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STRYKER SOLDIERS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS TO BRING SECURITY, SERVICES TO BAGHDAD NEIGHBORHOODS

By Staff Sgt. Brent Williams

1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq -- For the Soldiers of Company F, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, interpersonal relations, consensus information and the pictures they create are the biggest contributors to the safety and security of citizens in the Saha and Abu T'shir communities of southern Baghdad.



STAFF SGT BRENT WILLIAMS

1st Lt. Brady Cowan, a platoon leader assigned to U.S. Army Europe's Company F, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, sits down at an Iraqi family's request to talk about whether they have concerns about security in Saha, a Shi'a and Sunni-mixed community in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad, Iraq, April 16.

"We want to build a relationship to give the people a normal life -- to bring the resources into the community," said Lt. Col. Scott Reineke, commander of the 2nd Squadron.

"This is about building relations in Abu T'shir and Saha," Reineke told his commanders and staff officers during the unit's final rehearsal for a three-phase operation that began April 16 in support of Operation Raider Typhoon.

Headquartered in Vilseck, Germany, the 2nd SCR -- currently operating attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division -- will hand over its areas of responsibility here to the division in May. In the meantime, the Soldiers of Company F, occupying a combat outpost in

northeast Rashid, say they want to take a few more bad guys off the streets before they leave Baghdad.

“We are conducting point operations to improve security for the people of Iraq,” said Capt. Kevin Ryan, F Company commander. “Once security improves, we can focus on improving the quality of life for the people of Abu T’shir and southeastern Rashid.”

The ongoing clearing operations are part of the 1st BCT's first effort, since assuming its mission April 13, to deny terrorists and criminal elements a safe haven in the area that is home to approximately 1.2 million citizens in Baghdad.

The three-phase operation is reminiscent of the same work that the 2nd SCR has done in the area since August, said Ryan.

Acting on military intelligence and information from Sons of Iraq members, Soldiers conducted pinpoint raids April 16-17 to capture some of Multi-National Division - Baghdad's most wanted terrorists and criminals, the captain added.

The units then transitioned into the second phase of operations, working with the SoI, area sheiks, and members of the local community to gather data that would allow the unit to build better relations with the predominately Shia and mixed Sunni-Shia communities, he explained.

“People who are sitting on the fence and don’t know which way to go will go our way just because we talked with them,” Ryan said. “If we do this right, we will build relationships with the people which will empower them to be able to keep these bad guys from coming back into their neighborhoods.”

Conducting census operations, checkpoint inspections, joint patrols, combined operations and traffic control points in partnership with Iraqi security forces is nothing out of the ordinary for the Stryker Soldiers, said Sgt. 1st Class Roberto Huie, a Company F platoon sergeant.

“Walking through the neighborhoods ... is an everyday thing,” he said. Early-morning operations to hunt down the most wanted criminals are a bonus, he added.

“Our preferred method is to knock, and 90 percent of the people are more than willing to let us in,” said Huie. “Conversely, if we find a house that looks suspicious to us, or a family that looks suspicious to us, and they don’t want to let us in their house, sometimes we have to cut their locks.

“We may not see the results in the next three weeks, but I think this (operation) is going to generate a lot of tips and a lot more leads ... and eventually we will get them,” he said.

“Whether the people like it or not, we are coming through their whole neighborhood to get these criminals off the streets.”

The company's mission has varied greatly during its time as a "surge unit" here, said Huie. Its Soldiers have worked throughout Saha and Abu T'shir in southeastern Rashid to assist with essential services; to provide force protection for Iraqi contractors to fix sewage or electricity issues in the Iraqi neighborhoods; and to provide overwatch for Iraqi security forces and SoI manning checkpoints, the sergeant explained.

Staff Sgt. Scott Campbell, a "Fox" Company squad leader, said he hopes to see more changes for the better as the unit prepares to leave Baghdad and take on a new mission in Baquba.

"There's a better peace now, than there was before the 'surge,'" said Campbell.

Campbell said he has seen many changes, especially in the security situation around southern Baghdad, over the course of his three deployments to Iraq since 2003.

"I think that when we go around and meet the locals and get to know them better on a personal basis, they become more at ease with us," he explained. "The more we get to talk with them the better they trust us, the more they like us."



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