

Balad, Iraq - September 20th at Forward Operating Base PALIWODA, home of the Task Force 1-77 "Steel Tigers." Perhaps the most eagerly anticipated day on the FOB outside of the day the Task Force redeploys home. The smell of baking chicken and French fries drew countless soldiers to the newly painted orange building at the north east corner of the FOB at 0900 hours. The reason for the soldier's excitement was simple. Today Akeel's Supermarket re-opened after being closed for over three weeks. The market, run by local Iraqi Akeel Narjay Marhoon, is the FOB bizarre, where soldiers can buy anything from soft drinks to DVDs to lunch. "If you want it, we will get it!" is the motto painted on the side of the market.

For the first six months of the deployment the market was located in an old run down building that did not have a roof or a floor. Recently Task Force 1-77 Commander, Lieutenant Colonel David Hubner, Sr., requested that the building be renovated to include a roof to protect soldiers shopping for their favorite snacks and movies. Through a \$5,000.00 donation by the Steel Tigers, Akeel and his fellow vendors were able to add a roof and cement floor, as well as completely repair and rebuild the walls, and repaint the building a bright orange color. Soldiers from the Task Force have been waiting, albeit impatiently, for the market to re-open for business. "This is the only place we have to buy snacks and sodas and movies. We don't have a PX on the FOB, so it is Akeel's or nothing," said Sergeant Derrick Salas.

After opening his doors the market was packed for the rest of the day. Soldiers rushed to get their hands on the latest movies and restock their supply of sodas and snacks. Task Force 1-77 Command Sergeant Major John Fortune, who helped to re-open the market, noted the significance of the event, and of the renovations. "This market is important for the morale and welfare of these soldiers," he stated. "But it is also important that we provide them with a safe place in which to shop during their off time. This new ceiling gives them that protection." Akeel was very pleased with the new market. "The market is very nice now," he said. "The ceiling makes it safe for us all to work here and for the soldiers to shop. This is good, very good!"

To show their appreciation for the support of the Task Force, the market vendors painted a large picture of the 1-77 Armor Regimental Crest on the side of the building, and presented Command Sergeant Major Fortune with a large gift depicting the crest and the crests of the other units who are a part of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team. Soldiers from the Steel Tigers can now resume shopping in the "new Akeel's Supermarket" without having to worry about dodging incoming mortar rounds.



Local vendor Akeel presents CSM John Fortune of TF 1-77 with a gift to show his appreciation.



Soldiers check out the newly renovated supermarket on FOB PALIWODA