

Coalition, locals work together to rebuild Iraq

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MOSUL, Iraq – Soldiers of the U.S. Army Reserves 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion, Mattydale, N.Y., who are now attached to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, have been working to help rebuild northern Iraq since their arrival here eight months ago.

Capt. Liane Dare, executive officer, A Company, 403rd Civil Affairs Reserves Battalion, said her unit has about 130 troops assigned. Her company covers the eastern and southern Ninewa Province, including Mosul and Qayarra, while B Co. covers Tal 'Afar, Al Kissik, Sinjar and the surrounding area.

"The Civil Affairs teams are composed of U.S. Army Reservists called back to active duty because of their civilian skills, and this has helped with regards to project management," said Capt. Ralph Sarmiento, executive officer, B Company. "Moreover, these projects ensure that the maneuver commanders have a safer area to work in."

The purpose of the civil affairs team is to meet with the local Iraqi people and find out what reconstruction projects are needed most, then help make arrangements to pay for the approved jobs, said Dare.

"We go out and conduct an assessment of the area," she said. "We talk to the mayors, mukhtars, sheiks and the local people and see what their complaints are, what their problems are, and identify what we can possibly do to help them. Then we try to pass that information up the Iraqi government's chain-of-command so they try to fix the problems themselves."

The Iraqi government consists of villages that make up sub-districts, which make up districts, which make up the province, which is Ninewa, she explained.

"They have a provincial council that oversees everything and they look at projects, potential projects, and what their focus is," said Dare. "Then they determine what they want to spend their money on. A provincial reconstruction team, or PRT, who works directly with the governor and Directors General of the province, is located here. They also work with the U.S. State Department. We kind of feed into their stuff and they try to push what we find out from the lower local government and mentor the Iraqis to fix their own problems - to pay for it themselves and make a process of priorities. The civil affairs personnel help the Iraqi government put together a list so they can determine exactly what needs to be done and exactly what their local governments underneath them want the focus to be and then determine if the



COURTESY PHOTO

Coalition Soldiers from the 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion visit with a local family from Mosul, Iraq, to hand out toys and supplies. The battalion is responsible for interacting with the local people to find out what projects in their neighborhoods they would like to have built. The information the unit collects is then handed up to the Iraqi government.

provincial government has the same focus, or whether it's something they can afford to do right now."

One important aspect of the PRT is to meet with the Ninewa leaders as mentors, she said.

"They can make suggestions to the governor to hold a town hall meeting in an area that the governor hasn't visited in a while that may be feeling neglected," added Dare. "They also help the governor build lists and schedules of things that need to be done and help him prioritize projects."

One challenge for the Iraqi government is that they need to make sure they are not completing too many projects in one religious sector because the locals may see it as favoritism.

"The PRT tries to help ensure the projects are divvied up equally to each religious sector of the province," she said. "The challenge is to make sure there is a political balance and that they spend the money properly so there is no suggestion that they are biased toward one area or the other."

One area that needs attention is the electricity throughout the province.

"A lot of the essential services they get, they don't pay for, like we do in the U.S.," said Dare. "They pay very little for electricity, for example. For the most part, their government pays the bill. During Saddam's era, he paid for everything, but tended to favor the Sunnis, so everyone else was suffering. Now everyone has power, but it is limited. Some areas may get 18 hours of electricity per day, while other areas only get 8 hours. The reason for that is because Saddam did not allow the people to have certain items like microwaves and satellite television. Since Saddam is gone, everyone, not just the wealthy, are allowed to purchase any appliances they choose. That freedom is overloading the circuit and the power grids can't han-

dle it. Each neighborhood is affected differently, depending on how many of them have the niceties only the wealthy were allowed to have before. Several people have purchased generators so they can have electricity 24 hours-a-day, but the generators run on fuel, and that costs money."

To help complete projects, the local government has a Ninewa Business Center. "The goal of the NBC is to give out loans to help Iraqis open up their own business to improve economic development. The center also advertises contractor positions that are open for bidding on projects," she said.

Since Dare's unit has been here, she said they have funded more than 40 projects in Qayarra, valued at more than \$1.7 million and 27 projects in Mosul, totaling over \$1.8 million. Some of the projects that have been completed are: the reconstruction of schools; the building of playgrounds; renovating gyms and pools; water, sewer and cleanup projects; providing medical and food supplies; and road repair and bridge work.

In B Co., Sarmiento said his unit has also spent millions of dollars on various projects.

"B Company has completed over 70 projects from April 2006 to the present in Tal 'Afar, Sinjar, al Kissik, and Rabiya, all part of the western Ninewa Province," said Sarmiento. "Although each project varies in cost due to the scope of work, we have managed a total of over \$9 million throughout fiscal year 2006, and paid out almost \$50,000 in battle damage payments."

Sarmiento said the projects his company has worked on are all important to the local people and Iraqi government.

"B Company has been instrumental in the re-development of the infrastructure of the city of Tal 'Afar as evidenced by the new municipal building and the Tal 'Afar Adult Literacy Center. The Sinjar Team has opened the Sinjar Maternity ward which will help to lower the mortality rate of newborns in that city, and Kissik will begin delivering blankets to needy people in that area. The Rabiya team continues to work on road and water projects. These projects will help the locals live better because we have assisted the Iraqi people in establishing essential services such as electricity and water."

Dare said getting to meet with the Iraqi people and earning the local leadership's trust has been a very rewarding aspect of her job and she is proud of how well her Soldiers have been performing.

"There are definitely a lot of benefits that come out of the risks we take. Hopefully the anti-Iraqi forces get out of here because the Iraqis have so many things they need to fix without having to worry about AIF attacks," she said. "I see the lower enlisted Soldiers that go out there and do things that captains, majors and senior noncommissioned officers would normally be doing. I am very proud of what our Soldiers have done and how they have stepped into the responsibilities that they fill. The situation forces you to dig down deep and find the other aspect of yourself that you never knew you had - that you could be strong."

First Aid

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way to restore breathing, Kyle said the students were shown how to insert a J-tube into an unconscious patient. The J-tube can be inserted into a trauma victim and left temporarily unattended so care can be given to a more critical patient, Kyle said, which is one of the reasons why it is important to learn.

"American Soldiers normally don't want to practice with the J-tube because it is inserted into the throat to keep the airway open which causes a gag reflex," said Kyle. "Some of the Iraqi students wanted to try it. It's not dangerous, just uncomfortable, so we let them practice on each other."

At the end of the course, each student was issued a certificate of completion, written in both

English and Arabic, and signed by the squadron commander.

Kyle said teaching this course was something the B Troop commander, Capt. Samuel Benson, wanted to do for the Iraqi security forces.

"He wanted to set something up," said Kyle. "It was a collaborative effort with the [military training team] to put this together."

The 3-4 Cavalry medics will next be in the process of training the ISF medics to teach this course. Kyle said his unit plans to teach this course again around Jan. 22 with the Iraqis in the lead.

"We will help them teach the course, but mostly it will be them. The goal is for them to one day be able to teach CLS on their own."

Another Coalition Forces Soldier, who assisted in the class, said he knows the training the ISF

received was invaluable.

"The Iraqi Forces were eager and willing to learn," said Spc. Lucas Oppelt, combat medic and South Bend, Ind., native. "With the integration of combat life-saving skills into their training, they will be confident in each other's abilities to save lives on the front line."

Kyle agreed with Oppelt and said he enjoyed spending time with the Iraqis.

"I had a really good time teaching them. They asked a lot of questions, were attentive and excited to be learning something new. With these new life-saving skills that the Iraqi army soldiers are starting to acquire, they will be better suited to help save their fellow soldiers in combat. I'm glad to have been a part of that."