

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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LEADERSHIP, TEAMWORK WORK HELP U.S. ARMY EUROPE MILITARY POLICE HONE IRAQI POLICE IN ISKANDARIYAH

By **Sgt. Daniel D. Blottenberger**
18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs Office

ISKANDARIYAH, Iraq -- For members of U.S. Army Europe's 127th Military Police Company, mission success in Iskandariyah can be measured by the success of the local Haswah Market.

“Markets are the best way to measure success in Iskandariyah,” said 1st Lt. Nathan Diaz, a platoon leader for the company's 3rd “Wolfpack” platoon.

“Sunnis feel safe enough to come back to the markets to shop and sell their products. Insurgents drove out Sunnis in the Iskandariyah area and now Sunnis are coming back. Six months ago you would not see this.” said Diaz.

Six months ago the 127th -- part of USAREUR's 18th MP Brigade, but currently attached to Fort Hood, Texas's 720th MP Battalion here -- was battling insurgents in the area daily, as the MPs and a local infantry company kept watch over a battalion-sized battle space for more than eight months.



SGT DANIEL D. BLOTTENBERGER

Sgt. Michael Ullerich, a military police officer with U.S. Army Europe's 127th Military Police Company, hands out toys to kids at the Haswah market in Iskandariyah, Iraq. The masked Iraqi police have become legendary in the Iskandariyah District for driving out insurgents. The 127th is part of USAREUR's 18th MP Brigade, but currently attached to Fort Hood, Texas's 720th MP Battalion in Iraq.

“It was like playing ‘Whack-a-Mole.’ Insurgency would flame up in one area; we would go put it out, then it would flame up somewhere else and we would go put it out,” said Diaz.

This process continued until the U.S. troop “surge” brought more coalition forces into the area.

“It was a giant turf war. There would be six to eight significant events a day in the area. There were bodies in the streets every day,” said Diaz.

“The surge was ‘crackdown time.’ We rounded up all sorts of bad guys. The Iraqi police were very confident to do their jobs because they had all the coalition forces backing them up,” said Diaz.

“Insurgents are not safe in this area,” said Capt. Madhlum Abd Al Rahman Khodor, the Haswah police chief.

The Iraqi police are evicting people who moved illegally into the homes of the Sunnis who fled in fear of the violence, said Diaz. They do this with the help of the Iskandariyah local police departments.

“The IPs here are a lot better than they used to be. They operate independently now,” said Diaz, who has worked alongside the Iskandariyah Police for more than 13 months.

The last few police academy classes have been heavy on Sunni graduates to even out the Sunni and Shia numbers in the Iskandariyah District police force. Still, the Sunnis wear masks while on patrol to hide their identity for safety reasons.

“These masked IPs just started showing up in Iskandariyah. These IPs are legendary in the area the locals call them Masked People,” said Diaz.

The reason these IPs are so effective is because of good leadership in Iskandariyah. “The (Iraqi police) commander is working very hard, so his IPs are working very hard. IPs reflect their leadership,” said Diaz.

“These are the best IPs I have ever had,” says Khodor of the Iraqi officers he leads on patrol in Haswah daily.

The 127th’s mission since arriving in Iskandariyah has been to train and support the Iraqi police in the area so the local forces will be able to operate on their own once the coalition withdraws.

“We are here to make the IPs as independent as possible. One day we will be gone and they need to get by and succeed,” said Diaz.

Members of the 127th meet with IP commanders in Iskandariyah often to discuss ways to improve the IP force.

“It is amazing what these IPs do with what they have. They just don’t give up. They make the most out of what they have,” said Diaz.



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