

# Iraqis train for future

## Civil Defense Corps beefs up security

By David Ruderman  
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

A ragtag mix of 150 men crouched on a damp stretch of gravel and earth to eat their lunch of flat bread, pancakes, fried vegetables and fruit. Ranging in age from their teens through their 30s they were recruits for the Balad Battalion of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, and their performance in the months ahead will help determine the future of their country.

"There's hardly a time when you get to take something from its raw form and watch it grow into something we can use to keep the peace," said Command Sgt. Maj. Barry Maieritsch of 3rd Corps Support Command's 27th Transportation Battalion. "It's very encouraging."

Maieritsch has overseen the training of the ICDC recruits on LSA Anaconda from the beginning. The unit will consist of five platoons of about 50 men each, with members being recruited from area villages, he said.

"We were very cognizant and particular about who we were hiring," Maieritsch said he worked on the principles of inclusive representation and integration of the diverse ethnic and clan affiliations prevalent in the villages around Balad.

"From one village to another there are certain grumblings. There are a lot of poor people around here. We're very sensitive to their concerns, that if we take people from one village the sheiks will say we are not helping their people get jobs and the other village is collaborating."

After lunch a dozen or so of the recruits bow down on corrugated cardboard box panels to pray and then join the others for physical examinations and training on the Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifle.

"We're working into our third month. We are growing this thing from the ground floor up. They were farmers when we recruited them, but about 75 percent were former Iraqi military. Fear was the motivator around here, and now it's what we call 'thuqah' — that's Arabic for trust," said Maieritsch.

"If this is you, and this is me," he said, spreading his hands apart to employ the gestures that are integral to communication among the Iraqis and the American Soldiers, "we will never come together." He slapped his open palm with the fist of his other hand to show the idea of coming together. "That's thuqah — that's trust — coming together like a hand in a glove."

"Most guys work as farmers in villages around this base. Some are military and some are former officers. Among soldiers there are different ranks and more who worked in the military academy," said the battalion's Iraqi leader, Abdul

Salaam Jawad, a former lieutenant colonel and commandant of an air wing stationed on the airfield here.

What are his soldiers learning?  
"When they start, how to check a person and how to check a car. And more after, a person with a pistol or a knife, what to do about this. You learn about weapons and like this."

What was the reaction among his men to the capture of Saddam Hussein in December? "All guys are happy and, ta-ta," said Jawad, clapping his hands for emphasis, "because Saddam was difficult for many guys, I think all these guys."

The trainees come to the base six days a week, study in a series of tents and return home at the end of the day. If they were formerly in the army they make \$175 a month, if civilian, \$165, said Jawad. They are both Sunni and Shiite, and many of them are illiterate.

Maieritsch recounted a 50-year-old father of 10 arriving one morning to enlist. He shook his head, but in talking to the man asked if he could teach Arabic to the recruits. No problem. The man brought his own textbooks, set up a chalkboard in the training area and got to work teaching his countrymen the fundamentals of their own language.

### 'No fear and no bomb'

"I like this job because something like security, like the police, I like this," said Hussam Abid Al Amer, a 19-year-old student from Baghdad in his third week of training. "I say person in ICDC is good, because you can trust him. They know this area good. ... I hope free and no fear and no bomb."

"Thank you, America, for freedom — finished," said one of Amer's colleagues, exhausting his English vocabulary.

"Some of them do this for the money. It's the only job available these days," said Muhammed Habib, an interpreter who was a graphic designer working for clients abroad before the American invasion. "But most are more interested to prevent what could happen to their villages down there. They are going to secure their villages in about a 10-mile radius from Anaconda, protect their villages in their uniforms."

The uniforms were scheduled to arrive Jan. 21. The patch supplier was on base Jan. 19 to arrange delivery. "By the end of the week they'll all be done," said Maieritsch. "That's going to be a sight." Wearing uniforms will work to cement the bonds within the unit and augment the trainees' sense of belonging to a coherent force, he said.

"They're an interesting bunch," said Staff Sgt. Samuel Finch, a platoon training sergeant from the 282nd Quarter-



Photo by Dennis Johnson

### Iraqi Civil Defense Corps recruits are briefed before beginning weapons training.

master Company, a Reserve unit from Montgomery, Ala., attached to 3rd COSCOM. "There's not a lot of training you can do. A lot of them are former military so we're teaching leadership and to have more trust among themselves. That's what we're trying to do. A lot of them are just like Americans. Some things they'll listen to and a lot they won't."

So far the ICDC has had its successes, said Maieritsch. "I said to them, 'Some of you know people who have fired on this base and killed my Soldiers. If you tell me who they are and where their weapons are I assure you that we will bring them in and no one will know you are involved in this. We've been very successful from a humint [human intelligence] point of view from our guys. RPGs, mortar rockets and mortar tubes have been turned in, and there's more to come. We've taken enemy weapons out of the hands of people who specifically used them against our convoys coming out of Anaconda. We've taken in 55 RPGs; that's 55 chances gone to kill us," he said.

Like most 3rd COSCOM Soldiers at LSA Anaconda, Maieritsch was preparing to return to Germany in early February. The 82nd Airborne Division will take responsibility for training and fielding the ICDC battalion. He expected the first elements to graduate in early February.

"The idea is that we're getting them trained to do those force

protection tasks that they can do here on Anaconda and then work their way out [into the surrounding countryside]," said Maieritsch.

One of their first assignments could be supporting guard tower force protection operations, half being manned by American Soldiers and half by ICDC members, he said. There are 36 ICDC battalions being trained around Iraq, and some are already active patrolling Main Support Route Tampa, a major highway link that runs north to south through the country.

### 'Proud as heck'

"I'm just proud as heck we have a president with the vision and the guts to move ahead with this," said Maieritsch. "Otherwise these people would still be living in misery and tyranny. We're spending a lot of money here, and we have troops dying out here, which is terrible, but we're going to see something amazing and worthwhile come out of this."

"I hope my country is very well and works very well together with America. I hope I see with America some flower for the future," said Jawad.

"It was different in the old regime," said Habib. "The soldiers used to be like slaves. They paid them \$1 a day. Now they can do something to make money, to get married. We have faith in our job and the cooperation with the coalition forces. They pay a lot of attention for us. You are always welcome in our country here."

"This is the first time we did this though," said Kirby, nodding at the motley crowd lining the hallway.

Mixed in among the military members, Kellogg, Brown and Root contractors who run the terminal and groups of Soldiers waiting for flights were 21 members of an Outback Steakhouse team on a "feed the troops" support trip. Scheduled to fly to Al-Asad to prepare meals for Soldiers, the black T-shirted restaurant chain representatives huddled in the hall with everyone else.

"You take what you've got and do what you can," said Jaci Roderick, an Outback employee, as she crouched in the hall. As the thud of return fire continued she reflected on the difference between how the ongoing violence in the country is perceived at home and her impressions of seeing it firsthand.

"No one likes it too much, but they don't understand it clearly. They just take what the press puts out. It'll be nice

when they [the Soldiers] can come home and share their stories. They've got some incredible stories," said the Colorado native.

Outside the booming continued. "Usually it's just one or two and they're done. It's been pretty quiet. In fact this is kind of extreme," said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Allen Bock of the 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron, who had ferried the Outback crew to the airfield for their flight.

The firing faded and the crowd inside the terminal lightened up, waiting for the all clear to be announced. Some KBR employees joked about singing a Conway Twitty tune, "Little Darling," to entertain the Outback crew, but in the end were too embarrassed to sing.

The airfield was cleared for operations at 7:35 p.m. and the hallway emptied quickly. Soldiers and airmen went back to their missions, and the passengers resumed waiting for flights.

# Horror and redemption

## Interpreter describes life under Saddam

By David Ruderman  
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Tha'ar Zubaydi may have the readiest grin on LSA Anaconda.

The 47-year-old Shiite father of five, a former English teacher and today an interpreter for the Balad Battalion of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, has a lot to be happy about.

"I worked in the army for 11 years, from 1980-1991. In 1986, during the war [the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988], I was talking to my friend. I told him, 'We have been fighting the Iraqis for six years, and for what?'"

Zubaydi soon paid a price for his candid remarks. "There was an intelligence officer who heard me and he put me in the jail and they hanged me in the hook in the ceiling for six months. They put a knife in my left arm. They thought I would die sooner or later. Not to embarrass themselves [so he wouldn't die in prison], they released me."

Zubaydi survived. He underwent two operations on his mutilated arm. "After that the doctor said, 'Forget you have a left arm.'" Today he can move it, but his arm is riddled with scars and gouges, some over an inch deep.

He was overjoyed when the Americans began the bombing campaign in March of last year. "Don't talk, don't talk about it. I see it, I see it now. I can talk now. I am free. There is no power over my head that tells me, 'Shut up, shut up, I'll kill you, I'll kill you, I'll kill you.'"

From the predominantly Shiite town of Ad-Dujayl, the Zubaydis were not among those favored by the Baath regime. He and his wife, also an English teacher, each made \$4 dollars a month.

"How can we survive with \$8? How can I pay the rent? To buy a sandal or a shoe, it costs \$3. You see, to build a house of mud here in Ad-Dujayl, it costs you about \$1,500 — a house of mud."

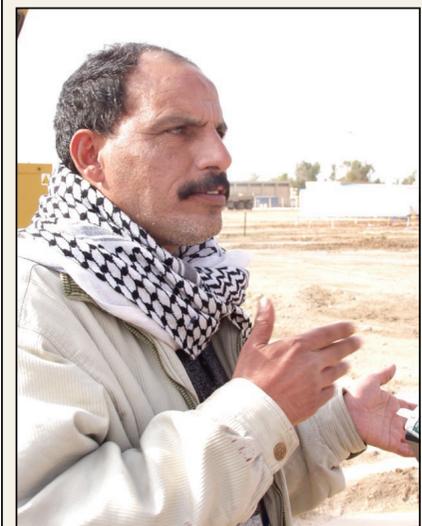


Photo by Dennis Johnson

"During the war, believe me, we were praying to God the coalition forces would win the war because if he [Saddam Hussein] won he would kill everyone," said Tha'ar Zubaydi.



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Iraqi interpreter Tha'ar Zubaydi discusses training with Spc. Clint Dornquist, with the 3rd COSCOM G-1, one of 12 Soldiers responsible for standing up the Balad Battalion of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps.

Since the arrival of the Americans the Zubaydis' lot in life has improved immensely. His job as the ICDC interpreter and a night shift job at the police station bring in around \$500, and his wife is earning around \$200.

"For the first time when I brought bananas for my kids they told me, 'What's that, Daddy?' It's a banana. 'How can we eat it? From the top or the bottom? It's a fruit?'"

How did he get his job with the Americans?

"Easy," he laughed. "Nobody learned me. I have been learning myself since I was a child by hearing the news, the BBC World Service. I was listening to: 'You are listening to the Voice of America from Washington, D.C.' So since I was a child I am wondering, what is that D.C., D.C., D.C.? Some Americans told me District of Columbia," he said.

"During the war, believe me, we were praying to God the coalition forces would win the war because if he [Saddam Hussein] won he would kill everyone. He would revenge for himself. He treated his people with no mercy. Saddam was a tyrant, a real, real tyrant. Sometimes I would prefer to see the devil than to see Saddam. The devil is more merciful. The devil!"

Zubaydi described witnessing an assassination attempt in his town against Saddam Hussein in 1982 that went awry. "I think I am lucky, lucky to escape from Ad-Dujayl because I saw with my eyes. One day they decided to bury us, about 300 we were, 300 people in the jail. They buried 200 people. I saw them with my eyes, and then when 200, they were satisfied and laughing, laughing at us," he said.

"He buried them in massive graves and he cut off all their orchards and their vineyards. When somebody told him 'How can we survive, you cut off all our orchards and vineyards?' — It's your problem, and if you repeated that question again you will be dead."

The rule of fear perpetuated by the Baath regime never wavered, said Zubaydi.

"We were waiting for America since 1991, but you traited us [betrayed us]. He killed after 1991 one million Iraqis, and I think you know that. In 24 years, believe me, he killed more than 8 million, 8 millions people, with no reasons," he said.

News of Saddam's capture in December was a day of joy in his house. "I made with my kids a big celebration, a big celebration. I gave them candies and some fruit."

Zubaydi is buoyed by the economic blessings the Americans have brought in their wake, but there's more to the source of his smile than a steady income.

"One day the sergeant major here asked me, 'Why are you sitting here?' Let me watch the Americans, I like them. I told him. Really, really, really I am telling you the truth: You are very, very welcome here from the bottom of my heart."

# Just another mortar attack on LSA Anaconda

By David Ruderman  
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About 60 Soldiers, airmen and civilians dropped what they were doing and took shelter at the LSA Anaconda passenger terminal Jan. 22, as mortars flew across the wire of the giant logistics hub about 90 kilometers northwest of Baghdad.

"Get away from the windows. Get away from the windows," shouted Soldiers as they scrambled for their Kevlar and congregated in the central hallway of the terminal. Shells started landing around 6:45 p.m. and the thud of American response fire could be felt inside the terminal.

"It's always normal. The last time was yesterday," said Spc. Timothy Kirby of the 266th Transportation Detachment as he waited in his body armor. It was the 134th attack on the base since it was occupied by American forces in April, said officials.



Photo by Dennis Johnson

People take cover in a Balad terminal hallway during a mortar attack.