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U.S. ARMY EUROPE ENGINEERS TAKE PART IN OPERATION TO SECURE AREAS BY IRAQ'S EUPHRATES RIVER

By **Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy**
3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq -- A 3:50 a.m. wake-up call from 4,000 pounds of explosives dropped from B-1B bomber is what you call a true rude awakening.



This unmanned aerial vehicle image shows smoke still drifting over an island in the Euphrates River bombed by the U.S. Air Force Nov. 16 at the start of Operation Marne Courageous.

That's when coalition forces dropped in at island in the Euphrates River suspected to be an insurgent safe haven.

The even-earlier-than-bright-and-early mission, called Operation Marne Courageous, kicked off with a bang Nov. 16. Components from the Iraqi army, the U.S. Air Force, the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division, and a key player -- U.S. Army Europe's 502nd Engineer Company -- took part in the operation.

The island that was targeted was located in the Euphrates between Owesat and Al Betra. The objective was to deny insurgents to use the island as an asylum, said Air Force Capt. Craig Barham, 15th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Squadron.

The overall aim of Marne Courageous is securing the population of the two towns, former insurgent sanctuary areas, by establishing a permanent presence on the west side of the river.

“In addition to that, we’re going to exploit any intelligence that could lead us to the missing or captured Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division,” said Maj. Curtis Crum, 3rd BCT operations officer. The two Soldiers, Spc. Alex Jiminez and Pvt. Byron Fouty have been missing since May 12.

“The goal of this joint effort with the Iraqi army and U.S. Soldiers is to defeat any remaining extremists or al Qaida in Iraq operatives on the western side of the Euphrates River in our zone,” Crum said.

The operation has three phases: intelligence gathering, establishing security and maintaining a presence.

Phase two began with the bombing and an air assault operation in which units went into Owesat and Al Beta, knocking on doors in an attempt to identify anti-coalition forces and al Qaida forces, as well as looking for information that might lead to Jiminez and Fouty.



STAFF SGT TONY LINDBACK

Soldiers from U.S. Army Europe's 502nd Engineer Company lock assault float bridge bay sections together to ferry vehicles and heavy equipment across the Euphrates River in support of Operation Marne Courageous Nov. 16.

The second and third phases overlapped. While troops on the ground established security after the air assault, the 502nd, a bridging company from Hanau, Germany, began construction of an assault float bridge from Patrol Base Dragon across the river to extend lines of communication.

“The movement of forces to clear the objective ... is going very smooth, so we were able to employ the bridge immediately,” said Col. Dominic

Caraccilo, the 3rd BCT commander, adding that a good portion of the bridge was in place the first day.

Another step in the third phase is construction of Patrol Base Kemple, where the 3rd BCT's Company A, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry will be based. The location has been established and will be operational by mid-December.

The base is named for Cpl. Andrew Kemple who was deployed to Iraq with Co. A, 3-187th when he was killed Feb. 12.

Caraccilo said he is pleased with the progress of the operation.

“We expect nothing less than perfection when you do an air assault because the risk associated ... is so high that you can’t accept anything (else),” Caraccilo said.

“Tactically, for us to be able to employ like this is pretty significant -- that was exceptional.”



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