

Iraqi Cobra battalion takes over FOB Bernstein

SPC. MICHAEL PFAFF

133rd MPAD

TUZ, Iraq – The Iraqi Army assumed responsibility of Forward Operating Base Bernstein in the northern Sallah-Dihn Province Jan. 5, as part of the transfer of security in Iraq from coalition forces to the Iraqi Army.

The “Cobra” 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division took control of the base and responsibility for the security of the surrounding region from the “Balls of the Eagle” 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division during a transfer of authority ceremony.

The transfer took place after many months of training and joint missions with the Iraqi Army, preparing them for the eventual takeover. During the ceremony, the 2-320th commander recounted more than 600 missions, three battalion-sized operations, and countless smaller missions in a speech to the participants.

“The Cobra battalion was formed in January of 2004, so this isn’t a process that just started with our arrival,” said Lt. Col. Martin J. Holland, the battalion commander of the 320th Field Artillery Regiment. “The basis of [the transfer] really came in the training and development of the Cobra battalion over that two year stretch and building their operational capabilities where they were able to operate tactically with very lit-



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Lt. Col. Martin J. Holland, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, hands over the key to Forward Operating Base Bernstein to Lt. Col. Safa during a transfer of authority ceremony to the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade of the Iraqi 4th Division.

tle coalition assistance.”

Holland said the “Cobras” have come a long way, and Lt. Col. Safa, commander of the Iraqi Army 2nd Brigade, expressed his pride after the ceremony.

“I’m very proud of my soldiers, my officers, and the people who have died or been injured for this,” Safa said. “All the people who died from this battalion are from Tuz. We ask God to mercy them and send them to heaven.”

“They’ve done a great job,” Holland said. “I am very confident

that the Iraqi Army is capable of controlling this battle space.”

One U.S. company staying behind The 320th Field Artillery Regiment will leave behind a company-sized element to assist in future operations if needed, but the rest will be moved to Kirkuk, Iraq. In his speech, Holland explained that the Soldiers staying behind were for further assistance in the transition.

“Coalition forces have not and will not abandon you, the citizens of Tuz and the surrounding area, or the people of Iraq,” Holland said.

Holland said he trusts the Iraqi Army is prepared to ensure the safety of the citizens in Tuz and the surrounding region, and during the ceremony remarked on the success of the Iraqi Army during recent government elections.


“Working together during the elections, you enabled over 65,000 Iraqis to vote at over 40 polling sites in a democratic election free of violence or intimidation,” Holland said. “You can build on this record of success and serve as an example to all of Iraq.”

Safa said the next step after assuming control of the base is to use it effectively in order to maintain the safety of the Iraqi people in the province.


“We are from the people,” Safa said. “And, we work for the people. If we don’t protect them, who can protect them?”

The hand-over of this base is a step, but Holland said it’s a big step in the right direction to letting the Iraqi people stand up and protect themselves from anti-Iraqi forces who might oppose a democratic government here.

“As we progress through turning battle space back to the Iraqis and putting them in charge, that’s the right thing,” Holland said. “The only way Americans can eventually pull out is a step-by-step process. As President Bush said, as Iraqi units stand up, American units will stand down.”



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