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January 11, 2010

The Army's cost of dealing with cash in Iraq

By: Capt. Randy J. Michael
TF Pathfinder, 4th BCT, 1st Armd. Div.



COB ADDER - Iraq may not be ready for Paypal, but with the help of the U.S. Army, the southern Iraqi provinces of Dhi Qar, Maysan and Al Muthanna are moving closer to a cashless system in order to deal with the mounting costs of dealing with cash.

Task Force Pathfinder is increasing its use of electronic funds transfer (EFT) as a way to pay local contractors and vendors instead of stacks of Iraqi Dinar. The transactions are part of the unit's role aiding the State Department's Provincial Reconstruction Teams as they build-up the Iraqi civilian infrastructure.

The benefits of this change have been immediate. The Army saves

"The transition to electronic funds transfers is a welcomed sign of progress that has the added benefit of saving the U.S. government money."

Lt. Col. Mike Eastman
Commander, Task Force Pathfinder



money. Soldiers eliminate the security risks associated with transporting funds and confidence in the Iraqi banking system gets an added boost with every deposit.

Today, the U.S. Army brings an estimated \$42 million in currency into Iraq and Afghanistan monthly, down from \$192 million per month the previous year and as much as \$400 million a month in 2003. With the development of new banks, including one nearing

completion at Contingency Operating Base Adder's Iraqi-Based Industrial Zone (IPBZ), EFT is becoming the preferred method of payment.

When paying for reconstruction projects with hard currency, the cost to the Army is an estimated \$32 per payment due to the additional security costs. By contrast, EFTs costs a scant

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Photo by Pfc. Aaron Brooks

1st Lt. Adam Marquis from Buffalo, N.Y. and Navy Lt. j.g. Christopher Deluzio, New York, N.Y., both assigned to Task Force Pathfinder, inspect the progress made on an electrical project in Dhi Qar province.

New Chapel Opens Doors Wide



Photos by Spc. Samuel Soza

Members of the 34th Infantry Division band perform "Down To The River" at the beginning of the dedication ceremony of the new chapel at Contingency Operating Base Basra, Jan. 2. The ceremony included music and performances from multiple 34th Infantry Division band detachments, a gospel choir, a performance by the dance praise team, and prayers from the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities.



Soldiers and Airmen pray during the dedication ceremony of the new chapel. "To set aside the harshness of the environment and the harshness of military living."

By Spc. Samuel Soza
367th MPAD



COB BASRA, – Doors opened wide for service members and civilians who attended the dedication ceremony of the new chapel held at Contingency Operating Base Basra, Jan. 2.

The ceremony included music and performances from multiple 34th Infantry Division Band detachments, a gospel choir, a performance by the dance praise team, and prayers from the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities.

Several prominent figures and community leaders attended the event, including Imam al-Moosawi and acting archbishop, Imad al-Banna, of St. Efram Chaldean Catholic Church. Both leaders are from Basrah.

Also in attendance were Martina Strong, 34th Infantry Division's State Department political advisor, Alice Walpole, the British consulate-general, and Mike Sunshine with the Provincial Reconstruction Team, as well as members of the Red Horse Team – a group of U.S. Airmen who construct facilities throughout warzones, including this chapel.

A marble plaque, made by associates of al-Moosawi, was also uncovered during the ceremony to commemorate the event.

The role of a chapel is crucial to service members, said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) John Morris, 34th Inf. Div. chaplain.

"This is my third deployment to Iraq," said the Afton, Minn. native, "And this chapel, like every chapel that



A plaque, made by associates of Imam al-Moosawi, is unveiled during a dedication ceremony for the new chapel.

I've served in, in Iraq, is a sanctuary in the middle of a very dangerous place."

"This is a place of peace, of quiet, of all the good things, that war isn't," he said.

Construction on the chapel began around October and was completed Dec. 21, said Morris.

In the beginning, the 34th Inf. Div. chaplains held services in a 45-man tent they inherited from the British forces, which was insufficient for the 9,000 American personnel on the base, Morris said.

Later, they used the special event dining rooms found at the dining facilities.

"At one point there were four different DFACs and so we had four different sites," said Morris, "It was very discouraging, I had Soldiers get angry many



Spc. Ericka Jones, of Miami, Fla., unit supply specialist with the 810th MP Co., a member of the dance praise team, performs mime during the ceremony.

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THE RED BULL REPORT

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34th Inf. Div. PAO: Lt. Col. Kevin Olson
OIC, Command Information: 1st Lt. Shamika Hill
NCOIC, Command Information: 1st Sgt. David Bennett
NCOIC: Staff Sgt. Chris Carney
Managing Editor: Sgt. Ben Kibbey
Graphics Designer: Sgt. Francis Horton
Layout/Design: Spc. Francesca Stanchi
Staff Writers: Sgt. Francis Horton, Spc. Sam Soza, Spc. Samantha Johnson, Pfc. J. Princeville Lawrence

Contributing Units

- 17th Fires Brigade
- 4th BCT, 1st Armored Division
- 12th Combat Aviation Brigade
- 3rd BCT, 3rd Infantry Division
- 367th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Media Queries please contact 34th Inf. Div. Public Affairs Office at MND-S_PAO@iraq.centcom.mil



A round flies during the weapons qualification portion of the Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter competition.



Photos by Sgt. Francis Horton

Sgt. Danail M Pacheco, 84th Explosive Ordnance Battalion, demonstrates the proper way to load and unload an M2 .50-Caliber machine gun during the Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter competition here on COB Adder, Dec. 27-29.



The contestants prepare their land navigation courses during the Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter competition.



Sgt David J Hall, 17th FB, takes cover during a mock indirect fire exercise meant to show the proficiency of the Soldiers warrior tasks and training.

Soldiers Compete for Soldierly honors

By Sgt. Francis Horton
367th MPAD



COB ADDER – Soldiers on Contingency Operating Base Adder competed for the title of Soldier of the Quarter and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter, Dec. 27-29, in contests which tested physical and mental capabilities to their limits.

"It's fast paced and very busy," said Sgt. David Hall, 1st Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, 17th Fires Brigade. In the time leading up to the competition, he and the other Soldiers toughened themselves physically and mentally.

SpC. Jeffery T. Chase of the 17th FB won Soldier of the Quarter and Hall was name Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter.

The competition included a physical fitness test, consisting of the two-mile run, pushups and sit-ups, a two-mile road march, a land navigation course, a review board and weapons qualification.

"We picked the skills Soldiers are most likely to use," said Sgt 1st class Felicia Hamilton, 121st Brigade Support Battalion, a ~~Denton~~ Texas native.

The land navigation course was a desert field, and large Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles were used as points. Using a compasses and protractors, the Soldiers had to find the right points in order. If they were wrong, they had to go back to their last correct point and start over.

At various points during the course, Soldiers had to complete tasks ranging from first aid and reacting to indirect fire, to the loading and unloading of the M2 .50-caliber machine gun.

Many of the events were created specifically to frustrate and disorient the soldiers.

"We want to see who can withstand the pressure," Hamilton said.

In preparation, the soldiers practiced the various military skills and worked to put their bodies in top physical condition.

"We want to come up with ways to keep our soldiers trained and focused," said Command Sgt. Maj. Philip Pandy, 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

HOMETOWN HIGHLIGHT

The town is known for its active music life, which Paste magazine named America's "Best Music Scene" in 2008. The annual North Texas State Fair and Rodeo Denton Arts and Jazz Festival are major events that attract over 300,000 people.



For more of Sgt. Horton's stories, visit:
www.TheRedBulls.org/Horton

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\$2.50 per transaction and could save the Army an estimated \$20 million annually.

Task Force Pathfinder's paying agents have handled more than \$14 million in both dinar and EFT disbursements with local contractors and vendors in Maysan, Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces over eight months. Another \$21 million is approved and pending future payments for local humanitarian assistance projects. Most of this will be paid via EFT.

So what is the Army's delay including this into reconstruction contracts? It isn't easy convincing Iraqi businessmen that an electronic receipt is going to pay them when for years they have received bundles of cash. Contractors need reassurance that the process works. This means both Soldiers and program managers must be well versed in the pro-

cess and understand everyone's responsibility to ensure efficiency.

First Lt. Andrew King, disbursing agent, of the 33rd Finance Management Company, deployed to COB Adder, explained the EFT Process.

"We process the EFT request and send it up within the first 24 to 48 hours. Then, Baghdad releases a voucher number. At this point, it takes 5 to 7 days for the payment to reach the contractor's account," he said.

Not only is the finance company a resource, but there is also the EFT Assistance Center. The center was established and funded by the taskforce to serve as a help-desk to all the stakeholders in Iraq's newly introduced EFT payments system.


Since Oct. 2008, the assistance center has resolved over 150 EFT payment problems totaling more than \$15 million. Also they provide monthly statistical analysis of the most common EFT payment issues

within Iraq, and communicate the root causes of these issues to Joint Contracting Command-Iraq, Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Department of Defense, and all other applicable government agencies.

Brig. Gen. Phillip E. McGhee, director of resource management for U.S. Army Central Command, said the Army will go cashless in theater at the beginning of the 2010 fiscal year when writing contracts with local vendors.

As the Soldiers of Task Force Pathfinder continue their efforts to build civil capacity in southern Iraq, "the transition to electronic funds transfers is a welcomed sign of progress that has the added benefit of saving the U.S. government money," added Lt. Col. Mike Eastman, commander, Task Force Pathfinder.

For more of Capt. Michael's stories, visit: www.TheRedBulls.org/Michael



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For other samples of Mr. Harmon's work go to www.jodyharmon.com
The prints will be delivered at the 60 day event or mailed out to non-attendees.

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Sunday, January 17, 2010

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This is an opportunity to sell your items privately, from service member to service member or to donate items to charity! Provide your own display, and set your own prices. Pick up bags to store donations* prior to Jan. 17 at the Red Bull MWR tent.

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CHAPEL

times, [that] we kept changing locations and they were frustrated."

In August, a temporary solution came in the form of a 300-man tent, obtained from Camp Bucca.

This was used while plans for a new chapel were developed, a project that faced its own difficulties.

"It looked as though this chapel would not be able to be built in time due to lack of housing. That had to be the first priority," said Morris. "And there was a lack of material."

After four months, the chapel was finally completed.

"We're told a miracle happened, that construction on housing was completed on time, material came in to build this, everything came together, and we were able to be in here for Christmas, which was a tremendous blessing," said Morris.

Morris also said the new chapel has many improvements over the previous facilities, including adequate air-conditioning, no leaking and plenty of room for simultaneous activities.

An unplanned feature is the lighted bell atop the new building, which will make the chapel a prominent landmark to future service members, Morris told attendees.

"That was a total surprise," he said, "That isn't a part of the original plan. The Red Horse Team took it upon themselves to design that, and put it up there as a gift to the chapel team, and we are just blessed to have it."

Morris sees a double meaning behind the notion that the chapel is something service members and civilians can use to orient themselves.

"This is a place to come and, for a few moments, get away from the war," said Morris, "To set aside the harshness of the environment and the harshness of military living."

"So much of what we do brings out the hard side of us," he said, "Here's one place where we can be fully human again."

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Around the world in 34 seconds



CARACAS - President Hugo Chavez said he ordered two F-16 jets to intercept a U.S. military plane that twice entered Venezuelan skies on Friday, but Washington said none of its planes flew over the South American country's airspace. Brandishing a photo of the plane, which he described as a P-3, Chavez said the overflight was the latest violation of Venezuelan airspace by the U.S. military from its bases on the Netherlands' Caribbean islands and from neighboring Colombia. "They are provoking us ... these are war-planes," he said. Chavez said the F-16s escorted the U.S. plane away after two incursions lasting 15 and 19 minutes each. A spokesman for the U.S. Defense Department denied Chavez's assertion, saying in an e-mail: "We can confirm no U.S. military aircraft entered Venezuelan airspace today. As a matter of policy we do not fly over a nation's airspace without prior consent or coordination." Senior Obama administration officials said the U.S. Southern Command was unaware of any incident involving U.S. government aircraft in Venezuelan airspace on Friday.



DETROIT - A federal judge entered a not guilty plea on Friday on behalf of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the 23-year-old Nigerian accused in the attempted bombing of a Detroit-bound airplane that prompted a sweeping review of U.S. security procedures. Abdulmutallab, who shuffled into court in leg irons, answered questions from U.S. Magistrate Mark Randon, who entered the not guilty plea after his court-appointed lawyer said the defendant would "stand mute." He was arraigned on six charges including attempted murder and the attempted use of a "weapon of mass destruction" to bring down a plane carrying 289 other people. President Barack Obama took responsibility on Thursday for security failures that allowed Abdulmutallab to board the plane in Amsterdam and ordered reforms aimed at thwarting attacks. The attempted bombing on Christmas Day prompted a spate of airline security scares that have shut down airports and stranded jittery passengers.



PERTH - Tommy Robredo upended world number four Andy Murray to help Spain rally for a 2-1 victory over Britain in the Hopman Cup final on Saturday. Earlier, 15-year-old Laura Robson had stunned world number 26 Maria Jose Martinez Sanchez 6-1 7-6 to give Britain a surprise lead before Robredo responded for Spain with a 1-6 6-4 6-3 upset of Murray. The Spaniards then saved three set points in the opening set of the deciding mixed doubles as they clinched a dramatic 7-6 7-5 victory to win the event for the third time. For Robredo, it was his second Hopman Cup victory after partnering Arantxa Sanchez Vicario to the title in 2002.



BEIJING - Chinese people who live in government-sponsored housing in a prosperous southern province may be evicted if caught repeatedly spitting in public, according to a draft plan. The plan, carried on the Guangzhou Land and House Management Bureau's website (www.laho.gov.cn), also includes littering, making too much noise and gambling among more than 20 other "misdeeds" that would lead to eviction, based on a point system. Spitting once in the community carries a three point penalty, littering five, dropping things from upper stories seven and not paying the rent for three consecutive months carries the maximum of 20 points, the plan said. People in such housing will be forced to move out if they rack up a total of 20 points. Spitting in public is common in China, despite repeated government campaigns to wipe it out as a health menace. The bureau's website said it had "borrowed ideas from the advanced experience of Hong Kong on public housing management."