

TF 1-7 Soldier Helps Iraqi Children Through Individual Effort

By CPT Ryan M. Rooney

(FOB Summerall, Bayji, Iraq) When Specialist Michael Tingue arrived in Bayji, Iraq with the First Infantry Division's Task Force 1-7 in March 2004, he saw the conditions that children in this war-torn country had to live in. More importantly, however, he saw that he had the opportunity to help, and with a self-inspired determination he began a personal campaign to gather clothes, toys, and



SPC Michael Tingue with an Iraqi boy during a visit to the city hospital in Bayji. Though nervous at first, the child was much happier after he got a donated toy collected by SPC Tingue.

school supplies for the impoverished people of Iraq. SPC Tingue knew that there were plenty of people at home who were willing and able to help, but didn't know how. He saw how he could create the opportunity for people to help and wrote to his hometown newspaper. As a 92Y Supply Specialist, he was already skilled at managing the



SPC Tingue tries to control a gathering crowd of eager Iraqi children as he distributes some of the clothes, school supplies, and toys donated from home.

inventory, storage, and distribution of large amounts of supplies, so the project fell into place for him naturally. "As a Quartermaster, it's my job to support the war fighter. I saw this as a chance to show Iraqis we're here to help, and to possibly take away some of the hate towards Americans," says SPC Tingue of his project.

SPC Tingue started by writing a letter explaining how people could help by sending clothes, school supplies, and toys to his hometown newspaper in Oregon, the Albany Democrat-Herald. The letter then made its way to The



SPC Brice Matthews and SPC John Abrams of HHB/1-7 help sort through some of the dozens of boxes donations collected by SPC Tingue

Oregonian, another newspaper, and then took off on its own, sent along by eager supporters, eventually making it as far as Chicago, Connecticut, and Louisiana.

As word spread, the project gained momentum on its own, and its inertia continues as boxes still continue to pile in. At its peak, SPC Tingue was receiving about 20 boxes every other day when mail arrived for almost two weeks. The rate has now slowed to about 5 boxes a week, but they still continue to come in months after that first

letter. So far he estimates that over 200 boxes of donations for Iraqi children have come in. And though he never thought his singular effort to help would grow to such proportions, SPC Tingue is pretty happy with how his project turned out.

SPC Tingue's efforts have not gone unnoticed by the chain of command. His selfless effort was recognized by the Task Force commander, LTC Kyle M. McClelland, with a Task Force Certificate of Achievement and a much sought-after Task Force coin, as well as recommending him for similar honors from the Brigade Combat Team commander. "SPC Tingue determined that he could make a difference and took a personal interest in establishing an 'irreversible momentum' of the humanitarian kind," says LTC McClelland. "I admire his personal drive and dedication to making a difference. That is why we are here – to help the Iraqi people help themselves. This is a positive step in that direction. Every little bit counts towards bridging the gap building trust and confidence. SPC Tingue is a Soldier with a mission and focus, he is making a difference every day."

SPC Tingue hopes that his project will outlive his time in Iraq and hopes to find someone to take on the project when the 1st Infantry Division leaves sometime early next year. However, he even has a new project already. His latest undertaking is to try to get a young Iraqi girl with a severe



A happy Iraqi mother smiles with her overjoyed daughter, thrilled with gifts donated by people from home in America.

cardiac ailment to the United States for surgery, without which she will die, and his latest letter-writing campaign has begun in earnest.

Further donations for Iraqi Children can be made under Operation I Can (Iraqi Children's Assistance Network) from the 1st Infantry Division web page (www.1ID.army.mil) or by mailing to:

SPC Michael Tingue
HHB/TF 1-7
OIF 2 (FOB Summerall)
APO AE 09392

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