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Telling the MND-Baghdad Story

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(Photo by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Iraqi's to the Rescue

Iraqi firefighters work to extinguish a blaze at Coalition Outpost Callahan in eastern Baghdad's Sha'ab neighborhood after a generator caught fire Sept. 27

Stryker Soldiers Send Message to Insurgents

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

BAGHDAD - The essence of an insurgent-dominated neighborhood of the Iraqi capital's East Rashid District is evident as Soldiers weave through the desolate, maze-like streets peppered with improvised explosive devices. Several doors and gates are painted with evidence of a fanatic Muslim stronghold.

"In the name of God, I take back this house from the non-Muslim," a Sunni interpreter reads from a gate. "Signed, al-Qaeda in Iraq."

Despite the dangers that linger behind street corners and on rooftops, the Vilseck, Germany-based 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, currently with Multi-National Division - Baghdad, wanted to send a clear message to the insurgency Sept. 20.

The Stryker Soldiers, who have been in the country for less than two months, are tackling their clearing mission one weapons cache, suspected insurgent and roadside bomb at a time in a fight that Staff Sgt. Jared Utter briefly described as possibly being "one of the biggest fights in Iraq right now."

Only a month into the unit's projected 15-month tour, Utter, a native of Columbus, S.C., and the a squad leader with Company G's 2nd Platoon, said his troops have seen more than a month's worth of experience now on their fifth back-to-back day out in this sector.

This particular day started off like all the others with the sun peeking above the hori-

zon creating an orange backdrop behind the company's formation of eight-wheeled Stryker vehicles.

It took about an hour to get to the neighborhood and begin searching; a place where only six out of 36 houses were occupied.

The Soldiers with 2nd Platoon, led by 1st Lt. Eric Owens, discovered hand-made, highly-explosive materials in a house they had cleared out the day prior.

"This is not the first time we've seen (insurgents) come in behind us," said Owens, who hails from Richmond, Va. After an explosive ordnance disposal team detonated the explosive material, the company continued with the mission.

It was a little after 1 p.m. and the company has been clearing homes all morning. Behind a shield of white smoke, 3rd Squad maneuvered across 60th Street, a road with a direct view of an open field, when something exploded and rounds started to fly.

"I saw tracers hit the ground. They opened up on us with PKCs (machine guns). We don't know if it was a mortar or (rocket-propelled grenade that exploded), but it couldn't have hit more than 20 feet away from us," said Spc. Eric Horvath of Mentor, Ohio, who later found pieces of shrapnel melted onto his gear. "It all happened so fast. It was like I teleported to cover."

While they continued to receive heavy machine gun fire from the second story of a building across the open field, Spc. J. Jacobs of Bloomington, Ind., fell face down onto the

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828 Iraqi Police Recruits Graduate Training

By Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Beach
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP INDIA, Iraq - Gerian Mohamed is proud of many things in his life; his marriage and the birth of his children. But today, he said, is one of the proudest moments of his life.

Today he became a police officer.

A few short months ago he was a farmer, growing vegetables sold in Baghdad markets. The 30-year-old proudly declared he is ready to serve his country.

"The training was very difficult, harder than I imagined," Mohamed said through a translator. But he said he

feels ready for what lies ahead.

Mohamed was one of 828 volunteers to graduate the Iraqi Police training program here today. A separate class graduated from the Baghdad Police College Sept. 20. The goal is to expand the Iraqi Police force by 12,000 officers over the next six months throughout Iraq.

What lies ahead for Mohamed and the nearly 1,500 other volunteers from the Abu Ghraib area of western Baghdad, who will soon undergo the same training, is the opportunity to do their part in building a better and safe Iraq for them-



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Beach, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Iraqi Police graduates carry Lt. Omar Thamer, an Iraqi Police officer instructor, on their shoulders after the graduation ceremony at Camp India Sept. 25.

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