Husaybah Blitzed by 3rd ACR

By Spc. Chuck D. Meseke
82nd Airborne Division PAO

HUSAYBAH, Iraq-Bandit Troop, 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Carson, Colo., went on the offensive in one of Iraq's most volatile towns, Husaybah during Operation Rifles Blitz.

"Husaybah is like the East Los Angeles of Iraq; it's just a rough neighborhood," said Pfc. Carl Roush, a scout with Bandit Troop. "It's a nice place to visit, but I would hate to live here."

Roush and the others of Bandit Troop recalled their stay in the city's Baath Party headquarters from Oct. 18 to Nov. 8.

"We were attacked on a daily basis in the compound, and at the end we had counted up more than 80 mortars launched at us within one week," said 1st Lt. Shannon Thompson, a platoon leader in Bandit.

The enemy was also much different from those they had faced in other parts of Iraq, Thompson explained.

"They coordinated their attacks, moved their positions and could aim their mortars," said Thompson. "That is when we started thinking, this isn't the local Joe. They were landing mortar rounds inside the courtyard of the compound and even landed one on top of the OP (observation point)."

Operation Rifles Blitz began Nov. 20 and was designed to isolate and target the anti-coalition fighters that have proven to be an escalating problem in the border region near the city of Al Qa'im.

Bandit Troop's responsibility during the operation fell on securing the main avenue of approach in and out of the city, allowing other 3rd ACR troops, combined with soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, to conduct raids on targets identified to be insurgents operating against the Coalition.

About 3,500 soldiers have been a part of Rifles Blitz and have captured many anti-Coalition fighters and uncovered intelligence on the whereabouts of others.

"When we show up like this with 3,500 soldiers, it shows the local people that it is OK for them to show us where the bad guys are, and they don't have to be afraid of those people," Thompson said.

"Just the other day, we have had informants say, 'they are shooting at you from my front yard,' and the tips that lead to results, we will give them rewards accordingly," Thompson said.

Intelligence has led to the capture of more than 100 individuals, as well as hundreds of weapons, numerous materials used for making improvised explosive devices and anti-Coalition documents.

Even while conducting such an aggressive operation, the soldiers found small ways to foster good will between themselves and the Iraqi people.

(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Chuck D. Meseke)

A soldier with 1st Sqdn., 3rd ACR mans his post at dawn at the entrance to the border town of Husaybah.

One family that had been particularly helpful to the soldiers of Bandit Troop was rewarded not only monetarily, but was given medical assistance from Pfc. Eddie Barrier, a combat medic.

Barrier, with the help of an interpreter, was able to give aid to a sick woman in the family. He also arranged for her to see a military docotr if needed.

"The family was helping us out with info, so we did what we could to help her," Barrier said.

Such treatment is not uncommon from U.S. soldiers.

"If we are around and have the time and resources to help someone out, we do," said Barrier. "It's my job."

This kind of outreach to the people of Husaybah was the initial strategy when trying to bring security to the city, but eventually prolonged attacks led to aggressive operations.

"We tried the passive approach, but that didn't work. Now we have had to raise our intensity," said Roush.

With intensity in mind, the soldiers of Bandit Troop, and the 3rd ACR continue to conduct Operation Rifles Blitz to bring security and stability to one of the most volatile regions of Iraq.

On The Cover - Military policemen with the 82nd Airborne Division, Sgt. Chad Kibert, Pfc. Travis Colgin, Spc. Nathan Mosley and Spc. Luke Wilson, toast with sparkling grape juice during the Thanksgiving Day feast held at Champion Base. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Craig Pickett)

BIG $$ Go Far to Help Locals

By Master Sgt. Dave Johnson
350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AR RAMADI, Iraq-The 304th Civil Affairs Brigade from Philadelphia made a huge impact on the local economy.

On Nov 20, another $500,000 spread out over several contracts was passed out for local entrepreneurs.

Contracts ranged from new police cars and protective body armor for the Iraqi police force, to murals depicting the new Iraq replacing the defaced Saddam Hussein ones at the Government building downtown.

Economic vibrancy filled the air at the CMOC [Civil Military Operations Center] amidst local Iraqis seeking to do business.

The market areas are clean; shop owners are displaying their wares openly, and commerce is thriving on the main street downtown.

(U.S. Army photo by By Master Sgt. Dave Johnson)
An Iraqi contractor counts the money he received Nov. 20 at the CMOC in Ar Ramadi. He is anxious to begin fulfilling the requirements of his contractual agreement.

"Streets are clean; there is construction going on, and shops are open," said Lt. Col Martin Bischoff, officer-in-charge of the Governate Support Team for the 304th.

Compared with other parts of Iraq in the Sunni Triangle, downtown Ramadi appears to embrace principles of capitalism under the Coalition.

"I'm proud of what we've done here," said Bischoff. "The ultimate extension of the Coalition can be seen by what we're doing all day in the CMOC -- every day."

"The municipal government works quite well in Ar Ramadi," added Bischoff.

According to Bischoff, skills of military veterans are tracked, so CPA personnel can gauge who and how many have skill sets that can be utilized for infrastructure refurbishing. Also, the CPA and GST is able to track factory workers with machine operating skills.

"Also," said Bischoff, "word of mouth regarding these contracts spreads fast in the community."

"You have to work to eat in this type of society," said Bischoff. "You can't take a socialist state and change it overnight, but you can tell how well the new economy is working here."

When contracts are advertised in the community, the CMOC fills up fast with entrepreneurs making bids for work and much-needed money to pay for labor and supplies.

"CPA workers and civil affairs experts spot problems, needs and requirements for rebuilding are formulated and contracts are delineated.

"We put bids out, and we average 15 bids per contract," said Mr. Harry Christian, CPA's administrative officer for Al Anbar province.

"It is fair and open competition, a free market for Iraq. This is President Bush's and L. Paul Bremmer's intent for Iraq -- a free-market economy," said Christian.

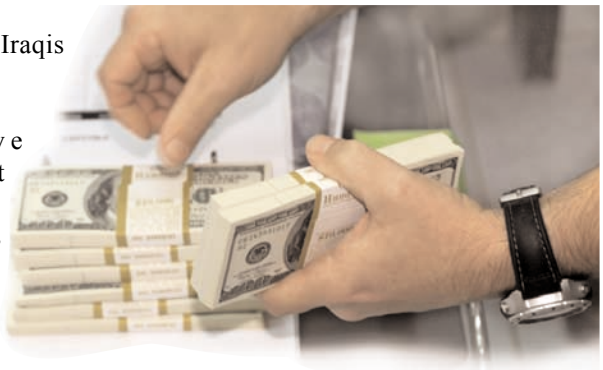
Experts from the CPA and 304th inspect the work and products before merchants receive the rest of the monies for their contracts.

"Before we pay, we assure quality is performed to specifications to standard and on time," said Christian.

Iraqis are starting to follow the American model of checks and balances in the workplace.

"Iraqis are learning about quality," said Bischoff. "Much of the work we see going on now has Iraqis following around their workers to ensure good quality."

"Once they get a taste of the good life," said Bischoff, "it will work here. Many Iraqis are very positive about doing business in a free market system."



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82nd Abn Div PAO
HHC 82nd Abn Div
APO AE 09384

Division Commander
Maj. Gen. Charles H. Swannack, Jr.

Division Public Affairs Officer
Maj. Neil Harper

Staff
Publishing Editors
Capt. Jeffrey Fitzgibbons
Master Sgt. David Johnson

Content Contributors and Editing Staff
Sgt. 1st Class Gary Qualls
Staff Sgt. Craig Pickett
Sgt. Gabe Nix
Sgt. Joe Healy
Sgt. Danny Martin
Cpl. Joe Niesen
Cpl. Vernon O'Donnell
Spc. Justin Carmack
Spc. Michael Carden
Spc. Charles Meseke
Spc. Jamie Bender
Pfc. Johnnie French

319th Zeros in on Target

By Spc. Justin Carmack
350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FALLUJAH, Iraq-As long as Saddam Hussein's loyalists continue to attack, Coalition forces will be prepared for the worst-case scenario. Since the Coalition has shifted emphasis from combat to humanitarian-based operations, many soldiers have been used in a different capacity than they were trained, most respond well. Despite all of this, one fact remains constant, no matter what the assignment, a soldier must stay proficient in his or her job.

The Deputy Fire Support Officer (Deputy FSO) for 3rd Brigade 82nd Airborne Division, 2nd Lt. Scott Schoop, is working to ensure paratroopers from the 1st Battalion 319th Field Artillery Regiment, maintain their skills. Shoop has 'paved the road' for a new artillery range set to be located outside of Fallujah, Iraq. The range will be multifaceted for those paratroopers currently stationed at FOB St. Mere as well as for the Marines who are tentatively scheduled to relieve them early next year.

Shoop came up with the idea for the range after the brigade moved paratroopers and equipment onto the FOB. Unfortunately, a field artillery training range had yet to be established by the units who had preceded them.

The 319th needed to register its guns, so that if the need should arise, they could accurately be used in combat. An impact area was selected as a site they could use to register their guns. However, one problem still remained; there were no targets on the site.

Paratroopers began the process of moving targets onto the sight. Wrecked vehicles from an Iraqi military scrap yard were used. After the vehicles were positioned and the area was vacated, looters from the community stole most of the pieces from the automobiles, eliminating many of the targets before the artillerymen could use them.

During the major military push toward Baghdad, Coalition forces impounded several T-72 Tanks from the Iraqi Army. The tanks were stored at St. Mere. Shoop collaborated with the 855th Military Police (MP) Company, A Company, 1-16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division to move some of these tanks into the impact area. Once the tanks were moved members of the 307th Engineer Battalion would destroy specific components inside the tanks. By only destroying specific pieces of equipment the tanks would appear as more realistic targets.

"We wanted to set-up a range that was as realistic as possible," said Shoop. "So we are moving the tanks so they represent a four tank convoy and a four tank assembly area."

The range is still under construction. Four tanks have been moved into position to represent the convoy, but the assembly area has yet to be created.

The creation of the range is more difficult than one may think.

"One of the most challenging parts has been to free-up the M-88," added Shoop. "They have a real world mission. They go out and retrieve tanks that breakdown. On the other hand this mission is only conducted in our spare time."

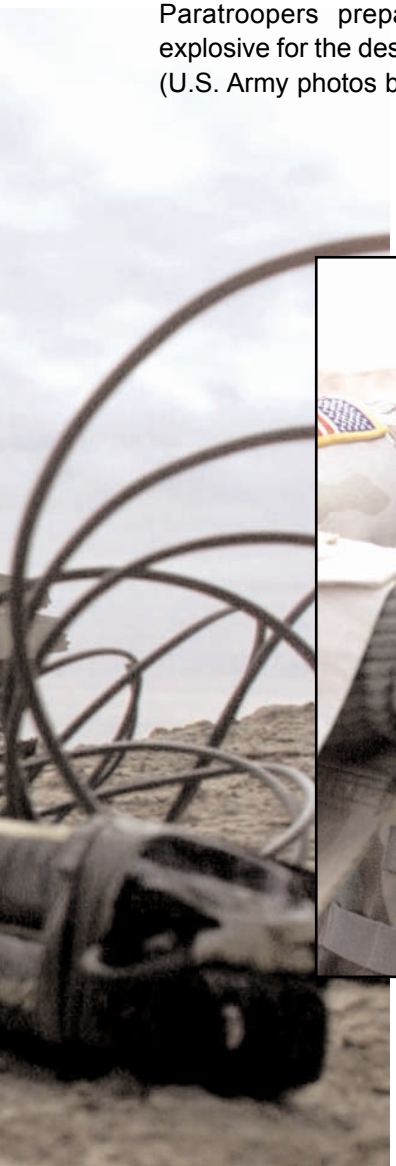
Once the tanks arrive at the impact area, paratroopers from the 307th place C4, a powerful explosive, onto specific areas of the tank so that their weapon systems may not be salvaged and used again.

"We place the C4 on the engine block, any communication equipment and the weapon systems," said Sgt. Paul Timavave of the 307th. "Our priority is to destroy things that can be used against Coalition forces, yet leave the tank intact so that it can still be used as a target.

Though the project was designed to benefit the field artillery unit, many soldiers will benefit from the project. The range will also be available for training soldiers on weapons such as AT-4s,

MK-19s and M249 Squad Automatic Weapons (SAWs).

"It will not only be beneficial for our paratroopers," explained Shoop. "Any Marines or soldiers that come here after the 82nd leaves will undoubtedly benefit from this range, too."



Right - Sgt. Paul Timavave of the 307th Engineer Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division quickly lights one time fuse off of the other time fuse. Timavave was lighting the time fuse as part of a project to disable the former Iraqi Army's tanks.
Inset - Timavave carefully tapes a time fuse with a blasting cap to detonation cord that runs to sixteen blocks of C-4. The slightest pressure or electrical shock to the blasting cap could result in disaster for the team disabling Iraqi tanks.
Bottom - Staff Sgt. Steven Page of the 307th carefully cuts C-4, a powerful explosive used in the destruction of Iraqi tanks.
Left - C-4 calmly sits on the ground as Paratroopers prepare more of the powerful explosive for the destruction of an Iraqi T-72 tank.
(U.S. Army photos by Spc. Justin Carmack)

Soldiers Fuel City with Hope and Diesel

By Cpl. Joe Niesen
350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

(U.S. Army photo by Cpl. Joe Niesen)

Staff Sgt. Hudak, a fueler with the 209th Quartermaster Company out of Layfatte, Ind., prepares to fill up a community fuel tank in the village of Al Kabnia, while others pull security.

AL KABANI, Iraq-In a dusty little village of fishermen and gardeners, hope stopped by in the guise of soldiers delivering 2,500 gallons of much-needed diesel fuel for the residents. The stop was part of a weekly meeting between Lt. Col. Tomi King and the villagers of Al Kabani.

As the trucks flowed into the town, children and adults alike swarmed the village's street in anticipation of what the soldiers had brought them.

The fuel truck, provided by soldiers from the 209th Quartermaster Company, Lafayette, Ind., pulled up to a tank that had been built by the locals the previous week in anticipation of the event. Along with the fuel, soldiers also assessed other concerns from the community.

"Each week, I try and make a trip out to see them and help them in some way, whether it is providing fuel, or just making an effort to listen to their problems," said King, commander of the 3-4 Air Defense Artillery Regiment (ADAR), 82nd Airborne Division.

The fuel, which will be stored in a community tank and used primarily for power generation, was only the latest in a series of goodwill gestures designed to create a bond between the local village and the neighboring military base. The ADAR had made previous trips to assess the situation in the village and had delivered medical aid, soccer balls and candy to the children there.

The village sits less than ten minutes outside the 82nd Airborne Division's Forward Operating Base (FOB) Ridgeway, well within sight of the base perimeter. It is home to only a handful of residents, but their well being is something that the soldiers at the base have taken into consideration.

The soldiers of the 3-4 ADAR have been working with the villagers for the last seven weeks, said King. "When we first arrived, my regiment was given charge of force protection here at Ridgeway. As part of that, I was asked to look into helping and assessing the local villages that fall into our area of operations."

The fuel is just one of the many projects planned for the tiny village. The commanders in charge of the area hope to provide clean water and power to the village in the near future. To facilitate this, plans are being made to get water treatment equipment delivered, and it is hoped that they will be tied into the power grid for the base as well as to the local fuel grid.

"I think that the work we are doing is extremely important, not only for the villagers, but also for the troops," said King. "My soldiers man observation posts 12 hours a day, and when they volunteer to go to the village, it is generally during their time off. Many of them look forward to the work because it lets them see the impact of their work in the area."

King explained that before they began working with the community, soldiers were reporting enemy contact on the perimeter with regularity. Once they began their weekly visits, the number of reported contacts drastically reduced and even ceased in some areas.

"Now that we have shown them that we are here to help them and not an occupation force, they have ceased harboring former regime loyalists and actually begun to report them," said King.

While there is still a lot of work to do in the community, King insists that the villagers be taught to help themselves. While they supplied the fuel, it was up to the community to provide the storage tank.

"The challenge is trying to let them do most of the work so that they become self-sufficient," said Maj. Stew Stephenson, rear detachment personnel officer for the 82nd Airborne Division.

King added that they want, "the village to continue to survive once they leave, and that by teaching them self-reliance, they will create a seamless-transition when the time comes for them to leave the area."

Al Kabani is the only village currently under the 3-4 ADAR's wing, the difference they have made here has had a great impact on their mission of force protection and benefited all of the soldiers at FOB Ridgeway.

Question of the Week ?

Has Niagara Falla ever frozen over?

Last Week's Answer:
Thomas Edison invented the light bulb because he was afraid of the dark.

THE COMICS ON DUTY WORLD TOUR

By Cpl. Joe Niesen
350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AL ANBAR, Iraq-A soldier's life is seldom filled with anything but work and brief moments of rest. This week, many soldiers stationed throughout the Al Anbar Region of Iraq were treated to a brief moment of respite from daily doldrums when the Armed Forces Entertainment program brought them a group of comedians.

The funnymen were part of the Comics on Duty World Tour and their mission was to take the soldiers' minds off the tedium and stress that normally fills their day.

The five comics delivered shows to the 82nd Airborne Division's Camp Ridgeway and Champion Main bases as well as other FOBs.

"They're great, this is a nice break from the usual," said 1st Lt. Adam Camarano, Delta Troop, 1-17th Cavalry Platoon Leader, 82nd Airborne Division.

The comics barraged the audiences, which numbered over 100 at each showing, with witty observations about life in Iraq and the military. They also played on themes often denied to troops in a combat zone. These latter topics ranged from television to sex and alcohol and guaranteed laughs from the more than receptive audience.

Other comics pointed to the differences between active duty soldiers and their reserve and National Guard counterparts.

"You National Guardsmen can't even be taken hostage. It's like when you're caught, you get to say 'hey, this is great, you got me-but I've got to get back to work on Monday,'" quipped host Kevin Jordan.

Most of the soldiers in attendance were grateful for the performance, with only one soldier asking for more.

"I hope that the Playmates make it here some day, yea that would be good," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lindsey with the 49th Engineering Battalion out of Conway, AK.

In all, the comics accomplished their mission and gave the soldiers in Iraq something to relieve the stress of their current environment as well as something to talk about for the next few days.

(U.S. Army photo by Cpl. Joe Niesen)

Pace Visits with Troops

AR RAMADI, Iraq- The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace, visited soldiers in Task Force All American on Nov. 23. His purpose was to thank the soldiers for their efforts and listen to their concerns.

"Part of my job is to know exactly what you are doing out here," Pace said. "We are watching with thick glasses in Washington and are very proud. I just wanted to come by and say 'Thank You'."

Pace concluded by saying many army generals hand out coins as a sign of gratitude for a job well done. He however, had dog tags and would present one to every soldier in the TOC.

The four-star Marine Corps general worked his way around the room, shaking hands and speaking with all soldiers. From colonel to private, Pace left no one out.

The next stop was the dining facility for a lunch with the troops. In an open forum setting, soldiers ate with the general and had an opportunity to ask him questions.

Then he was off to other sites and to visit with other soldiers.

(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Craig Pickett)

Gen. Peter Pace greets Spc. Tiffany Duchess, 313th MI, 82nd Airborne Division, and presents her with a dog tag inscribed with his name and emblems of the four branches of service.

Soldiers Feast on Fixins

AR RAMADI, Iraq - Soldiers here at Champion Base celebrated Thanksgiving on Thursday, Nov. 27.

A large holiday dinner was served with "all the fixins" to help improve morale for the soldiers. In addition to the large holiday meal, a basketball tournament was held in the afternoon along with other activities.

The preparataions for the meal took weeks and it was apparent when entering the dining facility. The entire building took on a differnet feel with the extravagant decorating, which included a large chocolate sculpture made by a soldier.

"I really liked the set-up, it was beautiful," said Spc. Timesha Cheeks, a civil affairs specialist with the 304th Civil Affairs Brigade. "Obviously, I wish I was home with my family, but I have started to think of the soldiers here as my extended family and that helped improve my mood for the day."