

2-28 IN CENTURY OF VALOR ANNEX

The transition from combat operations to Foreign Internal Defense training presents many challenges to both the leadership and soldiers of the United States Army in Iraq. Task Force 2-28's experience during its deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated the success with which today's Army units are rising to the many challenges of a new operational environment and mission. Following the approval of the Iraqi Security Agreement, the task force continued to successfully transition from a counterinsurgency operational mindset to that of supporting and fostering an Iraqi-led effort to secure and stabilize the Babil and Karbala provinces. The Black Lions derived their success largely from three factors: tough, realistic training for both the Task Forces' soldiers and their Iraqi counterparts, meaningful partnerships with Iraqi leadership through key leader engagements, and commitment to improving Iraqi daily life through numerous projects.

The factors leading to the Black Lions' successes in both conducting combat operations and training the Iraqi Security Forces into a technically and tactically proficient force existed well before the first soldiers of the Task Force arrived in Iraq in December 2009. The officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers of TF 2-28 IN possessed not only several years of combat experience on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan but also extensive training in the months leading up to the Battalion's deployment.

Prior to reflagging as TF 2-28 IN on March 17, 2008 the leaders and soldiers that comprised the formation served under the banner of TF 1-26 IN, the "Blue Spaders." Recently returned from combat operations in Iraq, these soldiers had experienced combat, gleaning from it a level of experience that serve as a vast and powerful knowledge base in future operations within the Iraqi theater of war. Not only would these soldiers be able to effectively prepare unseasoned soldiers for the hardships of combat operations, but they would also have the knowledge and experience to lead them as well.

Though much of leadership had gained a vast amount of combat experience in their previous deployments, the ever-changing operational environment into which they would deploy would yield new threats and challenges. Grafenwoehr and Hofenfels Training Areas in Germany provided training grounds on which to prepare to meet those obstacles to their missions.

In July 2008, the Battalion began gunnery at Grafenwoehr Training Area conducting individual, crew, and collective live fire exercises. During this training, the soldiers developed technical proficiency in utilizing their weapons and deploying their vehicles in combat scenarios and established unit TTPs with which to address various challenging scenarios on the battlefield.

Hofenfels Training Area and the Mission Readiness Exercise (MRX) provided the means with which to put these skills and TTPs to the test, offering a simulated model of the Iraqi geopolitical landscape. The training area presented the Battalion with an environment similar to that in which it would operate – a forward-operating base (FOB) surrounded by densely populated urban areas separated by a vast rural landscape, whose occupants were divided along religious, political, and ethnic lines and in conflict with one another. To further add to the realism, actors portraying the local population spoke

primarily, and often only, Arabic, scenarios that would test a soldier's ability to discern the proper action with his Rules of Engagement (ROE) frequently arose, and every leader's decision and soldier's action had lasting consequence to result in an ever-changing operational environment. The culminating, week long MRX ensured that the soldiers of TF 2-28 IN would live by the adage, "train how you fight."

The Black Lions arrived in Hohenfels in early August 2009, gaining operational control of a USMC FAST platoon and a Czech Army company in addition to its original task organization for the MRX. The MRX provided exposure to numerous missions within full-spectrum operations to include key leader engagements (KLEs), security operations, Foreign Internal Defense (FID), and counter-insurgency. In addition to providing for the practice and demonstration of proficiency in individual-, crew-, and unit-level tasks and newly established TTPs, the conduct of full spectrum operations allowed Battalion and the various companies to perform command post exercises, testing the effectiveness of each command team's ability to receive, analyze, and disseminate information in a timely manner. Though only a few months of training limited the extent to which leaders and their soldiers could focus on any one of the vast numbers of missions and scenarios, the CMTC observer-controller teams praised the success with which the Black Lions met their missions. The invaluable experience and confidence that each soldier, crew, and unit had gained during the MRX combined with the prior experiences and knowledge of much of the leadership within the Battalion would pay dividends when the Black Lions began operations in Iraq.

The Black Lions developed and cultivated a learning environment within its ranks, drawing from the experience of its senior leadership and reinforcing it with new, realistic training to emerge from Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels ready for the challenges that they would face in Iraq.

As the training phase of pre-deployment drew to a close, the Black Lions began the logistical preparations for their arrival into Iraq. The Task Force, as part of the 172D Separate Infantry Brigade, deployed to Kuwait from late November to early December in 2009. Training, however, did not end in Germany. Camp Buehring, Kuwait doubled as both a training ground as well as a staging area as the various units of TF 2-28 IN received their respective personnel and equipment.

The Black Lions, commanded by LTC John Reynolds and Command Sergeant Major Patrick R. Akuna, consisted of four line companies and a headquarters company. CPT Mike Gunther and 1SG Gary Ausbrooks led B/2-28 IN, known as Team Bushmasters. CPT Robert Summers and 1SG Tim Ybay commanded C/2-28 IN, the "Spartans." C/3-66 AR, Team Pain, consisted of three armor platoons led by CPT Daniel Lawerence and 1SG Steven Smerer. B/1-77 FA, the "Bulls," consisted of three field artillery platoons commanded by CPT Todd Anderson and 1SG Ray Trent. HHC, or Team Wolfpack, consisted of Battalion Headquarters, the Scout Platoon, the Mortar Platoon, the Medical Platoon, the Support Platoon, the HHC maintenance team, and a CPN team attached from 57th Signal Company, commanded by CPT Jesse Greaves and 1SG Widmark Quashie. Though leadership within the echelons of command would change throughout deployment, the changes to task organization throughout the deployment remained relatively minor. Almost as soon as soldiers arrived in Kuwait and rallied around their respective company guideons, training resumed.

Training and instruction specific to the challenges of the soldiers currently in Iraq occupied much of the soldiers' time during their brief halt in Kuwait. Such instruction included counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) training, fratricide prevention, and ROE training. Selected soldiers received training in Talil, Iraq, on the Battalion's newest assets: the Mine Resistant Ambush Protection (MRAP) vehicles. All the additional training in Kuwait only served to boost the Black Lions' level of readiness for their impending mission.

As the soldiers trained, senior leadership within the Task Force began their own planning and preparation for the mission that lay ahead. Originally assigned to conduct a relief-in-place with the British Army's 20th Brigade in Basra, the Black Lions instead received orders to move to FOB Kalsu north of Hillah, Iraq. As Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) extended the British mission in southern Iraq, the Black Lions prepared to assume responsibility for the security and stability of two Iraq provinces: Babil and Karbala.

Counterinsurgency operations remained in the forefront of the Battalion's mindset upon their arrival at FOB Kalsu in January 2009. The Task Force mission statement read:

Task Force 2-28 deploys to its assigned area of operations with the Iraqi theater of War, conducts relief-in-place, and counter-insurgency operations in accordance with the Iraqi Security Agreement to defeat destabilizing forces and aligns with the PRT to support the local and Provincial government's ability to provide a safe and secure environment for its population.

During the initial weeks of their arrival in FOB Kalsu, soldiers of TF 2-28 IN began improving the battlespace in support of the Brigade mission. B/2-28 IN completed force protection upgrades to FOB Kalsu, including rebuilding over 800 meters of the perimeter walls, improving the security of an entry control point, and upgrading the tower defenses. In addition, the company improved upon the base defense battle drills, integrated the efforts of Coalition Forces (CF) and those of Third Country National (TCN) security forces, and provided security for the assessment for the repair of a nearby bridge adjacent to the FOB. C/3-66 AR provided the base Quick Reaction Force (QRF), responsible for responding to significant acts on or near FOB Kalsu. Meanwhile, C/2-28 IN assumed security and escort missions, supporting the Brigade Combat Logistics Patrols (CLPs), as they moved throughout the Babil and Karbala provinces.

On February 17, 2009 the task force received Brigade OPORD 09-04 directing the task force to align itself with two Iraqi Police Headquarters (IPs), two Provincial Joint Command Centers (PJCCs), two Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and two Iraqi Army Brigades (IAs) in two provinces, Karbala and Babil. The task force consisted of B/2-28, C/2-28, E/5 CAV, B/1-77FA, and 563rd MP Company. On February 20, B/2-28 assumed responsibility for an operational environment within the Babil province, centered on the city of Hillah. Occupying a patrol base co-located with 1st Battalion, 31st Iraqi Army Brigade and the Regional Embassy Office (REO), Team Bushmasters provided QRF within their area of operations and security and escort for members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) operating out of REO.

In addition to conducting their own operations, the soldiers of B/2-28 IN began training members of the North and South Babil Emergency Response Units (ERUs). The training consisted of a three-week course focused upon individual-, squad, and platoon-level operations to enable the ERU to serve as emergency response unit for the civil

government. Perhaps more importantly, the CF trainers identified and mentored potential instructors from within the ranks of the trainees such that, by the third iteration of the course, a third of the course material was being taught by Iraqi instructors. Following the graduation of the Central Babil ERU Battalion from the Babil Police Academy, the Iraqi instructors taught the three-week course under the supervision of CF soldiers. Following these successes, Team Bushmasters established training programs for the 31st Brigade Iraqi Special Operations Company and four companies of 1st Battalion, 31st Iraqi Brigade. The training program proved useful during Operation SITTANG, 15 kilometers east of Hillah, when 1-31 IA arrested three members of an improvised explosive device (IED) and indirect fire cell.

At the end of February 2009, TF 2-28 IN concluded a relief-in-place with 69th Forward Support Company at Patrol Base (PB) Husaniyah in the Karbala province. B/1-77 FA assumed the Task Force's responsibilities in the Karbala province, providing security and escort for the PRT operating out of the patrol base. In addition, the Black Lions established a Tactical Command Post (TAC) and a Forward Aid Station (FAS) at the patrol base. The TAC allowed for improved command and control within Karbala and communications with battalion headquarters in FOB Kalsu, and later REO.

As in Babil, the Task Force identified a need to assist in the professionalization of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the Karbala province. The Iraqi Police (IP) and ERU in Karbala had not received training from CF instructors in the last year and desperately required advanced training in crime investigation, search procedures, and warrant processing. In an effort to meet these needs, task force leaders identified a suitable location for a training location for the Karbala Iraqi Police Academy (KIPA) south of PB Husaniyah. In early March, Black Lion soldiers, cooperating with International Police Advisors (IPA), built a temporary training facility and began classes. Meanwhile, C/2-28 IN began training one of the ERU companies and the Scout platoon trained thirteen Iraqi Army platoons in basic infantry skills in a period of two months. In May, the Scout Platoon served as the security element for C/9 Engineers as they constructed a weapons range at Lake Razazah, west of the city of Karbala. The range served to provide the 33rd Iraqi Army Brigade with a location at which to conduct weapons qualifications.

In March 2007, the Black Lion Operational Environment (OE) increased substantially as the 172nd Infantry Brigade assumed responsibility of three additional provinces: Najaf, Diwaniyah, and Wasit. On March 27, 2009, Task Force 2-28 assumed responsibility for the entire Babil Province, following a ten-day relief-in-place with 1-10 Cavalry Squadron. As a result, the TOC moved to REO-Hillah and the Administrative and Logistics Operations Center (ALOC) consisting of the HHC Command Post, Support Platoon, S1, S2, S4, and maintenance sections remained at FOB Kalsu. In addition, as part of the Brigade's OE realignment, Task Force 1-2 assumed operational control of C/3-66 AR. However, even as the Task Force lost one company, it assumed control of another two. The Battalion assumed operational control of the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop (BRT), commanded by CPT Weightman, and 563rd Military Police company. The companies still task organized to the Battalion assumed their own respective areas of responsibilities.

C/2-28 IN relocated to and assumed control of PB Mahawil, co-located with 2nd Battalion, 31st Iraqi Army Brigade. Security and stability of the area surrounding PB Mahawil remained the focus of Team Spartan as they partered with ISF in the northern

Babil province, including both 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 31st Iraqi Army Brigade, the Iraqi police districts of Iskandariyah and Mahawil, and various other government and civilian organizations. Much like B/2-28 IN and B/1-77 FA, C/2-28 IN set forth in training and professionalizing the ISF, focusing on life saving aid, marksmanship, and operating and maintaining vehicles.

The BRT, also known as the Renegades, conducted a relief-in-place with B/1-2 IN at PB Hamiyah. Partnering with 4th Battalion, 31st Iraqi Army Brigade, the Renegades assumed responsibility for ensuring security and stability near the towns of Hamiyah, Iskandariyah, and Haswah – towns that lay along the Shia-Sunni fault line in northern Babil.

Both C/2-28 IN and E/5 CAV supervised the transition of the Sons of Iraq (SOI) program from U.S. Army control and funding to that under the Government of Iraq. In April, the Government of Iraq paid the SOI for the first time and placed them under the supervision of the Iraqi Army. Much weighed on the success of this transition, as SOI member threatened to return to the insurgency in the absence of pay. Though the transition process encountered a number of initial problems, within three months the process proceeded flawlessly with the Iraqi Army firmly in charge. The Black Lion soldiers supervised the transitional process, acting as a calming force, encouraging local leaders to be patient and allow the government to remedy any initial flaws in the payment system. In addition, the C/2-28 IN and E/5 CAV established programs to train SOI members that could not be supported by the new program, providing instruction such as a two week training program for medical assistants in Hillah. Such a successful transition fostered confidence needed for further transfer of authority and responsibility to the Iraqi Security Forces and local and provincial governing bodies.

The transfer of authority and responsibility from U.S. Army and Coalition Forces to that of Iraqi civil and military leadership became an ever-increasing theme within the Black Lion OE. Perhaps the most critical transition occurred on June 30, 2009, when Iraqi Security Forces assumed responsibility for the security mission within Iraqi cities. This national transfer authority and responsibility result in relatively minor change within the Black Lion OE, if only because TF 2-28 IN had already considerably decreased its footprint within the urban landscape. Instead, the transition coincided with an increased focus on further development of the civil capacity and the beginning of a visible increase in the effectiveness and professionalism in the ISF, made possible by efforts early in the deployment.

By August, the ERU training academy in Hillah, initially established by B/2-28 IN, proved to be self-sufficient. In addition, the North and South ERU Battalions relocated to Iskandariyah and Hashmiyah to conduct independent counter-insurgency operations. On August 12, B/2-28 IN relinquished control of PB Hillah-REO to the 31st Iraqi Army Brigade under the oversight of the Iraqi Secretariat. The Bushmasters relocated to Convoy Support Center (CSC) Scania and conducted a relief-in-place with 3-16 FA, assuming responsibility for a vast portion of southern Babil.

Despite an increasing degree of responsibility being placed upon the shoulders of the Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi civil authorities, the Black Lions continued provide support in the fight against an elusive counterinsurgency threat. The support primarily consisted of providing the ISF with critical assets such as tactical UAV, military working dogs teams, air weapons teams, and additional reconnaissance platforms. During

Operation Lion's Roar in July, the 33rd IA Brigade recovered two caches of IED materials and indirect fire rounds northeast of Husaniyah.

As Task Force 2-28 prepared to leave Iraq, the Black Lions initiated three new projects. The Task Force established the Iraqi Police Professionalization Center at FOB Center. The instruction taught during a five-day course served to educate 25 IP investigators the basics of forensic evidence collection. In addition, the Task Force sought to improve upon the range at Lake Razazah, constructing a Scout Table XII and trench live-fire scenario for the Iraqi Army. Finally, the Black Lions helped the Iraqi Security Forces establish a plan for security of polling locations.

When the last Black Lion soldier departed from the Iraqi theater of operations, homebound for Germany, the military aspect of the operating environment with the Babil and Karbala provinces had undergone significant transformation. The counterinsurgency fight, once solely a burden bore by CF soldiers, now rested in the hands of a well-trained Iraqi security force. The transition occurred due to effort of Black Lion soldiers passing on their own experience and training and taking a vested interest in ensuring the training programs became self-sufficient, as they did in the ERU academies and KIPA. As a result, the successes of the ISF in Babil and Karbala in maintaining security and stability within these provinces are derived from the successes of the soldiers of TF 2-28 IN.

Effective training proved to be an essential aspect of the success that the Black Lion soldiers experienced during their deployment. Not only did soldiers within the Task Force benefit from tough, realistic training that began in Grafenwoehr and continued throughout the deployment, but they also used their own experiences to build the Iraqi Security Forces into an effective fighting force, capable of maintaining the security and stability of their own provinces.

In addition to establishing effective training programs, the relationships between the Task Force leadership and their many partners within Iraqi proved crucial to the success of the mission. Key Leader Engagements (KLEs) with the Task Force's Iraqi military counterparts provided insight into the challenges faced by members of the ISF and their leadership in their fight to provide for a safe environment for the Iraqi people. Leadership from the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi Police, and the Sons of Iraq frequently met with LTC Reynolds and the company commanders of the Task Force.

The Iraqi Army units responsible for security within the Babil and Karbala provinces included two brigades of the 8th Iraqi Army Division: the 31st Iraqi Army Brigade, commanded by COL Adnan Salman Inad Albu Tayf, and the 33rd Iraqi Army Brigade, commanded by BG Majid. LTC Reynolds sought to mentor these two leaders, promoting proactive, decisive leadership within the Iraqi military chain-of-command. 33rd MiTT aided in this endeavor, training and mentoring elements of the 33rd IA Brigade staff alongside B/1-77 FA in PB Husaniyah. In addition to these partnerships providing Task Force leaders with and opportunity to train and mentor their counterparts, they yielded invaluable insight into the challenges faced by the Iraqi military in Babil and Karbala. In conversations with LTC Reynolds, COL Adnan and BG Majid alluded to the fact that there existed a mutual distrust between the IA and the Government of Iraq (GOI). Both, however, praised the support that TF 2-28 provided, including joint patrols, training programs, and military equipment and assets. Knowledge of the key leaders and organizations within the Operational Environment allowed LTC Reynolds to mediate during times of conflict, fostering an atmosphere where each side could come together to

find common ground. Resolving the conflicts between the military, people, and the government of Iraq promoted unity of effort in the quest for peace and stability.

The Iraqi Police (IP) also played a substantial role in the Operational Environment. Consisting of several different entities, to include SWAT, ERU, and a standard police force, the police in Babil and Karbala maintained security with the OE on a daily basis, manning checkpoints, making arrests, and patrolling areas with high threat of enemy activity. MG Fadhil and MG Ali, the commanders of the Babil and Karbala police forces, respectively, led the members under their command with dedication and resolve. LTC Reynolds met with these individuals on a weekly basis, constantly assessing the security situation of the two provinces, providing insight and mentorship, and offering assets to aid in the security operations ongoing in the OE.

In addition to the military successes of the Black Lion soldiers, increased civil governance capability and an improved quality of life among local inhabitants of the Babil and Karbala provinces further demonstrated a commitment to the Iraqi people. Task Force 2-28 projects contributed to the improvement of essential services and infrastructure for both the local governing bodies as well the local populace.

The Task Force aligned with both PRTs in Babil and Karbala provinces to help move the Government of Iraq forward at local and provincial levels. During their initial weeks within their area of operations, B/2-28 IN cooperated with the PRT and provided security during the establishment of the local and provincial governments following Iraqi elections in January 2009. In Karbala, B/1-77 FA provided the PRT five security elements daily, in support of their movements throughout the province.

But while the PRT in Babil and Karbala maintained the primary responsibility of engagements with the GOI, TF 2-28 IN held also relationships with critical members of the GOI that fostered development of the capabilities of the local governance. One such relationship was between the Black Lion command team and Dr. Nai'mah, the head of the Babil Security Council. With the support of TF 2-28 leadership, Dr. Nai'mah alerted the Babil Security Council and ISF to the folly surrounding false IED detection devices that were being utilized at ISF checkpoints. As a result, GOI pressured the ISF to increase their utilization of proper IED detection equipment and techniques.

Dialogue between LTC Reynolds and the Babil Provincial Council helped mitigate tensions between residents of Hillah and Coalition Forces pertaining to the use of PB Hillah REO. Through an open channel of communications between provincial leadership, LTC Reynolds effectively communicated that Coalition Forces abided faithfully to the Iraqi Security Agreement, assured residents of REO that the transfer of PB Hillah to the IA was forthcoming, and asserted that the US government had invested 40 million dollars of State Department, USACE, and DOD projects in the Babil province.

Such commitment to the development of the capabilities of the local governance promoted one of TF 2-28's imperatives: creating deliberate and proactive leadership among the Iraqis. Similar to the assurances of self-sufficiency within the Iraqi security apparatus derived from training programs and joint cooperation, the soldiers of TF 2-28 left Babil and Karbala confident that the Iraqi system of governance was capable and self-sustaining.

Improving the quality of life played an important role in the success and stability of the Black Lion OE. In demonstrating the generosity and benevolence of US intentions through numerous projects, the Black Lions garnered support of residents of the Babil

and Karbala provinces. But perhaps more importantly, improvement of the quality of life helped raise local inhabitants out of desperate, unsafe conditions that often served to promote feelings of resentment or desperation that could be manipulated and coerced towards participation in subversive activity. TF 2-28, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and PRT managed and supported 85 projects in the Babil and Karbala provinces totaling \$72,925,299. TF priorities in Babil largely consisted of cleaning roadways to prevent IEDs and employing SOI. The largest TF project paved the Tunis traffic circle and 100 meters north and south on ASR Jackson, helping counter the IED threat and improving traffic flow for both the ISF and the civilian population.

Numerous other projects supported the inhabitants of the Babil province. In northwest Babil, Black Lion soldiers and Civil Affairs Team 3-5 coordinated to improve the Hateen Apartments, which housed a small community of largely unemployed Iraqis. USACE repaired a nearby water treatment plant, providing residents with clean water. In Hillah, Black Lion soldiers aided in the professional development of the city hospital's staff. In addition, the Babil PRT, cooperating with C/2-28 IN, strove to strengthen organizations, develop systems, and increase the productivity of local business through the Central Euphrates Farmer's Market. During one operation with the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and State, Spartan soldiers escorted 12,000 fish over 50 miles from Baghdad International Airport to fish farms in the Babil province to help create jobs. Such measures taken to improve the quality of everyday life for the residents of the Babil and Karbala provinces immeasurably promoted a greater degree of security and stability upon the departure of TF 2-28 IN.

Task Force 2-28 deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 01 December 2008 to 21 November 2009. During the year-long deployment, Task Force soldiers enabled more than 560 Babil and Karbala PRT missions, conducted over 815 partnered operations with the 31st and 33rd Iraqi Army Brigades, trained four battalions of Emergency Response Units, and supported civil government efforts to provide a safe and secure environment for the citizens of Iraq. However, the successes of the Task Force cannot truly be demonstrated with numerical values, as it is the sense of security, stability, and self-sufficiency within the Babil and Karbala provinces that truly speak to the Black Lion legacy during its deployment.