

Soldiers Search Houses in Rathwaniyah for Weapons, Explosives

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Sgt. Bryan Ganoe (left), a Rindge, N.H., native, who serves as a truck commander, and Sgt. Matthew Hubbard, a Lancaster, Calif., native, who serves as a section chief, both assigned to Battery B, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad, search a house during a cordon and search operation, Feb. 19, in the Rathwaniyah neighborhood of Baghdad. Soldiers were conducting the search in response to concerns expressed by local residents about weapons and terrorist activity. Photo by Multi-National Division Baghdad.

BAGHDAD — After receiving complaints from local citizens about people taking weapons into Baghdad’s neighborhood of Rathwaniyah, Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers conducted a cordon and search operation, Feb 19.

The Soldiers of Battery B, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), searched every house in their section – every room, every box and every vehicle – everything was checked to make sure nobody was hiding explosive material or weapons.

“We wanted to show we support the locals, and we would actually do something to help them,” said Capt. Geoffrey Gorsuch, a Peoria, Ill., native, who serves as the commander of Battery B. “We didn’t want people to hear stuff and that we were not doing anything about it. We wanted to show that we support them.

"I think they saw our true commitment with them today. Even though we were intruding into their lives, most of the people were very happy to see us because they understood why we were doing it."

Gorsuch said they have had incidents where businesses or local leaders were targeted with a bomb. When that happens, the Soldier of the 320th FA respond to issues of concern, which demonstrates their care for the local nationals and lack of fear of the extremists.

"It's really hard for us because there is no police station in the area. We have to get in there and help them until the Iraqi security forces spread out and accompany us in our area," said Gorsuch.

What started as a five-hour mission ended in 11 hours. On this day however, the Soldiers of Battery B didn't find anything out of place during their operation. Despite not finding anything, they were not disappointed.

"We did not find what we were looking for, which is a good thing because that means all the people living in the area know we're doing our job," said Gorsuch. "The fact we didn't find anything makes it a good day."

One of the things the Soldiers of Battery B did during the operation was to station the platoon leader outside to talk to the Iraqi families while the Soldiers were searching the houses. By doing so, the platoon leader presented a professional face and explained to them exactly what they were doing. This in turn helped to calm them down while the search was underway.

Pfc. Benjamin Ulery, a Jay, Maine, native, who serves as a combat medic with Battery B, said the mission was a long process; but in the end, it was rewarding to see the mission accomplished without finding contraband.

"During this type of mission, I use my skills and knowledge to help the local nationals with their medical needs," said Ulery. "Kids from the area come to me, and I try to help them out. If it is something complicated, I let them know they need to go to the hospital in the area."

The Rathwaniyah neighborhood has come along much better, and the improvements can be seen in the security of the area. The locals are very receptive to them and very cooperative because they understand it's for their own protection, Ulery said.

"I'm always extremely proud of my Soldiers. We've come so far since last year and just watching how this battery has grown in their professionalism amazes me. They were always very professional with the families in the neighborhood. I think they did an excellent job."