



Notes from the Front

Note Number 5

May/June 2004



Now 120 days into Operation Iraqi Freedom II, the Dagger Brigade Combat Team is continuing to root out the enemies of Freedom while simultaneously placing much of our effort into making this historic land into a fully functioning and self-reliant state. Much of the infrastructure and government systems that are needed to run a country are in the developmental stages or not present at all. But that is what the Province of Salah Ad Din and all of Iraq needs to stand on its own two feet. The BCT is helping to rebuild these government organizations and help repair the infrastructure. We are doing this so that one day, there will be no need for soldiers with American patches on their shoulders, to patrol the streets of Tikrit, or Samarra, or Balad. The goal of the majority of Iraqis is the goal of the Dagger Brigade; a free, and independent Iraq.

Our main mission here is to maintain a safe and secure environment, but we know that one day Iraqis will have to be responsible for their own security. That is why we have moved forward headlong into the training, equipping and integration of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. We mentioned this organization in the last note home but now more of our soldiers are interacting with these brave Iraqis. Every day officers, NCOs and soldiers visit the ICDC compounds to liaise with their Iraqi counterparts. The Iraqis are now accompanying US Forces on patrols and occupying Traffic Control Points that were once manned by the US Army. The Iraqis are performing these missions and performing them well! Forty-one soldiers from the 201st ICDC Battalion, working with TF 1-18 received the newly minted Iraqi Achievement Medal for their actions during the month of April. While those soldiers are honing their skills in the field, the Battalion and Brigade Staffs are receiving lessons on how to Command and Control their formations. Some of the Iraqi officers have experience in the old Iraqi Army, but they are eager to learn how a successful and professional Army like ours does business. We are obliged to teach them. At least once a week, officers from our staff visit their counterparts to go over how we do things and how they can tailor their organization to run as proficiently. This program does two things: First it fosters trust between the Iraqis and the Americans that is needed to operate effectively in Iraq. Secondly it sets the stage for Iraqis to secure their own areas reducing the need for our forces. A success story for all parties involved!

We are also assisting in the rebuilding of the infrastructure in Salah Ad Din, but we are not doing all the work ourselves. In order to give some relief to the high unemployment and give the people a sense of pride in their own efforts, the BCT uses funds set aside for civil projects to contract or hire Iraqi businesses and workers to rebuild or develop the things needed in everyday life. Daily there are crews cleaning up the trash on the side of the roads in Tikrit and Bayji. Planning for building or refurbishing schools is underway and contractors are being vetted for the projects. In Aruashed, which is just northwest of Balad City Center, a Project known as Nissan Seven, had its ground breaking ceremony on June 8th. This project will help over 800 Iraqi farmers, turning area that was just

desert before, into a contributing part of the local economy. This project will not only help the people, but will be a big step in building a bond between the people of Aruashed and American forces in the area. In Tikrit, on the 23rd of June, the City held its first Trade Fair Symposium with the help of the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion, and the 9th Engineers. This Symposium will help private contractors from the area learn to advertise themselves in a capitalist economy. This is all taking place in with the help of the Dagger Brigade but by the hard work and dedication to a new life of the Iraqi citizen.

We still do our normal job of soldiering. While doing so, some members of Charlie Company 2-108 IN, assigned to TF 1-26 helped a hostage return home. While conducting a security patrol the soldiers found Mr. Thomas Hamill; a Haliburton employee who was taken hostage in April. The soldiers secured Mr. Hamill, addressed his wounds and got him on a helicopter that started his journey back to the United States. It was a great moment for TF 1-26, the BCT, and the Big Red One. The press coverage was nice and it was a chance for the American people to see the positive side of the mission, but even more gratifying was the fact that we were able to save one of our own and ensure that terrorist permanently affected one less family.

To all the mothers and fathers of our children who are doing both jobs in our absence, our own mothers, and our own fathers, we hope that May 10th and June 20th were good Sundays! We didn't forget you, all that you have done, all that you are doing and will do for us.

Memorial Day took on a new significance for us this year, as many friends were no longer here to celebrate with us. We held a ceremony in their memory. Plaques were made for each lost soldier, and a 1st ID patch was placed on each one. May their sacrifice never be forgotten. On June 6th, Dagger Brigade held its combat patch ceremony; with MG Batiste present as a distinguished guest. MG Batiste presented the Commanders with our 1st ID Combat Patches, symbolizing the authorization for all soldiers in the Dagger Brigade to wear the Big Red One combat patch. The patch is awarded to all soldiers assigned to a unit in a declared hostile environment for at least 30 days. This recognition of wartime service was a very special moment for the Dagger Brigade, on a very special day.

We also played a big role in helping with the Transition of Sovereignty by making sure that the Province of Salah Ad Din was prepared. We oversaw the election of a new governor, Governor Hamad, and continue to give him advice. On the 30th of June, Governor Hamad officially took control of the province. Later that day, we handed over 60 vehicles to the Iraqi National Guard, which will be used for security and conducting patrols. The National Guard has shown lots of progress, and we are confident that they will be able to begin operating independently in the near future.

The temperature is rising and the mercury is always over 100 degrees. But we sweat not in misery or self-pity, because we know that our efforts are the price of freedom for the Iraqis and the price of security for you. So we'll endure, today and all the days that we must until we can get back to you. Until next time...

DUTY FIRST!!

**COL Randy Dragon
Commander, Dagger Brigade Combat Team**