

The Advisor



United States Forces-Iraq

April 2010



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On the cover:
Iraqi Army soldiers from the 4th and 9th IA Div lay 81mm mortar rounds down range at the Kirkuk Training Center during a live fire exercise at the Laylan Mortar Range. (Photo by U.S. Army Lt. Col. Steven Bien, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army, Kirkuk Training Center)



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Iraqi Mortarmen Deliver Lethal, Close Range Firepower

More than 140 Iraqi Army soldiers from three Iraqi Army divisions graduated from the 81 mm mortar course at Besmaya Combat Training Center recently. The four-week course trained soldiers in three separate and specialized groups: forward observers, fire direction center and mechanical, all of which are part of an indirect fire team.

During the course, the forward observers learned skills including map reading, how to call for and adjust indirect fire, and occupying an observation post.

“The things I learned as a forward observer will help me protect my family and country,” said Pvt. Dhia Mohamed Abdullah, from 3rd Battalion, 29th Brigade, 7th IA Division. “I’m proud of graduating ... It’s a good feeling.”

The fire direction center students learned how to compute firing data using M-16 plotting boards and how to use the boards as firing charts. They also participated in specialized training on how to develop surface danger

zone diagrams and safety diagrams that help them safely conduct live fire exercises.

Mechanical training focused on placing the mortar into action, pre-fire safety checks, and bore sighting a mortar for deflection and elevation. Additionally, the students learned how to lay a mortar for direction using a compass, misfire procedures, and how to properly handle ammunition.

“Before I came to the course, I knew nothing of mortars,” said Private Omar Khaled Sabar, from 3rd Battalion, 29th Brigade, 7th IA Division, “Now I feel that I can lead my platoon when I go



back to my home station.”

Collective training included reconnoitering mortar firing positions, advance party procedures and both day and night occupation procedures. The students put all of their new skills into action during their final training event, a full scale live fire exercise.

During the graduation ceremony, the top officer, soldier and platoon were recognized for outstanding achievement. Pvt. Sabar was named the course honor graduate and received a gift for his accomplishment. “It was a surprise that I did not expect, but I’m definitely happy,” he said.

Story by Sherwin Seabrook, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army Training

Photos:

(Top) Fire direction center students, Iraqi Army soldiers from the 11th IA Division, process fire missions on an M-16 plotting board as part of the 81 mm mortar training at the Besmaya Combat Training center. (Photo by U.S. Army Lt. Col. Douglas Porter, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army, Besmaya Combat Training Center)

(Left) Iraqi 81mm T3 (Train the Trainer) Cadre practice their emplacement skills of the 81mm mortar at the Besmaya Combat Training Center. (Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Michael A. Fraas, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army, Besmaya Combat Training Center)





Iraqi Aerial Gunners Protect, Defend

When they hear the unmistakable sound of a fighter jet soaring above, some U.S. Airmen call it the “sound of freedom.” Some Iraqi airmen now feel that same pride when they hear their helicopters overhead.

The Iraqis are on their way to an independent air force capable of protecting its people. One of the steps to an improved air force is the introduction of aerial gunners.

“The Iraqi military never had gunners before,” said Tech. Sgt. Ethan Masslow, 721st AEAS aerial gunner. “This slow-paced evolution, although progressing, has not been an easy road.” The Iraqi military is not like the U.S. where there are sequential, progressive steps to enlist. Some of the Iraqi airmen in training now have not been to basic training, but they have already completed technical school to become proficient in their jobs.

“The hardest part for us as gunners was getting the initial cadre of instructors and evaluators certified so they can go out and conduct the training themselves,” said Tech. Sgt. Michael Burt, 721st AEAS aerial-gunner instructor. “The students we had, who have now become gunner instructors, have gone through all the required training, but are now required to go through basic training. This creates a challenge when trying to get additional students trained.”

It’s an ongoing mission, but the advisors and instructors do what’s necessary to get the job done.

“In this environment, one of the obstacles is not having enough pilots on hand to fly so our gunners can accomplish their training,” Burt said. “Pilot training dictates gunner training.”

Language and cultural differences

abound, so advisors know the importance of establishing a connection. In order to build a rapport with their counterparts, 721st AEAS members spend off-duty time with Iraqi airmen in their environment. They are frequently invited to eat dinner or have chai tea together and build camaraderie engaging in a sport that transcends all cultures -- video games.

“We spend as much time with them as we can outside of work to sustain the relationship our predecessors set,” Masslow said. “Forming bonds outside the training environment is vital to promoting trust within the Iraqi military. If they don’t trust you, it will be hard to convince them of ways to improve the skills they already have.”

The Iraqi gunners have made great strides in a year – progressing from students led by U.S. instructors to leading students themselves.

“We have coalition crews in supporting and advisory roles now. A year ago, we’d be the ones controlling it,” said Tech. Sgt. Onnez Rodriguez-Massas. “The Iraqi air force has come a long way and they’re doing an excellent job.”

The local Iraqi people have expressed their support as well.

“People come out to wave at us and

you can see by their smiles that they are happy and proud to see us flying around with the Iraqi flag painted on the helicopter,” said Rodriguez-Massas. “This is their country and they want to see it being protected by their military.”

“It’s a symbol of change and they are now in control,” Rodriguez-Massas said.

The Iraqi helicopters provide the

“sound of freedom” for this country and it’s only getting stronger.

Story by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Kimberly T. Harrison, U.S. Air Forces Central Public Affairs

Photos:

(Left) Iraqi Mi-17 helicopter aerial gunner dons his kneepads before engine-start at Camp Taji

(Below) Iraqi Mi-17 helicopter aerial gunner Athier Fiaz scans the area during takeoff at Camp Taji. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Quinton Russ)





Doctor, Linguist, Advisor, Humanitarian: One Man's Extraordinary Acts of Kindness Inspire, Heal

In 2004, Salwan, Sa'adoon Ahmed, a young Iraqi boy, was injured when he was near a United States military convoy that was mortared, leaving him paralyzed in both legs and with other lingering medical problems.

Despite Salwan's appeal to multiple sources, including high-level Iraqi government officials and international medical organizations, he was not able to obtain the medical treatment he needed; six years later he met Dr. Adel Nobel Hansen, United States Forces-Iraq interpreter and medical advisor.

After serving as the medical liaison for the Marines at Al-Anbar province, Hansen's primary job at USF-I (formerly called Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq) was to translate medical documents from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense into English, but his outstanding interpersonal skills and

abilities led him to more opportunities. On numerous occasions, Hansen was called upon to serve as the commander's cultural advisor and personal interpreter.

Hansen's senior leaders have described the doctor as a top-notch linguist who embodies the values of duty, selfless-service, and integrity; an example for others to follow.

The doctor first learned about Salwan's situation January 1, 2010 when he met U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Ames, USF-I Strategic Operations Chaplain, at the New Years worship service.

"After four years, and despite at least 20 organizations and dozens of individuals saying that nothing could be done, now, in less than two weeks, one good man with a heart full of compassion made a huge difference," said

Ames.

Immediately, Hansen started making phone calls and getting in touch with the right people. Juggling his busy schedule, the doctor worked many hours during his personal time to connect Salwan with the senior military and health officials.

Hansen has formed many great professional and personal relationships throughout his career.

One example of these relationships is with Iraqi Maj. Gen. Samir Abdullah, Ministry of Defense Surgeon General, who in the end gave Salwan a medical waiver to be treated in the Iraqi military health system because the MoD's Clinic was open only to MoD and Ministry of Interior personnel and the family members (Salwan was neither of those).

Hansen persuaded the Surgeon

General “seeing Salwon would improve the image of MoD [health] services, by encouraging the Iraqi people to have more trust in their health care system, enhancing their credibility and matbe even inspiring some Iraqis.

Also, he explained to Iraqi Brig. Gen. Foud Jahil Alhilali, Surgeon General Deputy Commander, that Salwan was a victim of a terrorist attack. In response, the general wrote a letter to the Al Muthana Military Hospital and its Prosthetic Clinic commander stating Salwan to receive medical treatment.

Because of Hansen’s personal attention to this matter, Salwan met an orthopedic surgeon and a physical therapist Jan. 11, who treated his bed sores, fitted him with prostheses for his legs and gave him physical therapy to significantly improve his quality of life.

“Not only is it wonderful that Salwan received the treatment he needed, but this case has become a magnificent

opportunity to display the good will of the United States Forces toward Iraqi people,” said Ames.



The next step for Salwan is to receive treatment and possible surgery at a medical facility outside of Iraq.

“The thing that drove me to take im-

mediate action was seeing the passion and the caring of the chaplain and his assistance for the Iraqi boy,” said Hansen.

While he didn’t do any of the operating on Salwan, in the end it was Hansen’s willingness to help, which got the medical attention Salwan so needed for years.

Although Hansen’s contract with USF-I will soon be coming to an end, he will continue to pursue getting help for the young Iraqi boy.

In April 2010, the doctor will have the option to take another job in Afghanistan, Iraq or return home to the United States.

Story by Senior Airman A.J. Hyatt, United States Forces - Iraq Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Photos:

(Facing page) Dr. Adel Hansen (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Amy E. McLaughlin)

(Above) Dr. Hansen gives a Marine stitches. (Photo courtesy Dr. Adel Hansen)



U. S. Air Force Turns Over Aircraft Hangar to Iraqi Air Force

Members of the Iraq Training and Advisory Mission, U.S. Air Force and the Iraqi air force, stand shoulder to shoulder during a ribbon cutting ceremony on Kirkuk Regional Air Base, Iraq. Staff Lt. Gen. Anwer Ameen, Iraqi air force commander, and Brig. Gen. Scott Hanson, 321st Air Expeditionary Wing commander and director of ITAM - Air Force signed a letter of acceptance and transfer for the newly restored Skeleton Hangar.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Tabitha Kuykendall, 506th Air Expeditionary Group Public Affairs)

Iraqis Prep for Secure Network

The Iraq Training and Advising Mission - Intelligence sponsored classes at the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division (Ready First) in the Kirkuk Combined Coordination Center on Forward Operating Base Warrior March 18.

One of the classes offered taught members of the Iraq Police, the National Information and Investigation Agency and other intelligence and security agencies how to navigate through the Iraqi Intelligence Network.

The network serves the same purpose as the U.S. Department of Defense's Secret Internet Protocol Router Network that is designed to keep sensitive information flow secure, said to Mr. Kristopher N. Berceli, a civilian Army Department of Defense employee and NIIA advisor.

"It's what you would call their classified and secure network," said Berceli.

"They're learning how to use the 'I2N' [Iraqi Intelligence Network] system," said Capt. Timothy Jenkins of Ready First, 1/1 AD out of Fort Bliss, Texas, one of the officers who works in the KCCC here on FOB Warrior. "This is the first secure network the Iraqis have been able to use."

An additional class is also offered at the KCCC. "It provides a shortened overview of what is offered at the NTC [NIIA Training Center] down at Baghdad," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Steve M. McGinnis, an ITAM-Intel advisor with United States Forces- Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training. "We hope they will want to go to Baghdad and take the full course."

The overview was taught by Iraqi Lt. Col. Ziad Sefoog of ITAM who says he has been teaching this kind of class for two years. "It teaches everything involved in the intelligence cycle," he said.

"I think it opens their [Iraq security] eyes to a need for further understanding of the intelligence field," said Mr. Charles L. Meyer, civilian intelligence advisor who has worked with intelligence companies for 14 years.

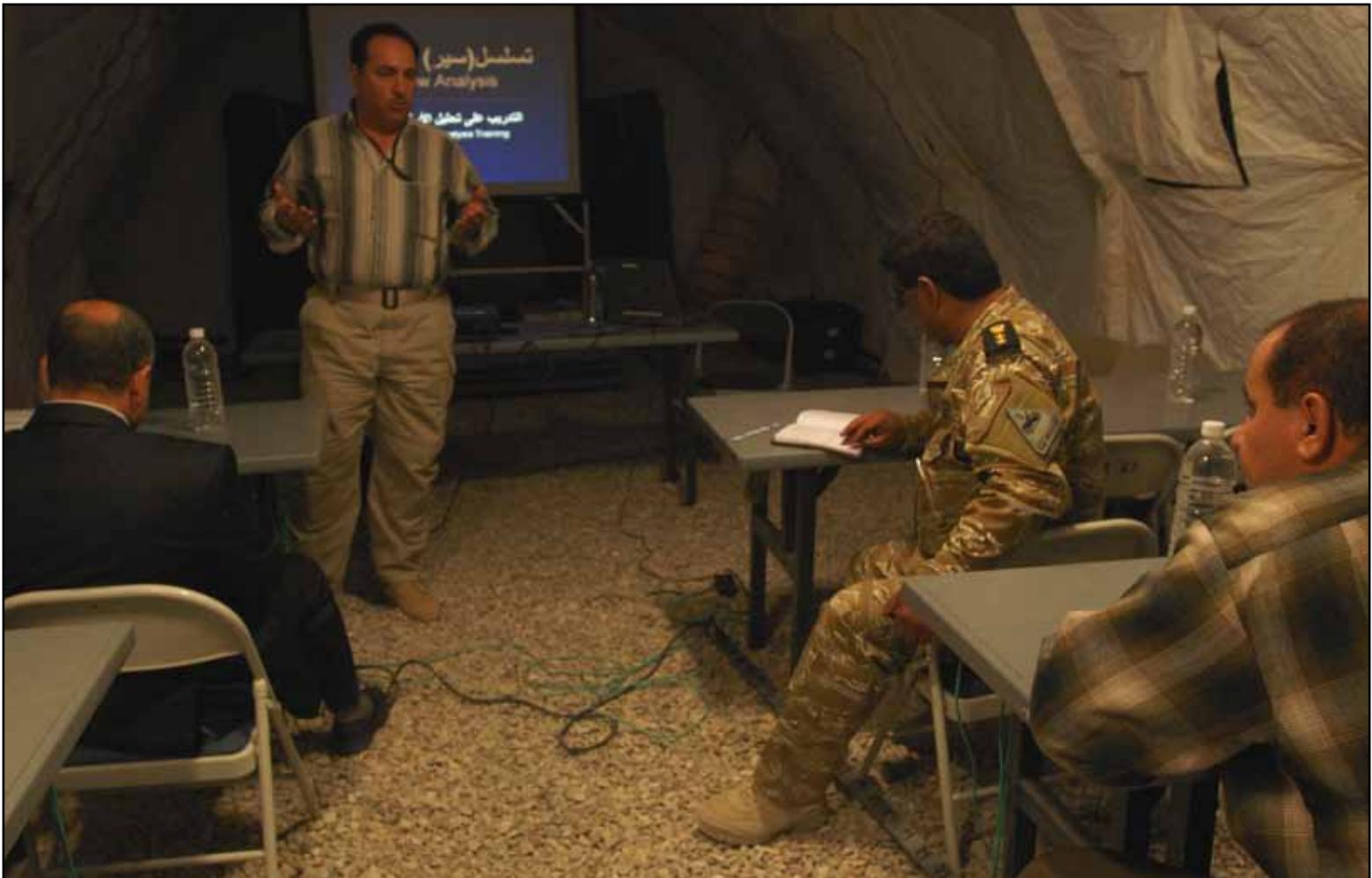
The ITAM Mobile Training Team plans to travel to several locations teaching Iraqi security forces the basics of the intelligence business.

"This is the first for the MTT," said McGinnis, "We expect to go to every province."

Story and photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Christina Turnipseed, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division

Photo

Iraqi Lt. Col. Ziad Sefoog of the Iraqi Training and Advising Mission who has been teaching this subject for about two years, gives students from different security groups in Iraq an overview of the intelligence cycle.





Iraqi Infantry Soldiers Graduate With Style

Infantrymen are the main land combat force of an army, ready to defend their country at the drop of a hat. Thanks to these soldiers, that hat will not be hiding a shaggy mop of hair beneath it.

Seven Iraqi Army infantrymen now have new skills to take care of their brethren in a different way. They are the proud graduates of the Administration Affairs School's first barber course at Camp Taji.

The course included training in sanitation and hygiene, familiarization with the tools and equipment, barber history and shaving techniques during the practical exercises.

"I am Infantry, so I have learned something new," said Pvt. Ali Abd Alameer, 8th Division. "I will use what I have learned with the soldiers at my unit."

At the graduation ceremony, Brig. Gen. Abd Al Kareem, commander of the school, presented each student with a certificate of completion for the course and congratulated them on being the first students to graduate from the class.

The students were enthusiastic about returning to their units to put their new knowledge and skills into practice.

"The knowledge I have gained here will be very useful," said Pvt. Mohammed Kareem Ali from the 8th Division. "I will cut soldiers' hair at my unit."

The next course is planned for later this year. In the meantime, these new barbers have their work cut out for them.

Story by Sherwin Seabrook, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army Training

(Photo) A barber course instructor observes a student's hair cutting skills during a practical exercise. (Photo taken by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Aaron Norfleet, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission – Army Training, Admin Affairs School)

Advanced Pilot Training Program Takes Off



The first students have begun classes at the Iraqi Air Force College, which opened its doors at the Tikrit Air Base in March. Ten Iraqi air force pilots are going through the advanced pilot training program on the T-6A to become instructors for other student pilots who will follow.

This program marks the first time Iraqi air force pilots have trained on the T-6A, which is a single-engine, two-seat training aircraft designed for providing instruction in advanced flying skills. Like U.S. military pilots, the Iraqis must master the T-6A before going on to fly more sophisticated multi-role fighter aircraft.

"The pilots who have been selected to come here today and start training will be the initial cadre of instructor pi-

lots for the Iraqi air force T-6 program," said Brig. Gen. Scott Hanson, director of the Iraqi Training and Advisory Mission and 321st Air Expeditionary Wing commander. "It's really exciting to be a part of this."

The pilots in training were hand-picked by Iraqi air force Commander Staff Lt. Gen. Anwer Hamad Amen Ahmed, who described them as his sons. "I look forward to the future of these pilots because they are the future of the Iraqi air force," Anwer said. "I hope that one day, one of these pilots

will return here to speak to a new class as the Iraqi air force commander."

The stringent selection process brings forward only the experienced candidates who are proficient in English as well as flying.

"Their English language skills are a critical part of the selection process because English is the international language of aviation," said Hanson.



“These candidates have all demonstrated that and they will be put to the test.”

When the students graduate from the course, they will become trainers of the same program they just completed. They are all experienced pilots on a variety of different aircraft, though none of them have flown the T-6 before this course.

“I’ve always been excited about flying the fast jet,” said Iraqi air force 1st Lt. Muslam Akeel Abdulrasaq, one of the new students. “Of course, it is going to be challenging because there is a quite a lot of learning to do and you have to be physically and mentally fit to do this job. I am really looking forward to it.”

The ITAM-AF instructors displayed similar enthusiasm for the course. “I have never experienced more job satisfaction than I do with just teaching students,” said USAF Capt. Daniel Fiedler, an ITAM-AF instructor pilot at

the Iraqi Air Force College. “To do that with these Iraqi pilots is cutting edge.”

I get to be a part of the initial set of people teaching Iraqis how to do this and realize their dreams, Fiedler said. “For them it’s not just the dream of getting to fly an airplane, it’s the dream of building their country.”

Story and photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Amy E. McLaughlin, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Photo:

Three T-6A airplanes sit in a hangar at the Tikrit Air Base, awaiting the Iraqi pilots who recently began training. The first Iraqi pilots training here will become the cadre at the Iraqi Air Force College.

Iraqi Firefighters Answer the Call

Firefighters from the Iraqi Civil Defense Training Academy recently demonstrated their fire and rescue skills during a recent demonstration in Baghdad.

U.S. Air Force instructors from the 821st Expeditionary Training Squadron and U.S. Army instructors from the 110th Chemical and 414th Civil Affairs Battalions mentor Iraqi firefighting students who assemble at the academy to receive formalized training.

The instructors at the Iraqi Joint Fire Training Academy teach core courses in basic firefighting, rescue and first aid, communications and hazardous materials, as well as explosive ordinance disposal.

During the demonstration, the Iraqi firefighters rappelled from a burning three-story building, and provided first aid to the victims of a simulated car bomb.

“The Iraqi Civil Defense Training Academy is currently working to establish an internationally accepted base curriculum,” said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kevin Cotton, 821 ETS fire rescue advisor. “The objective of the academy is to gain international certification and become one of the premier fire training institutions in the Middle East.”

In addition to responding to everyday local emergencies, the firefighters have been assigned to emergency management duties such as warning siren maintenance, national disaster notification, evacuation, bomb shelter maintenance and recovery of explosive residue.

“We are giving these firefighters a foundation of capability to protect their citizens by fighting fires,” said Master Sgt. Jeffrey Kimball, 821st ETS superintendent of fire rescue advisors. “They will be able to build Iraqis’ confidence by

rapidly and professionally responding to any incidents that may occur.”

During one class the students were taught how to extricate victims from vehicles. The next day a very real bomb exploded in Baghdad, which required them to put their training to the test.

“It was amazing that these young firefighters were able to use the ideas and tools they were just taught in a real life situation,” said Kimball. “Because it showed during a real life situation they were able to act and respond effectively.”

The academy staff uses the “train the trainer” concept, which means the students who successfully complete the course can become future instructors.

“The Iraqis are already teaching the basic firefighter course; and the hazmat course is about to be turned over to them,” said Army Spc. Michael Bur-



ris, 414th Civil Affairs Battalion assistant instructor. "I'm very proud of what they've achieved."

Story by Senior Airman Jarrod Chavana, U.S. Air Forces Central, Baghdad Media Outreach Team

Photos by by Master Sgt. Patricia Bunting, U.S. Air Forces Central, Baghdad Media Outreach Team

(Right) Firefighters with the Iraqi Civil Defense Training Academy pull a hose down from a building after a recent demonstration in Baghdad.

(Left) Master Sgt. Jeffrey Kimball, fire rescue advisor for the 821st Expeditionary Training Squadron, oversees a recent firefighting demonstration in Baghdad. The Iraqi Civil Defense Training Academy is currently working to establish an internationally accepted based curriculum; the future vision of the academy is to become internationally certified and become one of the premier fire training institutions in the Middle East.



Servicemembers Visit Iraqi School



Servicemembers assigned to United States Forces – Iraq Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training visited the Al Mustafa school for underprivileged children here recently. The troops met the children and teachers with more than 300 packages filled with school supplies, toys, coloring books, crayons and sweet treats.

The servicemembers were greeted with singing, clapping, chanting and hundreds of smiles as they approached the school yard. All of the teachers and the students were assembled around a table that held candles, aromatic incense and a bouquet of myrtle, all symbols of good luck and good will.

“I have always admired photos that showed American servicemen and women helping the children of Iraq, since the children of Iraq are truly its future,” Brig. Gen. Craig Olson, Iraq Security Assistance Mission director, said to the children and faculty of Al Mustafa. “It was my great wish that before I leave Iraq, there would be a day that I could participate in one of those

humanitarian missions myself. Today is that day.”

After seeing photos of a similar mission that took place last fall, Olson wanted his directorate to coordinate one as well. He called on U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Robert Carriedo, ISAM Air Force, and an interpreter for USF-I, who had both participated in the previous mission, and asked them to help coordinate another school visit.

Following that meeting, Senior Master Sgt. Luann Gaylor, assigned to ISAM Logistics, became involved, spearheading the coordination for the visit. After few months of diligent planning, she and the others collected donations of clothing, school supplies and toys for the children. A fund raising effort within ISAM netted more than \$800 to purchase additional items for the children and

the school.

When they collected and purchased enough items make a generous package for each child, several volunteers assigned to various directorates within

USF-I, DCG (A&T) gathered together and spent an afternoon organizing and packaging the gifts for the mission the next day. In addition to the packages for the children, they also presented the faculty with soccer balls, clothing and classroom supplies for the school.

“I know I speak for all the participants when I say it was one of the greatest blessings of my deployment,” Olson said. “I intend for there to be many more such visits in the future, so I highly encourage you to jump on the next opportunity. It will definitely be a highlight of your deployment. Just ask those who went today.”

Olson and his directorate have already begun collecting items for the next mission, with plans to go again in the near future.

Story and photos by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Amy E. McLaughlin, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Photos

(Left) An Iraqi boy shares a smile after peeking at the contents of his gift bag.

(Below) Senior Master Sgt. Luann Gaylor, Iraq Security Assistance Mission - Logistics, hands gift bags to the children at the Al Mustafa school in Baghdad.



Commander Finds Fresh Solution For Thirsty Troops

When Iraqi Brig. Gen Nadhem became the base commander in Taji, he was concerned about providing enough clean drinking water to sustain the base. The costs to the dining facility to purchase the water, the vulnerability of the water during delivery and the risks involved for the people who had to deliver it weighed heavily on his mind.

While investigating a solution to ensure a constant supply of clean water to his personnel, he found a company that could provide the parts and the system to purify and bottle water locally on base. Nadhem wasted no time taking action.

Since its installation about a year ago, the water bottling project has consistently produced 350 cases of water a day, which has saved the base a significant amount of money that can be used for other important projects for the soldiers.



“We used to pay about \$20,000 per month for water, mainly because of the cost of transportation and delivery,” said Nadhem. “But now we pay much less than half of that when you count supplies and filters.”

The entire project, including hiring a certified installer, cost about \$36,000 and was paid off less than six months after completion.

Nadhem is now looking into expanding the base’s self reliance and hopes to add a laundry facility to support the growing military population.

Senior U.S. and Iraqi military leaders have taken notice of the water bottling plant project and mentioned that they are interested in seeing the model followed throughout the Iraqi military.

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Amy McLaughlin, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Photos by Senior Airman A.J. Hyatt, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Iraqi Women Complete BCT

The mood was electric. A jubilant roar broke out among the ranks as the women chanted and danced in celebration.

These 65 women, from provinces throughout Iraq, had good reason to celebrate. Most have suffered the consequences of the war, losing loved ones and friends, yet they rose above seemingly impossible situations to begin rebuilding their lives by volunteering to protect their country. These women comprise the newest graduating class of the Iraqi Army Female Basic Combat Training course at Old Al Muthana Air Base in Baghdad.

The female Iraqi soldiers completed six weeks of rigorous training, learned fundamental military skills such as marching, weapons handling and marksmanship, and supported the security mission during the Iraqi national

elections early last month.

"We celebrate this graduation and thank the U.S. advisors for their assistance," said Lt. Gen. Hussein Dohi, Assistant Chief of Staff for Training in his address to the graduates. He stressed the importance of the class and expressed his pride and confidence in their future performance. "They will do great things," he said.

The pride and excitement were in the air as each graduate was called in front of their peers to receive congratulatory flowers and gifts. Finally the women swore to an oath of allegiance and service that completed the ceremony.

"We are proud of our female soldiers," said Maj. Gen. Simar Al Bash, Basic Training Tactical Center Director.

Since the first course was conducted in June 2009, 190 females have completed the training. The Iraqi Army plans to open a special center for female BCT training at Old Al Muthana in the future.

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Amy McLaughlin, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs

Photos:

(Below) Iraqi soldiers pose with LTC Delaina Sawyers, an advisor from Iraq Training and Advisory Mission - Army, following the Basic Combat Training course graduation at Old Al Muthana Air Base in Baghdad.

(Right) Iraqi Female soldiers celebrate the end of their basic combat training and the beginning of their military careers.

Photos by U.S. Army Capt. Shannon Frank, United States Forces - Iraq, Deputy Commanding General, Advising and Training Public Affairs





Iraqi Air Force



Story by by Senior Airman Mindy Bloem, 506th Air Expeditionary Group Public Affairs

Iraqi air force Squadron 3 launches all six of their aircraft from Kirkuk Regional Air Base, Iraq March 5. This launch was a surge flight operation in support of the national Iraqi elections March 7. This marks the first time the Iraqi air force flew an all-Iraqi effort in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in support of an Iraqi election. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Tabitha Kuykendall)

Makes History

As masses of Iraqis flocked to the polls in early March to ink their fingers for their preferred candidate, another historical moment took place in the skies.

This marks the first time the Iraqi air force flew an all-Iraqi effort in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in support of an Iraqi election.

"In previous years, the United States has provided security, aerial surveillance and reconnaissance for the elections," said Lt. Col. Rodney Liberato, 321st Air Expeditionary Advisory Group/Det 3 Chief at Kirkuk Regional Air Base. "But today marks a historic event because the Iraqi forces, with all of their assets, will provide their own ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] coverage for the Iraqi national elections, something they've been working toward for the past four years."

Kirkuk's Iraqi air force Squadron 3 launched all six of its aircraft on the morning of March 5 during a surge flight operation in support of the national Iraqi elections.

Since this squadron is tasked with supporting ISR operations over the major cities of Iraq during the elections, its members had to be vigilant in protecting the Iraqi people.

To be able to do their job properly, the squadron had technology to assist them in preventing attacks by terrorists.

The crews of Squadron 3 consist of a pilot, co-pilot and mission system operator. They have three RC-208 aircraft and three AC-208 aircraft, each equipped with an MX-15 electro-optical infrared camera system.

There are Iraqi operation centers

throughout the country with the capability to download full motion videos, captured from the aircraft's camera equipment, essentially giving the security forces on the ground an eye in the sky, said Liberato.

The effort is also notable because it is not just one unit or team working to complete a mission, but involved Iraqi forces across the country, teaming up to provide their people the necessary protection they needed for a peaceful election.

"From the very beginning, they built an integrated plan with communications, logistics, operations and intelligence, to provide support to their Iraqi security forces," said Brig. Gen. Scott Hanson,

"...To be a part of that was incredibly rewarding and exciting, and that's the kind of business our advisors do every day."

~Brig. Gen Scott Hanson

director of the Iraqi Training and Advisory Mission and commander of the 321st Air Expeditionary Wing. "So the elections for Iraq were secure for the voters as well as providing a legitimate election for the people of Iraq,"

Staff Col. Albayati, Iraqi air force Squadron 3 commander, believes this is an important step toward Iraqi independence.

"The role of the Iraqi air force is to provide the Iraqi security ground forces, the information needed for them to do their duties better," he said. "This means our planes will be overhead the cities, looking for every single movement. If anything happens, we will be in contact with the ground forces, giving them a direct link that will provide better reaction time. Everything we do

is to keep our people safe who are voting in this great and historical election in our country."

U.S. forces have been assisting Iraqi forces in achieving self-sufficiency since 2005, and for those personally involved in the nation building process, it has been a rewarding experience.

Albayati said this mission allows for changes in Iraq.

"Today, the Iraqi people are free to choose who will be best for them," he said, referring to the election. "In the past, everyone was afraid to show his finger, but I think now people will be proud to show their finger, and I think people who don't vote will think they made a big mistake."

The Iraqi colonel believes it's time for the Iraqi forces to protect their own.

"I cannot tell you how proud I am of what we are doing in this squadron," he said. "I cannot tell you the limits of my happiness when I saw

my guys working this morning with big smiles. They want to do something for their people. I am proud of each of them."

"I hope for peace for these great people of Iraq, and I want them to know that we are soldiers and our first job is to serve them," Albayati concluded.

The Iraqi air force saw great success during the election season. "It was very, very exciting. They surged their capabilities, as a matter of fact. They flew more lines and more sorties in one day than they have in the past," Hanson said. "So, to be a part of that was incredibly rewarding and exciting, and that's the kind of business our advisors do every day."



Three T-6A airplanes await the Iraqi pilots who recently began training. The first Iraqi pilots training here will become the cadre at the Iraqi Air Force College. [Story Page 10]

(Photo by Chief Petty Officer Michael Heckman, Joint Combat Camera Center Iraq)