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U.S., Iraqi Soldiers to Clean Streets of Hor Al Bosh

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1-1 Cav. Div. Public Affairs

HOR AL BOSH, Iraq -- In a big push to clear the streets here of extremists, Iraqi Army troops of the 3rd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) teamed with Soldiers from the 2nd "Stallion" Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment to perform a large Iraqi-led combined cordon and search operation, going door-to-door in every neighborhood here.

In this particular operation, the Stallions simply observed as the Iraqi Army troops performed the June 6 searches.

The Iraqi soldiers walked from house to house checking for weapons caches and meeting the people, as well as handing out tips cards for information on any extremists who may be lurking in the neighborhoods. When they were needed, Soldiers from the 2-8th Cavalry assisted the Iraqi troops.

"They're (the Iraqi troops) pretty comfortable with everything and taking it slowly and deliberately as they go about their searches," said Bedford, Va., native 1st Lt. Ben Melton, a platoon leader for Company D, 2-8th Cavalry. "They're really doing an excellent job flushing out the bad guys.

"This is a mainly IA-driven operation," he added. "These are the types of things they need to be doing to eventually be able to take over the security of their own country.

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'Patriots' Uncover Bomb Cache, Capture Suspect

By 1st Lt. Brian Cooke
2-32 Field Artillery

BAGHDAD-Multi-National Division-Baghdad Soldiers, in cooperation with Iraqi Security Forces, conducted a raid in the western Baghdad neighborhood of Hateen June 10, uncovering a cache of bomb-making materials and capturing a terrorist suspect believed to be linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq.

"We've been looking for this guy for some time," said 1st Lt. Kevin Mills, a tactical intelligence officer with 2-32nd FA. Mills said the operation's success can be attributed to the cooperation and shared intelligence between U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces.

Soldiers from the 2nd "Patriot" Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, acted on a tip and apprehended the alleged al-Qaeda member. The troops also found approximately 500 boxes of toilet bowl cleaner and 20 boxes of circuit breaker covers, which can be used to build improvised chemical weapons.

Mills said the raid was a product of coordination and cooperation between the Patriot Battalion and members of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army and the Yarmouk Iraqi Police.

(Photo by Maj. Sean J. Ryan, 2-2 Inf. Public Affairs Officer)

Four Stars at Baghdad Market

Adm. William J. Fallon (left), commander of the U.S. Central Command, speaks with Brig. Gen. Latiff, the Rusafa Area Iraqi Police District commander at the Mutanabbi Book Market in eastern Baghdad June 11. Fallon toured the market, the most famous in Baghdad. The market, also named the Al Saray meaning paper market, is open again, though recovering from a March 5 car bombing. Fallon spoke with locals and asked how things were progressing.

Soldiers Seize, Destroy Bomb 'Factory'

By Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons
4-1 Inf. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD - Multinational Division - Baghdad Soldiers seized a bomb-making "factory," along with another large weapons cache while on patrol in the eastern portion of the Rashid District of the Iraqi capital June 11.

"This is tremendous work by our Soldiers to take more than 300 (improvised explosive devices) off the streets," said Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, commander of 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

Troops from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and Company A, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, attached to the 4th IBCT, discovered the factory, a complex of small buildings deep in the thick palm groves of East Rashid, after receiving word of the objective's location from other Coalition Forces.

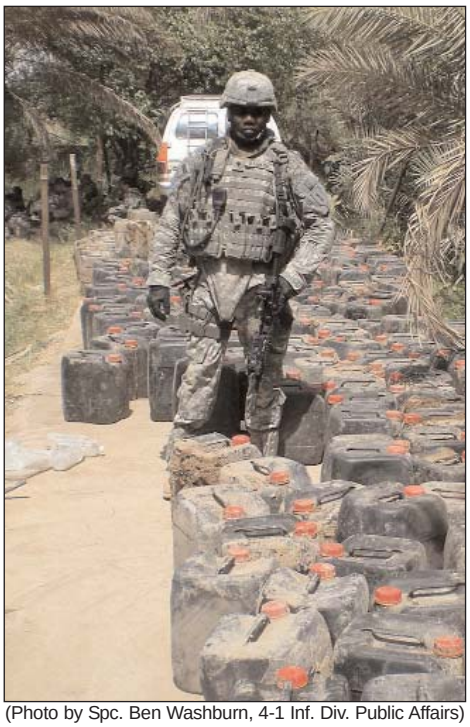
The find consisted of one vehicle wired and loaded with explosives as a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device; 54 82mm mortars; 27 155mm artillery shells; one 500-pound bomb; 64 anti-tank mines; two 200-pound bombs; three 100-pound bombs; 30 130mm projectiles; 30 hand grenades; 200 artillery boosters; 10 40mm rounds; one bag of blasting caps; one rocket of unknown caliber and origin; one bag of booster charges; six bags of propellant; 300 five-gallon cans of nitric acid used to make homemade explosives; one bag of breaching charges and 15 bags of anti-personnel mines with 100 mines per bag. Also found in the cache was enough wiring and bomb-making material to create more than 300 improvised explosive devices.

In a separate cache near the complex, an additional 125 five-gallon containers of nitric acid were found.

Three other vehicles were also found at the site wired as car bombs, but did not contain explosives.

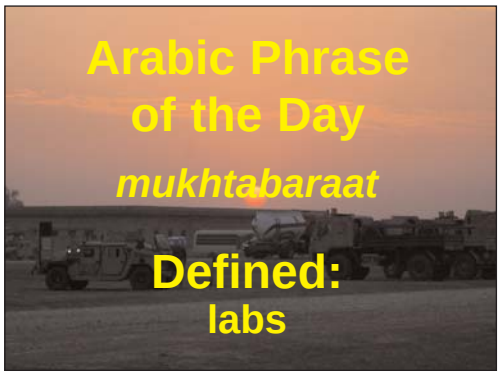
A Coalition explosive ordnance disposal team catalogued the weapons and explosives found and will dispose of them properly, preventing them from being used against innocent Iraqi people or Iraqi Security and Coalition Force personnel.

"This find further emphasizes our ability to get after the extremists and take away their tools of destruction, as none of these weapons and explosives will ever be used to harm others," Gibbs said.



(Photo by Spc. Ben Washburn, 4-1 Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Marquis Dawkins of Brooklyn, N.Y., an infantryman assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, surveys the more than 120 five-gallon cans of nitric acid, a component used to make bombs, discovered at a bomb-making "factory" in Baghdad's East Rashid District June 11. Behind Dawkins is the car bomb discovered at the site.



Iraq 3-Day Weather Report

Today	Tomorrow	Thursday
High: 102	High: 108	High: 110
Low: 83	Low: 89	Low: 83

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Protecting Baghdad One Wall at a Time

1st Lt. Jason Conley
9th Engineer Battalion

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces are improving security in western Baghdad by emplacing temporary concrete barriers at key locations. Coalition forces hope to prevent insurgents from gaining access to critical locations throughout the area.

The fortification of the Iraqi capital has been an integral step in curbing the insurgency that has troubled the city and is a slow and difficult process for the units tasked with emplacing the defensive measures.

Captain Matthew Davis and the "Headhunter" support platoon of Task Force 9th Engineers, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, are routinely finishing their assigned missions as most Soldiers in Iraq are preparing to conduct their morning duties. Never in their pre-deployment training had members of this platoon believed they would be assigned the arduous task of building the fortification network for both American and Iraqi forces throughout the capital.

"The normal duties for a support platoon are to supply the battalion with fuel and other resources to enable its fighting forces to conduct their mission," said platoon leader of the Headhunters, 1st Lt. Maya Lowell. "Not only are we providing that service, but a number of missions in the city, as well."

(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class John Feiler, 9th Engineer Bn.)

Cpl. Aaron Templet, petroleum supply specialist with the 9th Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, guides a crane moving Jersey barriers in place to increase the security on the Ramadan Bridge in western Baghdad.

Lowell's missions extend well beyond their normal duties and involve extensive coordination between Iraqi Army units and civilian contractors. Their missions have included repairing highways damaged by roadside bombs, emplacing concrete walls around American compounds to protect coalition troops from insurgent machine gun fire and rockets, and establishing guard towers at Iraqi checkpoints to increase survivability from the number of dangers faced on a daily basis.

The Headhunters may escort as many as eight flatbeds loaded with twelve foot high concrete walls, two industrial size cranes, and seven combat vehicles through the streets of western Baghdad to American and Iraqi Joint Security Stations.

They have built the walls for two American outposts and were called upon to fortify the volatile Ramadan Bridge following the insurgent attack that destroyed one of Baghdad's main bridges over the Tigris River. Their efforts in filling road craters commonly used for deadly improvised explosive devices have saved numerous American lives while their Iraqi force protection improvements have prevented insurgents from attacking Iraqi guarded checkpoints.

The missions grow longer and the heat continues to increase, but the Headhunter platoon will continue their mission regardless of the difficulties ahead, Lowell said, adding that their pride rests in the fact that they are saving lives, both American and Iraqi, on a daily basis.

'Stallion,' Iraqi Soldiers Go Door-to-door for Security

Clearing

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That's exactly what they're doing."

Over the past few months, Soldiers from Stallion Battalion have been helping to train the 3-9th troops advanced infantry tactics and other aspects of military training. Just recently, the 2-8th troops have begun going on real missions with their Iraqi counterparts.

"When we go on missions with them, we haven't had to give them any pointers, they're pretty much already on it," said Sgt. Marcus Canseco, a squad leader for Co. D who hails from Humble, Texas.

"They're just like any other infantry squad. They're highly motivated and dedicated to the task," he said. "The other day when they took fire, they handled everything very well and ended up capturing three detainees."

Within the course of this day's mission, the Iraqi troops arrested 17 suspects and confiscated several illegal weapons.

The day's success, according to Canseco, is a testament to the Iraqi Army soldiers and U.S. troops working together to gain the trust of the villagers in Hor Al Bosh.

"We've been securing our patrol base here and making our presence known, and a lot of the time we've spent here has involved meeting the people and most of them want us and the Iraqi Security Forces here," said Canseco. "We feel really good about what we're doing here today."

"I hope they see how the people live here and earn a better understanding of the culture," said Canseco. "I think it will give them a better appreciation for the freedoms they have back home."

"It's a small town and it needs to be cleared so the people here can have a future," said Willows, Calif., native Spc. James Boggan, an infantryman with Co. D Boggan.

Recovery Leads Captain Back to His Soldiers

By Sgt. Robert Yde
2-1 Cav. Div. Public Affairs

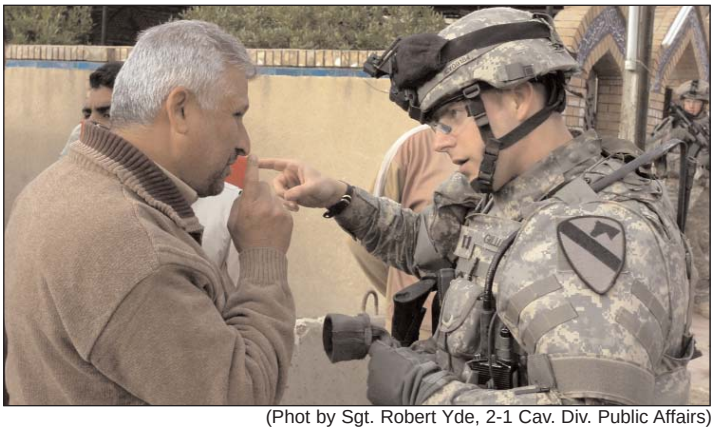
BAGHDAD - On a recent patrol through the Haifa Street area, Capt. John Gilliam was surprised at what he saw. The last time that he had been on Haifa Street was Feb. 3, and at that time, the area still had the notorious distinction of being known as one of Baghdad's most dangerous neighborhoods.

Today Haifa Street continues to show signs of new life as more businesses open and people continue to move back into the area daily. This was not the same place that Gilliam, the commander of Troop C, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment., 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, remembered.

"Haifa Street is a different place because when I left, you didn't go into the alleyways unless you were going after somebody," the Charlottesville, Va., native said. "Now, we were able to walk through the markets and walk through the alleyways, and there were kids playing everywhere, and there were people everywhere. There were businesses open and cars up and down the streets. It's pretty amazing."

The groundwork for much of the progress that Haifa Street has seen over the past several months is a direct result of the efforts that Gilliam's troop put into ridding the area of anti-Iraqi forces earlier this year.

Walking through the streets, Gilliam, 29, said that even though the area is now one of the city's safer ones, he couldn't help but scan the rooftops and alleyways -- something that was just second nature to him from his days of patrolling Haifa Street.



(Phot by Sgt. Robert Yde, 2-1 Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Capt. John Gilliam, the commander of Troop C, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., speaks with a Red Crescent worker before a humanitarian mission on Haifa Street Jan. 29.

It's a different place today, though, and Gilliam knows this as he points out that Coalition Forces have not received any enemy contact in the area since Feb. 3 - the night that Gilliam nearly lost his leg when a grenade exploded within just a few feet of him. That night Gilliam's Soldiers were on Haifa Street preparing for a raid to catch a sniper.

"We had gotten intelligence that there was a sniper operating out of one building, and we'd had a lot of sniper activity up there … a lot of very good snipers," Gilliam explained. "So I pushed the platoon that was out there to do an initial cordon of the area, and I went out there with an additional platoon and moved to go hit the target building."

After arriving to the building that they suspected the sniper was operating out of, Gilliam and his Soldiers quickly moved up and entered the building only to find it abandoned. They then searched the surrounding buildings, and while they discovered evidence of insurgent activity, they were unable to locate the individual they were after.

As they started moving back toward their vehicles, Gilliam received information from one of the helicopter crews that there were seven individuals with AK-47s moving through one of the alleyways.

"We moved one of our vehicles up into a blocking position, and we started moving dismounts up through the alleyways toward the individuals to try to get into position to where we could engage or capture them," he said. "We started taking pretty heavy small arms fire from down the alleyway, and we couldn't get a clear shot because they we're shielding themselves behind children."

As one of his platoons continued to move down the alleyway, Gilliam and his radioman, Spc. Stephen Battisto, stopped about 20 yards behind the other Soldiers so that Gilliam could make a call on his radio.

In the moment that they knelt there, Battisto recalls sensing that something wasn't right, and then hearing a noise that he described as a, "ting, ting, ting."

The noise was the sound of a grenade hitting the ground beside them.

The grenade, which the Soldiers suspect was thrown from one of the rooftops, landed about four feet from Battisto and Gilliam, and, acting on instinct, Battisto pushed Gilliam to the ground just as the grenade exploded.

"I immediately turned around and grabbed the back of his OTV (outer tactical vest) and pushed him and at that time it blew," Battisto said. "I remember I felt like I got hit by a train, and I remember Capt. Gilliam screaming that he was hurt."

Battisto said he shook Gilliam and asked him if he was OK, to which Gilliam responded that his leg was hurt.

"I tried to help him up, but he couldn't put pressure on one of his legs," Battisto said.

Battisto, with the help of some other Soldiers, moved Gilliam back to one of their Bradley Fighting Vehicles to begin treating his wounds.

As his leg began to swell and lose feeling and his foot started to turn blue, even Gilliam could no longer deny that his injuries needed immediate medical attention and made the call to have himself evacuated to the combat support hospital located in the International Zone.

"They put me into a humvee, and I was at the CSH in five to 10 minutes," Gilliam said. "Once we got to the CSH, they evaluated my leg, and as soon as they cut my pants off, they realized really quickly that I had some very serious internal bleeding - it's called compartment syndrome."

That night at the CSH

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A Commander's Long Road Back to Iraq

Long Road

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would begin a series of surgeries and physical therapy sessions that Gilliam would have to endure over the next several months.

"The main artery in your leg is right behind your knee and the piece of shrapnel literally went in and exploded that entire artery, so they took a vein out of my right, inner thigh and did what they call a double fasciotomy," he explained. "They slit my leg down both sides and took the vein out of [my thigh] and completely repaired the artery."

After two surgeries and several blood transfusions, the doctors decided Gilliam was stable enough to be moved back to Brooks Army Medical Center, located at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

Accompanying Gilliam was his wife, Capt. Erin Gilliam, who at the time was the operations officer for the 15th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd BCT, based at FOB Falcon in south Baghdad.

"I was with him the entire way, which was a good thing because it helped put my nerves at ease a little bit," she explained.

During his first month at BAMC, Gilliam's leg underwent eight more surgeries, including one to treat an infection that had developed.

During his stay in the hospital, Gilliam said the one goal that never left his mind was returning to his Soldiers, even though doctors initially told him he may never return to Iraq.

"Their initial estimates were that I would never come back, but, to me, it just never was a question," Gilliam said. "It was, 'OK, I'm hurt more than I thought I was, but it doesn't matter. Fix me so I can get back [to Iraq].' That's just all there was to it."

"Once my wife got back [to Iraq], then you're taking my troop and my wife -there was really not much else for me at that point," he said. "Everything that I cared about was [in Iraq], so mentally I was ready to come back."

Gilliam said at that point his sole focus became rehabilitating his leg and returning to Iraq himself.

"I couldn't have done a single bit of it without (my wife)," Gilliam said. "As soon as she left, there was nobody else there to baby me and cook me meals … so I put my crutches aside and decided that I didn't care how much it hurt. I wasn't using crutches anymore."

After nearly a month and a half in the hospital, Gilliam was released to outpatient status, living in a guest house at BAMC.

"I was doing therapy for probably four or five hours a day," Gilliam explained. "One of the biggest problems I had in therapy was aimed at loosening up my Achilles tendon so I could walk with a normal gait and run."

Gilliam said that his Achilles tendon had tightened during the month he was bed-ridden, making it difficult to walk.

For Gilliam, the daily therapy sessions were exhausting.

"You go from lying flat on your back in a hospital bed to doing five hours of therapy a day so your body's exhausted," he explained. "From getting off of all the drugs your body's been on, to just the flat-out blunt trauma of having a traumatic injury like that. It takes your body a long time to re-regulate itself."

Throughout the daily therapy sessions, returning to the Soldiers who he had commanded for nearly the past 18 months remained Gilliam's main motivation.

"The injury hurt; it definitely hurt - and the surgeries hurt, but the thought of not coming back to my Soldiers was far worse than anything that injury could have done to me," he said.

"You train with these guys; you watch them grow and mature. You watch kids, who were privates (and) are now sergeants. You watch sergeants who are now staff sergeants. That's been my whole life for 18 months. That was the worst part. Getting on a helicopter and leaving my guys was hands down the worst part of the entire experience and everything after that was, 'OK, what's next? What's the next step in getting back here?'"

In early April, Gilliam said he was started to put pressure on the doctors to clear him to return to duty.

"I was starting to try to get timelines and say, 'Hey, I'm getting better, what is it going to take for me to get out of here? What are the milestones I need to reach?'" he recalled. "For me, from a mental stand point, I needed to be back [in Iraq]. I needed to be around my Soldiers and being at Brooke Army Medical Center was just not where I wanted to be."

"The doctors had a whole slew of milestones that had to be met. Plus, just being verbally harassed by me on an almost daily basis about when I'm going to get out of there wore them down eventually, I think," he said. "Honestly, I think they probably just got sick of hearing me."

Gilliam was released from BAMC and returned to Iraq May 6.

While he was gone, the surge had begun to be implemented and battle spaces and shifted. No longer were his Soldiers responsible for Haifa Street. Instead, their new mission has them manning the entry control points into and throughout the International Zone.

When Gilliam saw some of the effects on his equipment from the shrapnel for the first time and seeing the damage to his equipment reaffirmed to Gilliam just how lucky he and his Soldiers were that no one else was injured that fateful day.

"Soldiers," is the simple response Gilliam gives when asked about the most rewarding aspect of returning to Iraq.

"They give you the motivation to get out of bed each day. They surprise you at every turn. They make you proud with the things they have done and make you want to be better," he said. "It's like being back with family."

"They give you the motivation to get out of bed each day. They surprise you at every turn. They make you proud with the things they have done and make you want to be better..."

Capt. John Gilliam, Commander
4th Squadron, 9th Cav. Regt., 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div.