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Air Force detachment attached to 18th Military Police Brigade assumes responsibility for Rashid police transition

By Sgt. David Hodge

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq -- A detachment of U.S. Air Force personnel attached to U.S. Army Europe's 18th Military Police Brigade has assumed responsibility for all Iraqi Police Transition Team operations in the Rashid district, working alongside Soldiers from the Army's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

"There are very few Air Force units that go 'outside the wire,' and that's what we do every day," said Master Sgt. Tom Daniels, a flight sergeant assigned to Detachment 3, 732nd Expeditionary Security Forces, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing. The detachment is currently operating as part of USAREUR's 716th Military Police Battalion, 18th MP Brigade.

With less than a month on the ground, the Airmen of Det. 3 have already been tested "outside the wire," said Daniels, who is in charge of three squads and six IP stations in Rashid.

"Now that we've got our feet under us, our main push is to get the IPs into the community because the public is used to seeing the Iraqi army and Iraqi National Police," explained Daniels.



SGT DAVID HODGE

U.S. Air Force Capt. Matt Ballanco, operations officer for Detachment 3, 732nd Expeditionary Security Forces, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, speaks to Iraqi Police leaders at a summit at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad's Rashid district, Oct. 22. Ballanco and his unit, which is responsible for all IP operations in Rashid, are currently attached to U.S. Army Europe's 18th Military Police Brigade.

The Airmen come from 52 different bases worldwide, said Daniels. All but one of them is active-duty Air Force, and they all volunteered to deploy for the yearlong mission. The group met at Fort Dix, N.J., for a two-month training exercise before deploying.

“The training we had at Fort Dix was very realistic,” said Tech Sgt. Charles Fortier, a squad leader assigned to Det. 3.

Shortly after the unit’s arrival, the Airmen responded to an attack on Iraqi civilians in the Bayaa community. For the first hour after the attack the team was the only American forces at the scene of the car bomb explosion, said Daniels.

Fortier said he heard the blast from a nearby IP station.

“We heard it and felt it,” stated Fortier.

Fortier and other members of the detachment followed the IPs to the scene.

“After driving to the site, the IPs immediately began caring for and evacuating the wounded,” said Fortier. “The IPs handled the situation excellently. Even the IP commander was right in the middle of the blast site helping out.”

Fortier said he believes the IPs are a self-sufficient force capable of conducting many routine police investigations without any outside help.

The transition team conducts a bimonthly conference here to measure improvements and gather information for IPs, said Capt. Matt Ballanco, Det. 3 operations officer.

The focus of the transition team is to identify and fix administrative issues at the IP stations, improve the emergency response system, and develop tactics for better crime scene preservation, said Ballanco.

During an IP summit Oct. 22, Maj. Nathan Schallas, the Det. 3 commander, challenged IP leaders to take charge as American forces move into an overwatch control mode and the government of Iraq raises its interest in aiding the Iraqi security forces throughout the Rashid district.

“The top priorities for the IPs are the safety of the Iraqi population and the disruption of criminal activity,” said Schallas.



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