



TF 2-7 IN Newsletter February 2008



Greetings from western Al Anbar Province once again where Task Force 2-7 Infantry recently welcomed the arrival of the month of February. Even though February will be one day longer this year, we're still referring to it as the "short month!"

Cold weather continued throughout the month of January with temperatures below freezing most nights and even two days of small accumulations of snow...yes, that's right, SNOW in Iraq! Due to the higher elevation here in western Anbar (over 2000 feet), the Rutbah area generally receives snow a few times each winter. The Soldiers of TF 2-7 enjoyed the change of weather and scenery while it lasted.



Team Rage Soldiers pose with a new member of their team at COP Norseman

There were snowball fights, snowmen, and a good number of practical jokes. The local children reacted to the snow

in a typical manner, except without sleds, snow boots, and only a few gloves and mittens. Mostly, the precipitation eventually meant standing water from melted snow for the 1.2 million sheep which graze the deserts around Rutbah. We've observed many of the Iraqis of western Anbar appear to go into "survival mode" during the 10-12 weeks of winter.



A well-armed snowman guards the TF TOC after our 2nd January snowstorm

In addition to continued progress in our area of operations, the month of January also brought relatively specific news about our transition out of Rutbah and the Al Anbar Province and our eventual redeployment for Fort Stewart. During the last week of the month, CSM Coston and I traveled to each of the Task Force's remote combat outposts to personally announce the news of our return to Georgia and answer questions about our redeployment and reintegration training period. Though I'm sure the word has spread quickly (good news usually does!), I'll reiterate the facts as we know them today:

- 1) TF 2-7 IN will redeploy on the first two main body flights from the 1st Brigade.
- 2) Those flights should arrive at Hunter Army Airfield between **_** ***** 08.
- 3) Approximately 130 personnel (mostly volunteers and late deployers) will return in early ***** after they complete various tasks in Kuwait.
- 4) All Soldiers will receive a 2, 3, or 4-day pass once they arrive depending on which day of the week their plane lands. Soldiers landing on a Sat, Sun, Mon, or Tues receive a 2-day pass. Soldiers landing on a Weds receive a 4-day pass; and Soldiers landing on a Thurs receive a 3-day pass.
- 5) Following their local pass (must remain within 100 miles of Fort Stewart), Soldiers will complete 10 days of Reintegration Training. This training will occur Mon-Fri only.
- 6) The Block Leave period will begin somewhere between **_** ***** and end 30 days later in mid-*****. Soldiers do not have to take all 30 days and may request to take more.
- 7) Email and telephone communication with your spouse may be less frequent during the month of ***** since we'll be in transit across Iraq and living in a temporary lodging area at the Al Taquadam Air Base (South of Ramadi) while we turn in equipment, ship our personal gear and select unit equipment home, and then load USAF aircraft for our flight to Kuwait.
- 8) The Rear Detachment and Family Readiness Group will have the latest information and always be able to get in touch with us.



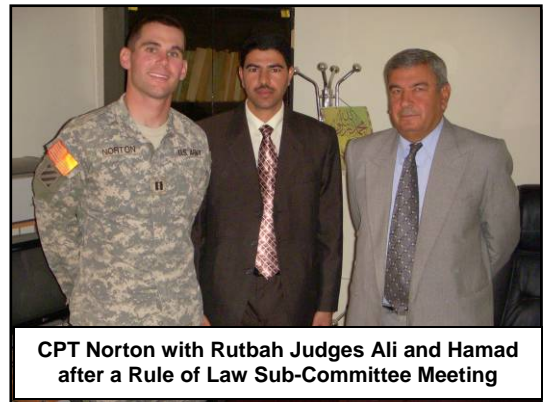
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The official news of our redeployment and the discussions and planning that go along with it have certainly provided a bit of excitement here, but we also understand that remaining focused on our mission until the last day is extremely important. Despite continued relative stability in our area of operations, there are still those who seek to do us harm and battlefield hazards exist every single day. The CSM and I will be stressing the importance of keeping everyone's head in the game until the very end. As a Task Force, we've been exceptionally fortunate thus far and I know that no one wants our luck to change in our final weeks.

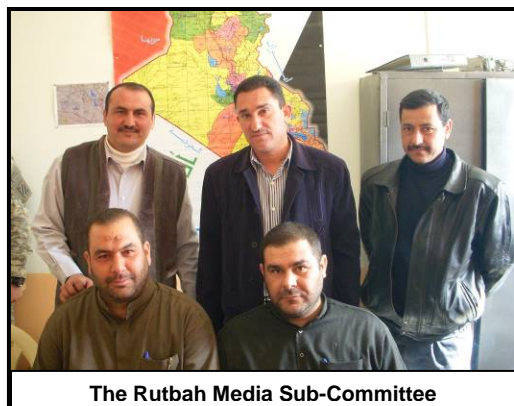
As we continue to go beyond steady-state operations, each company conducted a company-level operation during the month of January. Typically just one day in duration, these operations integrated Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces as well as additional capabilities from the Task Force – from USMC F/A-18 aircraft and AH-1 Cobra helicopters, to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and canine search teams. The operations sought to act on intelligence we had received from a variety of sources and took our Soldiers and the Iraqi Police out of the daily grind and kept us on the offensive. We'll repeat this effort in February while we attempt to leave no stone unturned as we prepare to handover our area of responsibility in March.

We continue our close partnership with the fledgling municipal government in Rutbah and its surrounding towns and villages. We've coached the Rutbah City Council into developing several sub-committees which help the City Council Chairman and Mayor make decisions for the city and also help them shape the issues which need to be raised to the Provincial Government in Ramadi. For example, the Rule of Law subcommittee meets weekly and consists of the head judge from the Rutbah District Court, his investigative judges and various legal staff, and the investigators from the Rutbah Police Department. They



CPT Norton with Rutbah Judges Ali and Hamad after a Rule of Law Sub-Committee Meeting

discuss the ongoing cases – from misdemeanors and child abuse to kidnapping and murder – and share ideas about how the police investigators can develop and present



The Rutbah Media Sub-Committee

cases to the judges more effectively. The Media Subcommittee is working on publishing a weekly newsletter to help inform the local population about what their government is doing for them at the local and provincial levels. They Fuel Committee helps ensure the Rutbah District gets its fair share of fuel (gas, diesel, kerosene, and propane) from various Provincial sources and that the arriving fuel trucks are distributed fairly to local gas stations and then through a local distribution system which attempts to ensure equitable distribution to municipal departments, homes, and businesses. These committees meet weekly, and now, after 5 months of coaching and mentoring from us, all are Iraqi-run. It's a combination of Civics,

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Management, Psychology, and Group Dynamics 101 in action, but it is working -- and it's a simple, locally effective system of government that they have embraced. To continue beyond our departure, it must be *their* system and one they are comfortable with and able to conduct without our constant attention and supervision.

Bravo Company worked very hard over the past 6 weeks helping the town of Akashat (about an hour's drive north of Rutbah) establish their own local government. After significant discussion and development throughout the past month, the town held an election on 31 January to elect 7 representatives to form a City Council. Over 1500 local citizens (including over 250 females) turned out to cast their votes during the course of the day-long process.

Citizens from Akashat cast their votes for City Council members on 31 January



A local volunteer helps tabulate the results of the election



We helped them prepare the ballots, advertise the election and keep the polling site secure. Since this

small village is not recognized as either a District (*qada*) or sub-district (*nahia*) by the Provincial Government, there will be no salary for these councilmen and no budget for the city. These are all just selfless citizens who have stepped forward to make a difference for their tribes and families. Unlike past efforts to elect local

leaders, this event was not marked with any act of violence or threats to the candidates or those coming from miles around to cast their votes.

Our Task Force Fire Support Element (FSE), led by CPT Will Norton and SFC Joshua Hanks, planned, coordinated, and executed a Joint Fire Control Exercise on 21 January. The operation integrated live firing from our 120 mm mortar platoon, AH-1 Cobra helicopters, and Marine F/A-18 Hornets. Soldiers from our FSE and Marines from our TF ANGLICO (Air & Naval Gunfire Liaison) were able to train by integrating and adjusting live ordnance from all these platforms...including mortars, 2.75 in rockets, 30 mm canon, and even 2 – 500 lb bombs from the F/A-18s. It was a tremendous training opportunity by any measure and the fact that we pulled it off in a combat zone makes it even more unique.



LT Ervin Johnson communicates with AH-1 Cobra Helicopters as they approach the target during the Joint Fire Control Exercise on 21 Jan

When we arrived in Rutbah in early September, we established what we call a Joint Coordination Center (JCC) adjacent to the Iraqi Police Station downtown. This facility serves a variety of purposes, but its main function is to better integrate the combined activities of Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. As we look to the future of Iraq and plan for a smaller Coalition role, we've recently begun to help the Iraqis plan for the future of the Rutbah JCC. The result of our shared ideas and discussion was that



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the Rutbah JCC would remain the hub of coordination for Iraqi Army, Iraqi Highway Patrol, Iraqi Police, but would expand to include other emergency municipal services (ambulance, fire, water, electric, etc.). Additionally, the Rutbah JCC



The Rutbah Joint Coordination Center

will become the home for the Rutbah Vehicle Registration Office (similar to a DMV). We've recently helped the Iraqis renovate an existing structure just outside the Police Station complex that will serve as the future JCC. Local contractors have performed the work and Rutbah officials are pleased with the progress and believe the facility will play an important role in their city's future. Though we've certainly given them some ideas about the facility's capabilities, most of the big decisions have been theirs...including the

exterior color! Our JCC Officer in Charge, LT Mark Kramer, has taken more than his fair share of harassment for "his pink building!"

I was fortunate, once again, to be able to make the drive to Ramadi and witness the C Company Change of Command Ceremony on 18 January. During this ceremony, MAJ Diogo Tavares (recently promoted on 1 January 08) relinquished command of "Cold Steel" to CPT Scott Stephens. We certainly thank Diogo and his wife Jackie for all their hard work and dedication over the past 21 months and we welcome Scott and his wife Rena to the Cottonbaler Team from the 3 ID Headquarters. We look forward to welcoming C Company back to the Cottonbaler Task Force prior to redeployment after 15 months with TF 3-69 Armor.



MAJ Diogo Tavares relinquishes the C Co guidon to LTC Mike Silverman (Cdr, TF 3-69 AR) on 18 January at Camp Blue Diamond

As you know, on 28 January 2008, President Bush delivered his State of the Union address to the Nation. As is the custom, our Commander in Chief provided his assessment of recent progress the Nation has made in a variety of areas as well as his vision for the future. As you would expect, the Global War on Terror was one of the major topics. I shared some excerpts of his speech with the Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors of TF 2-7. I wanted them to be aware not only of the President's specific comments about the war in Iraq, but also about *them* -- the Servicemen and Women who are winning it -- and the tremendous sacrifices of their families. As I've told them many times over the past 13 months, they should feel proud about what they're doing, feel proud of what they've accomplished and been a part of this past year, and know that their Nation, their Commander in Chief, and CSM Coston and I are all humbled by their service and the personal sacrifices of their families.



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We're into the final weeks of a very challenging 15-month deployment. We remain committed to our goal to leave our piece of Iraq better than we found it and look forward to returning very soon to all those who have supported us so well this past year. We ask that you keep us in your thoughts and prayers as we conclude what has been, by all accounts, an extremely successful combat deployment.

Happy Valentines Day!

"Willing & Able!" LTC Doug Crissman...Able 6



The TF 2-7 Infantry deployment coin which each deployed member of the Task Force will receive before redeploying in late March