up the main walkway of the store.

"Action Alley is what they call it," she says.

"He was walking rather fast, so it caught my eye."

Ravenstein says the man kept walking and set off an alarm. She went after him.

"Let me see your receipt, and then I'll take this off for you," she told the man, referring to a sensor on the computer. Ravenstein says the man refused and kicked her.

"And then he punched me in my shoulder, and then he finally gave up and just let go of the computer." Ravenstein walked back into the store and sat on the floor.

"I was shaking pretty bad," she says. Assistant store managers immediately checked on her.

"They all came out and made sure I was OK," Ravenstein says. "They thanked me."

The next day, about two hours before her shift was over, Ravenstein says an assistant manager asked to speak with her. He then told her it's against Wal-Mart policy for anyone but a manager or someone in asset protection to try and stop a customer from stealing.

"He said there's really no gray area," Ravenstein says. "It just goes straight to termination."

She was told to turn in her badges and keys.

She says she's stopped people for forging payroll checks on more than one occasion.

"They never once said, 'You're not supposed to be doing that.'"

When asked about the situation, Wal-Mart spokeswoman Anna Taylor e-mailed this response:

"While we appreciate her intentions, Ms. Ravenstein's actions put her safety — and perhaps the safety of our customers — in jeopardy and, in the process, violated company policy as it pertains to how we treat people in our stores.

As an unfortunate result of these circumstances, Ms. Ravenstein is no longer employed by our company." Ravenstein filed for unemployment May 21.

"The main thing is I'm worried about my son," Ravenstein says of 4-year-old TJ.

She says she'd like to go to school to work in the medical field, perhaps as a nurse. She wants "a career, not just a job."

For now, though, Ravenstein says she simply needs to make money, and it's not likely to be in retail.

"After this experience, no. Probably not."

You are invited

Army Medical Department 4 Mile Walk and 8 Mile Run

When: June 26, registration at 4:45 a.m., start time is at 5:30 a.m.
Where: The run begins at LSA 16.

THE

North Star

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1st Infantry Division
2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
3rd Infantry Division

3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team,
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1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
1st Armored Division

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