Civil military operations work towards a safer Iraq

LSA ANACONDA, Iraq – Not far from Anaconda, along a labyrinth of narrow, jutting, dirt roads, mud houses, and flowing irrigation troughs, stands Ajeelia, a village which has long felt the presence of U.S. troops.

Considered friendly territory, the town has been on the receiving end of humanitarian aid since the occupation of Anaconda by U.S. forces in 2003.

Members of C Troop, 5th Squadron, 117th Calvary Regiment, a Woodstown, N.J. National Guard unit, visited the village Oct. 16 as they often do, bringing donations of school supplies, clothing, and other much-needed supplies.

The unit makes two trips per week to visit the six local villages they are responsible for outside Anaconda, in attempts to form a trusting relationship with them, said 1st Lt. Michael G. Tarricone, force protection officer for the troop.

The unit’s primary mission on Anaconda is to operate one of the entry control points, but they also have combat logistical patrols and combat reconnaissance patrols, Tarricone said. These are patrols that go outside the wire daily to ensure a military presence in the surrounding area, as well as gather any helpful information they can, he said.

The U.S. Army has a budget for supporting humanitarian aid in forms of education, healthcare, and long-term employment for it uses to make Iraq a better place for its people.

“We are hoping to decrease the attacks on Anaconda by presenting the softer side of the Army,” Tarricone said.

This is a long-term project that is not just aid to Iraqis now, but helping them to set up a more sustainable country for the future.

“Long-term, I’d like to see the towns become more self-sufficient,” Tarricone said.

On this particular trip to the village, the unit brought boxes of donations from both a local school and a truck driver with D Company, Forward Support Company (of Vineland, N.J.), 1st Squadron, 167th Calvary Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition, whose hometown is Berlin, N.J., holds an Iraqi child as supplies are handed out Oct. 16.

“Sheik Abbas Aboudi, the sheik of Ajeelia, met with Tarricone to hand the supplies over to the school, and the school heard. The supplies from Operation Iraqi Children were taken to the Al-Rafaiya school, which houses about 500 children.

“This is my fourth time going out, and I try to bring them whatever they need,” Marchese said.

Previously, she said the women in the villages would not speak to male U.S. Soldiers, so there was no good way to find out what supplies the women needed.

She said she now brings them women’s clothing, hygiene products, and baby supplies.

“We’ve gotten a lot of support from New Jersey,” Marchese said. “If we need playground equipment, they will help us out,” Marchese said.

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Three Iraqi girls pose for the camera in Ajeelia, Iraq as they await the arrival of donated goods.

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The unit's primary mission on Anaconda is to ensure a military presence goes outside the wire daily to ensure a military presence.

The unit makes two trips per week to visit the six villages which have combat logistical patrols and combat reconnaissance officers.

One such officer for the troop.

them, said 1st Lt. Michael G. Tarricone, force protection officer for C Troop, 5th Squadron, 117th Calvary Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition.

Marchese, one of the only female Soldiers who goes out on C Troop’s civil military operations, said she was asked to come to assist with the female villagers.

Previously, she said the women in the villages wouldn’t speak to male U.S. Soldiers, so there was no way to find out what supplies the women needed.

She said she now brings them women’s clothing, hygiene products, and baby supplies.

“This is my fourth time going out, and I try to bring them things they need so when we need information from them, they will help us out,” Marchese said.

The supplies from Operation Iraqi Children were brought to the Al-Rafaiya school, which houses about 500 children.

Sheik Abbas Aboudi, the sheik of Ajeelia, met with Tarricone to hand the supplies over to the school, and to discuss future plans for the school’s needs.

A possible expansion of the crowded school was discussed, as was the donation of playground equipment from the States.

Tarricone said these projects are reasonable requests which will be presented for either approval or disapproval. The way a project such as the school addition would work, is that if approved, bids would go out to a local Iraqi contractors to do the construction, creating more jobs, Tarricone said.

Aboudi was happy to have his request for a bigger school heard.

“We want to thank the American forces for helping us,” Aboudi said through a translator. “A bigger school would be better and safer for the kids.”

He also mentioned that since the U.S.'s arrival in Iraq, the change has been positive in his village. Tarricone said that all projects and donations go through the sheik first, ensuring that the local government system stays intact.

“We bring donations and goodwill feelings from the American public to the Iraqi populace,” Tarricone said.

Although this trip was just one of many, it is another step towards an independent Iraq.

“In an indirect way we support the Army’s mission by showing the Iraqis we can provide increased security, jobs for the people, and health care,” Tarricone said.

For now, C Troop will continue to conduct weekly visits to Anaconda’s surrounding villages to ensure relationships are built and friends—not enemies, are made.

story and photos by Spc. Alexandra Hemmerly-Brown

Spc. Joseph Schorno passes out supplies in Ajeelia.

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1st Lt. Michael G. Tarricone, force protection officer for C Troop, S-117th Calvary, a New Jersey National Guard unit, shows a school administrator the supplies donated from Operation Iraqi Children in Ajeelia, Iraq.