



(Photos by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma Ledesma, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Miami native Sgt. Michael Cockroft, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company indirect fire infantryman attached to Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, helps build a wall of sand bags at an Iraqi Army checkpoint April 21.



Sgt. Lamitra Niles, a truck driver with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Bliss, Texas, and a native of Porterville, Miss., attaches chains to concrete barriers during the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in the Iraqi capital's district of Ghazaliya April 21.

Troops' Efforts Help Calm Southern

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
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BAGHDAD – It has been about 40 days since they stood up the first of the concrete barriers that surround Joint Security Station Thrasher. Since then, much has changed.

Soldiers with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, and currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division here, have watched the dissolution of violent activities since they began maintaining a continuous presence in Iraqi capital's once-hostile neighborhood of southern Ghazaliya.

As part of the Baghdad Security Plan's main goal to not just conduct major clearing operations, but stay in the areas to prevent militia activity from re-emerging, JSS Thrasher, named after a fallen 2-12th Cavalry Soldier, was erected on March 14 to establish a strong Iraqi security force and coalition presence in the primarily Sunni neighborhood.

Since the implementation of the relatively new idea of a joint security station, the progress in the tone that blankets the surrounding neighborhood is evident. For the commander of Company D, the difference is like night and day.

"Before it was a constant fight, we had to fight to get into these places. My front yard was a body dump spot where we usually picked up four or five bodies every three days," Capt. Darren Fowler said. "(Improvised explosive devices were planted) on every major route coming east to west. (They're was) small arms contact continuously while on patrols, you couldn't do a dismounted operation without getting shot at and since we established the JSS and got a new battalion to work solely in southern Ghazaliya, verses the one company we had before, (it) has allowed us to dominate the battle space."

In conjunction with 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry

Division's clearing operations of the surrounding area and the barrier plan around Ghazaliya, designed to enable a firm grip on the city's security, strengthened the effectiveness of the JSS.

"It allowed us to gain control and now we are in the control phase in southern Ghazaliya where we can focus more on essential services and restoring civil projects to the communities," Fowler said.

The JSS, being such a new concept, took time to catch on with local residents. But Fowler said that didn't take too long to change, as the local populace started to get comfortable with the idea of the outpost in their neighborhood.

"They started coming here and starting saying, 'Hey, this is my problem. Can you help me with that?' and we actually go out and help them," Fowler added. "(They said) 'Hey, they're actually on our side.' Now, they are not so afraid to come here."

Information started to filter in through the tip line, a 24-hour hotline that residents can call and expose insurgent activity and prevent harmful acts in their neighborhood. Fowler had the tip line phone for five months and never got much from it. After arriving to JSS Thrasher, he started getting six or seven phone calls a day about issues in his sector.

The combined command post configuration of the JSS allows coalition forces and Iraqi Army troops to conduct their planning jointly, where all parties can monitor both radios and rapidly exchange information and do everything together effectively.

Fowler said that prior to the establishment of the JSS when they were still located on separate forward operating bases, Iraqi and coalition forces had to go out do a coordination the day prior to the execution of missions.

"But, now we can say 'We got this going on,' and we can be out in less than ten minutes on a joint patrol doing this together," said Fowler. "There is no more 'Us and them'



Like Crystal, Minn., native Pfc. Paul Yanez, a Bradley Fighting Vehicle system maintainer with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, pushes a concrete barrier into place during the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Baghdad's Ghazaliya district April 21.



Platoon leader and native of Spring Mills, Pa., 1st Lt. Salvatore Nicosia with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Bliss, Texas, plans out the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in southern Ghazaliya April 21.

Ghazaliya Violence

Everything is executed together now.”
 The tank officer said that during the last couple of months, he has slowly pushed Iraqis out into the lead on planning and executing missions with coalition forces slowly transitioning to an over-watch position on logistics and planning processes.

“(We’re) letting them do more for their own community, which puts their faces on all the projects instead of the American faces,” said Fowler, a native of Union, S.C.

Evidence of their dedication to the people of the southern region of this district, last week Lt. Col. Jabar, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, based out of the southern Iraqi city of Basra, and Fowler sat down with sheiks, elder community leaders and other influential individuals within the Ghazaliya district.

“They explained to us their situation, what their intent is for their communities and what they would like to see happen,” Fowler said. “The first thing out of their mouths was, ‘We feel secure, finally. Thank you. Now that we have security this is what we want to see happen.’”

The two commanders took notes and they’re starting to work on prioritizing the population’s list of needs as far civil actions, water, electricity, sewage, hospital, academics, and a myriad of other projects they have not been able to focus on in the last six months due to the emphasis on the security situation.

That focus can now shift because of JSS Thrasher. Fowler is scheduled to leave his company after 24 months in command.

“If you ask me if I did a good job in establishing security in a bad situation – yes. I feel confident that we’ve done that because the attacks are down in southern Ghazaliya,” Fowler said. “The company established the JSS. We’ve done a lot of good stuff here and, truthfully, I feel confident in knowing that I’ve made a difference in Iraq.”



An Iraqi soldier with the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, based out of the southern Iraqi city of Basra, keeps watch over a primarily Sunni neighborhood of Baghdad's Ghazaliya district from a guard tower at Joint Security Station Thrasher April 20.