

Thunderhorse Battalion Newsletter

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19 Oct 2004

Well, it's time to get another long overdue newsletter out of the gun tube. As usual, we've been busy lately. Things never seem to slow down in our sector. When the enemy backs off a little, we get busy with rebuilding projects. When the bad guys start up their tricks again, we work hard at changing their behavior. We've been through a series of these ups downs over the last month or so, but things have definitely picked up in October with the beginning of the Muslim period of Ramadan. Over the month leading up until about three weeks ago, things had been relatively quiet. Three or four days might pass without so much as some small-arms fire or a single explosion. Then things began to pick up significantly.

Thursday, 30 September marked the beginning of this increased activity. On that day, SPC Rodney Jones was standing guard at Raider Base, our outpost in the city of Abu Ghuraib, providing security for the rest of his platoon and the municipal buildings when a terrorist crashed through the gate took his life with a truck bomb. During the attack, Rodney stood his ground and stopped the attacker before he could reach his intended target and in doing so denied the enemy the objective he sought. The attack on that day was not only aimed at destroying the new government building in Abu Ghuraib, but also the Council Chairman and other Council members inside. It did not succeed however, because one man stood in the way. That man was Rodney Jones. His bravery and courage saved many lives and prevented what could have been a much more devastating attack. His loss has touched all of us and we will miss him very much.

So what do we make of this loss? Why did it have to happen? These are questions that come to mind as we work our way through this tragic event. As we survey the whole situation though, it becomes clear how essential it is that we protect these symbols of the new government and prevent the terrorists from trying to destroy this new democracy before it has time to grow. Just like the birth of our own democracy over two hundred years ago, it is going to take time and much sacrifice to get things going, so we must stay the course. The terrorists know that they must attack now in the early stages of democracy before it can take root or their own chances for success are greatly diminished. They seek to carry this objective out by intimidating or killing honest Iraqis who are risking their lives to be part of this new government.

Instead of democracy and freedom, the terrorists and former regime members want to set this country back eight-hundred years and impose a Taliban-like state that would be a haven for terrorists from throughout the world as Afghanistan was. Don't be fooled into thinking that these are some sort of freedom fighters trying to free Iraq from the "U.S. occupiers". They would like people to believe that. No, these are hard-core terrorist who aren't looking out for the good of anyone but themselves and they are getting huge sums of money from other countries that fear a free and democratic Iraq. These terrorists not only want to take over this country, they have publicly vowed to take their fight to the rest of the world. I am sure that they would have gladly driven the dump truck laden with explosives that hit Raider Base into a shopping center or a school back home had they been given the chance. However, their hands are full right now because we are taking the fight to them in their neighborhoods instead of in our own.

In January, Iraq will hold it's first free elections in history. These elections will select a National Assembly, like a congress, that will draft a constitution and a set of national laws. The time leading up to the election is probably the most critical period since the fall of the former regime. The country has to prepare for the elections. People will have to register to vote, candidates will have to get their message out and then voters will congregate at polling places to cast their ballot. All of these events provide the terrorists with an easy mark to intimidate voters or to attack with a car bomb or other device. They know that if the elections succeed, the government will continue to grow and get stronger, signaling the end for the terrorists.

In order to ensure that these historic elections can take place, the Theater Commander, General Casey, directed that some forces that were scheduled to return before January stay to ensure stability through this period. 2-12 CAV and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team are among those forces that will stay a little longer. So, instead of returning around the end of November as we once thought, we are now looking at a return sometime in January. We'll complete hand over of our current sector by the middle of November as scheduled and then we will serve as the theater (all of Iraq) reserve. This means we will be available to take care of business wherever a problem arises throughout the country.

In preparation for this and to make room for the incoming unit, we are going to move out of our current living accommodations and move into a tent city called Camp Stryker over on the other side of Baghdad International Airport from where we are now. Our mailing address will remain the same and although we'll still have access to phones and email, it won't be quite as handy. We will be housed with about twenty-five soldiers per tent and we'll have access to showers, a makeshift gym and a small recreation area with TV, etc. While the prospect of three months of tent living during the winter rainy season isn't terribly exciting, I have a feeling that we won't spend much time there once we become the reserve—there are plenty of problems to fix around this country.

In closing, I want to tell you all how proud I am of the hard work and dedication I see each day in the actions of the soldiers, their families and all those who support us back home. The boxes of goodies, cards, and letters we receive are an incredible morale booster and they help to take a little of the homesickness out of all of us. I'm sure that one day we will all look back on this and realize how much this sacrifice bonded us as soldiers, families, and as a nation. Thank you all once again for your support. God bless you all.

Always Ready! Thunderhorse!

LTC Tim Ryan
Thunder 6

PS: After almost two months in transit, our boxes with the 2000+ pairs of donated flip-flops from OPERATION FLIP-FLOP finally arrived. We are distributing them out each time we go out on patrol. The people truly appreciate them and having soldiers giving the folks something they need puts a whole different face on what they may think about us. Thank you all for your efforts and I would like to give special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Gary Cluck who have dedicated so much of their time and effort to making this happen. I will send some photos out in this and subsequent emails and hopefully it won't overload the system.