



The Old Ironsides Report

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Task Force 1AD brings playgrounds to Baghdad children

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BAGHDAD, Iraq – The children came out in droves as the U.S. Army vehicles pulled up along the sidewalk in the Hayy Karkh district of central Baghdad.

They were always excited to see Coalition soldiers, and this day was no different. The kids swarmed the soldiers as they walked across what was formerly a rotten community dump, where trash was piled in five-meter-high mounds.

Some children were hanging and swinging on the arms and legs of the uniformed Americans, and some were trying on the soldiers' Kevlar helmets. All the children were smiling, laughing and cheering to see their soldier friends again.

This was not one of the regular, multiple weekly visits the troops make to Hayy Karkh, however. But rather, it is a culmination of months of planning, coordination, assessments and hard work.

Soldiers from the 422nd Civil Affairs Brigade, an Army Reserve unit from Greensboro, N.C., alongside soldiers from 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, both part of Task Force 1st Armored Division, have set their sights on improving the quality of life for the neighborhood's residents.

The soldiers had arrived to celebrate the grand opening of the recreational areas that were cleared and furnished by U.S. Army personnel.

On two city lots that used to contain nothing but trash and sewage, now stand two soccer fields and an assortment of brightly colored playground equipment.

"Historically, this is one of the worst areas in Baghdad in response to U.S. Army presence here," said Sgt. Jason Shinn, noncommissioned officer with the 422nd. "Because of that, and the fact that it is very densely populated and there is no place for kids to play, we wanted to do something here."

Most of the progress being made in Baghdad is at a level beyond what the children and their families can easily see, said Shinn. The Coalition forces have made huge strides in government, administration and security concerns, but Shinn and his team wanted a tangible, visible answer to the question: "What are the American soldiers doing for me?"

"We wanted something that meets a need, and something that families can see on their level," Shinn said, "to see that we care about them, and we are here to help them."

Capt. Scott Sinclair, civil military affairs officer for 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, has been working in the same central Baghdad community for several months. As well as being responsible for security in the area, he and his unit have also played a large role in making the soccer field-clearing project happen.

The challenge that Task Force 1st Armored Division is facing, said Sinclair, is to bring a neglected community infrastructure up to a healthy operating standard without doing every bit of the work for the Iraqis.



The new swings on a Hayy Karkh district playground, built by local contractors and financed by U.S. Army civil affairs, are a big hit with local children and parents alike. An Iraqi mother pushes her daughter in a swing amongst the bustle of the park opening crowd. Task Force 1st Armored Division financed and orchestrated the removal of hundreds of tons of refuse from two downtown lots to make room for soccer fields and playground equipment.

"It is a matter of getting the cooperation and agreement of the people in the communities around us," Sinclair said. "At the same time we are hiring local contractors and local hires to do the job. We bring the team together and provide the funds, but we allow them to work it themselves."

The overwhelming majority of the contact that Sinclair and Shinn said they have had with the citizens of Baghdad is positive, but support from the communities must continue to increase if Iraq is to be able to stand on its own in the near future, he said.

"I have seen a huge improvement in the neighborhood since we arrived here," said Shinn. "I hope the community will see us as an ally in their struggle to rebuild their country. It is a huge undertaking, and we cannot do it without the support of the people."

"People are very happy to see what we have done," Sinclair said. "The majority of the populous is happy to see us here because they understand that we are making an improvement to their society."

Taking on responsibility for the safety and welfare of civilians in Baghdad is part of the job description for a soldier here, but Shinn and Sinclair said they believe in what they do, and would not have it any other way.

"It is really rewarding to see the first-hand effects of why we are here," said Shinn. "The kids are great, and they are why we are here. They are the ones who will remember us. (They will) carry on to build a better future for their country."

"I have one of the best jobs out here," Sinclair said. "I get to help people all day long and make a difference."

News

17 Soldiers Die in Iraq Helicopter Crash

Sniper Suspect Muhammad Guilty of Murder
VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (AP) - A jury convicted John Allen Muhammad of capital murder Monday, concluding he used a rifle, a beat-up car and a teenager who idolized him to kill randomly and terrorize the Washington area during last year's sniper spree. The jury will now decide whether the Army veteran should be sentenced to death or life in prison. The penalty phase was to begin in the afternoon.

Schwarzenegger Set to Become Calif. Gov.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) - In a departure from recent inaugurations, there will be no big parties and no gala balls after Arnold Schwarzenegger takes the oath of office as California's 38th governor on Monday. Bitterness over the divisive recall vote and the state's fiscal troubles have put a damper on livelier festivities - although plenty of celebrities promised to be on hand.

Sharon Says He'll Meet Palestinian PM

ROME (AP) - Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Monday he planned to meet with his Palestinian counterpart Ahmed Qureia "in the coming days" - the first confirmation from the Israeli leader that new talks were planned. "In the coming days, the Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian prime minister will meet and begin talks," Sharon told members of Italy's Jewish community during a state visit that began here Monday.

Rush Limbaugh Returns From Rehab

NEW YORK (AP) - Rush Limbaugh returned to radio Monday after what he called "five intense weeks" of rehab for an addiction to painkillers, promising listeners "even more honesty to come." The conservative commentator thanked his listeners for their concern, and assured them that his ordeal would not affect his radio program.

Oddly Enough

Southern Drawls Confuse La. Phone System

SHREVEPORT, La. (AP) -- Southern drawls have thwarted voice recognition equipment used by the Shreveport Police Department to route non-emergency calls. A switchover to a lower-tech, touch-tone system - in which callers hear a voice recording they can respond to by pressing a different number for each division - is scheduled for Monday, said spokeswoman Kacee Hargrave. The voice-recognition system asked people to name the person or department they wanted. More often than not, the system just didn't understand, and they wound up at the wrong place, said Capt. John Dunn, who oversees police communications. "In Louisiana, we have a problem with Southern drawl and what I call lazy mouth. Because of that, the system often doesn't recognize what (callers) say," he said. Interim Chief Mike Campbell knows all too well how frustrating the voice recognition system can be. "I can count on one hand when I have been transferred to where I've wanted to go, and I know the system. I can imagine how frustrating it would be for a citizen," he said.

A Safety Tip from 1AD

**When using cold-weather clothing,
remember C-O-L-D:**

**Keep it...Clean
Avoid....Overheating
Wear it...Loose in layers
Keep it...Dry**

Chaplain's thought for the day

The Storm

Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. —Matthew 7:24

Neal Beidleman survived the ill-fated 1996 expedition in which eight climbers died on Mount Everest. Some of them had paid \$65,000 for a chance to scale the world's highest peak. In assessing what went wrong, Beidleman said, "Tragedies and disasters . . . are not the result of a single decision, a single event, or a single mistake. They are the culmination of things in your life. Something happens and it becomes a catalyst for all the things you've had at risk."

On Everest, that "something" was a raging blizzard. According to journalist Todd Burgess, "If not for the storm, the climbers may have gotten away with taking so many risks. But the storm exposed their weaknesses."

The things at risk in our lives today—matters of spiritual indifference or disobedience—can overwhelm us when the storms come.

Obedience to God doesn't eliminate the tempests of life, but it does determine whether we fall or stand in the storm.

The storms of life reveal the strength of our faith.

This Day in History

MASS SUICIDE IN JONESTOWN: 1978

People's Temple leader Jim Jones leads hundreds of his followers in a mass murder-suicide at their agricultural commune in remote northwestern Guyana. The few cult members who refused to take the cyanide-laced Kool-Aid drink were either forced to do so at gunpoint or shot as they fled. The final death toll was 913, including 276 children. Jim Jones was a charismatic churchman who founded the People's Temple, a Christian sect, in Indianapolis in the 1950s. In response to the mounting criticism, Jones led several hundred of his followers to South America in 1977 and set up a utopian agricultural settlement called Jonestown in the jungle of Guyana. A year later, a group of ex-members convinced U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan, a Democrat of California, to travel to Jonestown and investigate the commune. Several People's Church members approached members of the group and asked them for passage out of Guyana. Jones ordered Ryan and his companions ambushed and killed at the airstrip as they attempted to leave. The congressman and four others were murdered as they attempted to board their planes. Back in Jonestown, Jones directed his followers in a mass suicide in a clearing in the town. With Jones exhorting the "beauty of dying" over a loudspeaker, hundreds drank a lethal cyanide and Kool-Aid drink. Only a dozen or so followers survived, hidden in the jungle. Most of the 913 dead were lying side by side in the clearing where Jones had preached to them for the last time.