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18TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE EXPERTS ASSESS, IMPROVE IRAQI POLICE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

By Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger

18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Radio communications can make the difference between life and death for Iraqi security forces.

The Iraqi Police force's effectiveness depends on responding quickly. Calling for reinforcements or medical aid in time to save a life can come down to a simple transmission between an Iraqi policeman on patrol and his patrol station monitoring the radio network.

"People will die if communications aren't working," said 1st Lt. Christopher Gehri, 18th Military Police Brigade Police Transition Team officer.

"Communications is one of the primary systems you need to be a successful police force."

"Iraqi Police have grown in numbers -- now their systems need to grow to match those numbers," said 1st Lt. David DeLong, a communications officer with the 18th.



SGT DANIEL BLOTTENBERGER

Capt. David DeLong, 18th Military Police Brigade communications officer, talks with Col. Ass'd Abdalehra Mousa, commander of the IP Patrol Headquarters communications center, about how the center inventories communications equipment, during an assistance visit to the Baghdad facility April 30.

Gehri's PTT is tasked with assessing and developing IP systems in Baghdad. DeLong is part of an "enhanced PTT" set up by the brigade to focus on improving systems within the IP organization. His specific mission is to visit IP stations' higher headquarters in Baghdad to assess their communications and determine how to help the IP develop and improve their capabilities.

"The Iraqi Police were very happy to have someone who knows communications talk with them and lend some additional advice," said DeLong. "I was impressed with the knowledge of their communications systems that they have and that they knew where they wanted to get to in the future with their systems."

For example, communicating via the Internet is a vital way to pass information between IP stations and headquarters in Baghdad, DeLong said. During a recent visit to the IP headquarters he assessed its ability to use the Internet to connect with the police stations under its umbrella.

"They have shortfalls with Internet connectivity, and their staff is now trying to fix these shortfalls with our assistance," the lieutenant said.

DeLong also visited various IP stations, then went to the Baghdad Patrol Headquarters communications center to "(learn) how the IP communications distribution system works and (see) what we can do to help," said DeLong. The center, opened in 1963, is where the organization's communication systems are issued, repaired, installed and tracked for use by IP stations and patrols.

"We keep track and repair all radio equipment that the IP use in Baghdad," said Col. Ass'd Abdalehra Mousa, the center's commander.

After visiting the center, DeLong said he was impressed.

"They have a good system in place (to) track and repair the equipment they retain," he said. "The IP were able to demonstrate they have ability to maintain and account for their equipment."

Team members said they were also impressed with IP members' ingenuity in repairing and maintaining their radio systems, and with the way the IP have integrated recommendations from coalition forces advisors.

"The systems were a lot like the systems we have," said Gehri, but he noted one significant difference.

"The difference is that our system is on computers, and the IP system is on paper," he said.

Team members said the next step is to ask Iraq's Ministry of Interior to supply additional radios to the Baghdad facility to support the IP officers on patrol, and to propose that the IP automate their systems for future efficiency.

"The hardest part of this mission is getting the IP automated," said DeLong. "Once we have accomplished that, we will be one step closer to getting the job done."

But coalition forces police officials say they see progress.

"The IP leadership is taking advice from the ePTTs and taking responsibility for their stations, while feeling better working with the recommendations made by the ePTT subject-matter experts who are improving the IP systems in Baghdad," said Lt. Col. Thomas Lombardo, the 18th's operations officer, during a recent assessment of PTT operations in Baghdad.

"What we saw (at the communications center) was very encouraging," said Gehri. "The IP were very organized in their operations."

"We are doing a lot to help the Iraqis," he added. "IP are taking steps in the right direction, moving closer to Iraqi self-reliance."

The 18th MP Brigade is a U.S. Army Europe unit based in Mannheim, Germany, and currently deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.



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