

Iraqi Police, Soldiers Graduate Task Force Marne NCO Academy

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Iraqi Soldiers find cover during a training exercise at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq, Feb. 23, 2008. The Soldiers were part of the second class to graduate from the Task Force Marne Noncommissioned Officer Academy. U.S. Army photo.

FOB KALSU — More than 80 Iraqi Soldiers and policemen graduated the Task Force Marne Noncommissioned Officer Academy here, Feb. 25.

For two weeks, the students participated in foot patrols, Humvee combat patrols, rifle ranges and classroom lectures to increase their skills and ability to lead in combat.

“You must now ‘leave and lead,’” Army Command Sgt. Maj. Gabriel Berhane, command sergeant major for the 3rd Infantry Division’s 2nd Brigade Combat Team, told the graduates, echoing a motto of the 3rd Infantry Division NCO Academy at Fort Stewart, Ga. “As you return to your units, you must constantly remind yourself what being a leader is about.”

Building a sense of leadership and a strong NCO corps in the Iraqi security forces is a main goal of the academy.

“They want to learn the leadership skills,” said Army Staff Sgt. Mark Hooks, a 10th Mountain Division military policeman assigned as an instructor at the academy. “The NCO part of them is starting to come out.”

The challenging curriculum of the academy, welcomed by the eager Iraqi troops, is modeled after the Army's Warrior Leaders Course. "There are times when we have to beef up the training," Hooks said. "A lot of times they don't want to take breaks; they just keep asking for more."

Army Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Fowler, a senior NCO academy instructor, said the Iraqi NCOs realize the benefits of the course and try to learn as much as they can while they have the opportunity. "They're very receptive in the classes," he said. "If they don't understand something, they never hesitate to ask."

The students said the team-building environment taught at the academy is important against their country's enemies. "It's good to work as one team," said National Policeman Fadhel Hakum. "One group means more power, and we can work against our enemy."

"The class is good because it helps me when I serve my country and my people," said National Policeman Saed Atyaa. "We can help to pick up our country if we are down."

Berhane encouraged the students to keep working hard and to train the Soldiers and police officers in their units the skills they learned at the academy. He stressed always to be ready to take the fight to the enemy. "The enemy is still out there ready to strike," he said.

(Story by Sgt. Jason Stadel, 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs)