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‘Iron Brigade’ teams with Iraqi commando battalion to secure Owesat in Operation Al-Sakar

By Pfc. Evan Loyd and Spc. Kevin Holden

2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division Public Affairs Office

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Soldiers from the Baumholder, Germany-based 2nd ‘Iron’ Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, teamed up with Iraqi forces for two combined counterinsurgency operations this month.

For the first operation members of the brigade’s 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry and Iraqi Soldiers of the Commando Battalion, 17th Iraqi Army Brigade, teamed up April 12 for a combined counterinsurgency mission in the Owesate area southwest of Baghdad.

Alongside the Iraqi commandoes, the 1-6th Soldiers from the Baumholder, Germany-based 2nd ‘Iron’ Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division carried out Operation Al-Sakar.

Multi-National Division - Baghdad officials said the purpose of the operation was to clear weapons and explosives caches, capture insurgents and establish security in the area.

“The Owesat area is void of a coalition forces presence and is a potential location to move accelerants into the Baghdad area,” said Lt. Col. Brian Eifler, commander of the 1-6th. “The objective of this mission was to destabilize any (al-Qaida in Iraq) and other terrorist organization operations in the Owesat area.”



PFC EVAN LOYD

Soldiers of the Commando Battalion, 17th Iraqi Army Brigade, move into position in Owesat, Iraq during Operation Al Sakar. Members of the Baumholder, Germany-based 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, teamed with the Iraqi commandoes for the combined counterinsurgency operation southeast of Baghdad, April 12.

The cornerstone of any counterinsurgency effort is establishing security for the local population and controlling the area, MNDB officials said. Once security is stable, a long-term presence can be implemented to facilitate the basic needs of the people.

The joint task force began the operation with an air-assault insertion to secure and defend the objective in the Owesat area, MNDB officials added.

“We wanted to surprise any insurgents and show them that nowhere is safe from the combined (Iraqi security forces) and coalition forces,” said Eifler. “We can surround an area in minutes with little to no warning and that we can do it any time.”

During the mission the joint task forces cleared a total of six square kilometers and found one cache of five 152mm rounds and detained several individuals, MNDB sources said. A successful counterinsurgency operation depends on building support of the local population, they added, and the troops of the 17th made a point of engaging citizens.

“Today’s mission was a success not only in what we found but in our building relationships with the local citizens of Owesat,” said Lt. Col. Ayoob, commander of the Commando Battalion. “It’s important that the people of the area can see the Iraqi Army as a positive influence they can trust to keep them safe.”

In addition to securing weapons, explosives and detaining insurgents the goal was also to show citizens that Iraqi and MND-B forces were there to meet their needs and improve the quality of life in the area, MNDB officials said. During the operation the Soldiers also handed out backpacks and school supplies to local children.

“The local populace didn’t feel threatened by us; instead they felt secure against an AQI presence being built up in their area,” said Eifler. “We showed the local Iraqis that the Iraqi Army and coalition forces still care about them.”

Task Force 1-6th and Commando Battalion leaders trained their troops for the mission during joint rehearsals and simulations since the 1-6th arrived at Forward Operating Base Falcon from Sadr City in early March. The two forces have also been building positive relationships with the people and strengthening the ability of the Iraqis to successfully conduct counterinsurgency operations, MNDB officials said.

“I hope that the Iraqi Army will continue to improve in all areas until we are equal to the coalition forces,” said Ayoob.

In a second combined mission, called Operation Bein Al-Nahreïn, 2nd BCT Soldiers and their Iraqi Army counterparts conducted another combined counterinsurgency operation, this time in the Qarghuli Village area of the Mahmudiyah Qada, April 11- 14.

For that mission U.S. troops of the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 63rd Armor, and Company A, 40th Engineers, partnered with Iraqi Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Brigade, 17th Iraqi Army Division. MNDB officials said the purpose of the mission was

to clear weapons caches, disrupt al-Qaeda attacks and demonstrate to area residents that the Iraqi forces are capable of providing a stable and secure environment in an area that has a history of smuggling and stockpiling of weapons and explosives.



SPC KEVIN HOLDEN

Iraqi Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Brigade, 17th Iraqi Army Division, join U.S. troops from Company A, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 63rd Armor, for a dismounted patrol during Operation Bein Al-Nahrein.

Bein Al-Nahrein illustrated the continuing transition of responsibility to Iraqi forces, MNDB sources said.

“1-63 CAB, Company A and the 2-23-17 IA rehearsed the mission objective three days prior to the operation; that included tactical maneuver, order of march, and actions on contact. Working with IA commanders on combined operations has been excellent,” said Capt. Eric Evans.

Qarghuli Village residents cooperated with the U.S. and Iraqi Soldiers as they searched homes and property in the village of Garaghuli. The locals were eager to speak with the IA Soldiers and share information, MNDB officials said.

Cpl. Kusay Hady of the 17th IA Division said IA Soldiers hope to win the support of the population, isolate insurgents and deny al-Qaida the ability to intimidate citizens.

“The combined operation went well, even though we found no weapons or explosives. We were well trained and prepared to clear the area of caches and insurgents,” said Hady.

The region has a history of previous searches which resulted in the discovery of several caches by

combined forces. The fact that no new stockpiles were found during Operation Bein Al-Nahrein is a sign of the success of IA and MNDB units because it is evidence the insurgents have lost the ability to control the area, Evans said.

“Working on Operation Bein Al- Nahrein with the IA was a success, and the mission was well planned and executed by the (coalition forces) and IA Soldiers. During the patrol the IA objective was to search the homes while (coalition forces) searched property and provided security,” said platoon leader 1st Lt. Chris Fluellen.

