

All In a Day's Work: Soldiers Meet with Sheikhs, Chase Insurgents

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Sgt. Christopher Humes, with Company C, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, chats with an Iraqi child during a meeting with tribal leaders to discuss humanitarian and infrastructure aid projects in Musayyib, Iraq, March 9. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Ben Brody.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE KALSU — “It seems quiet out there, but there’s always a calm before the storm,” said the burly platoon sergeant as he tightened the straps on his helmet. “We have to take care of the people and get the bad guys.”

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Williams, the platoon sergeant, and Soldiers of Company C, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, jumped in their Humvees at Forward Operating Base Iskan, Iraq, with that mindset the afternoon of March 9.

As the heavy vehicles lumbered through the date palm groves in Abu Jassim, near Musayyib, a group of sheikhs waved to them from the brick archway in a large farmhouse's courtyard.

Williams and 1st Lt. Josh Ray, the platoon leader, jumped out and greeted the sheikhs, as the rest of the platoon pulled security around the isolated compound. The group discussed an upcoming infrastructure project, a road paving project that they are working together to bring to fruition. The plan to pave the road would cost \$24,000 and employ about 100 local laborers, according to Williams, who is from Bloomington, Ill.

"A lot of little kids use this road to get to school and farmers drive heavy trucks on it, so the pavement would mean less wear and tear on their vehicles," Williams said. "We like it because it's harder to dig an (improvise explosive device) into a paved road."

Sheikh Abbas, leader of the local Sons of Iraq program, also mentioned to the group that several of his checkpoints had recently come under small-arms fire in the evenings.

Sheikh Abbas, Ray and Williams agreed that more checkpoints, strategically located to counter the attacks, would be manned.

After the meeting with the sheikhs, Company C's Staff Sgt. Tad McGill got a phone call stating a suspected insurgent wanted by the company had been sighted in Musayyib.

The Soldiers headed for the man's house, searched it and the surrounding neighborhood, but according to his parents he had already fled.

Jumping over walls and dashing through dark alleys, part of the platoon tried to track down the fleeing man.

Observing brand-new sneaker prints in the mud behind the wall in the suspect's backyard, Sgt. Brent Massey followed the tracks in hot pursuit. The Soldiers ultimately did not find the man and returned to his parents' house.

"We left on good terms – any mother's fear is that her child will be hurt, and we assured her that's not the case if he turns himself in," Williams said. "She wants him to clear his name so he can get married and her husband agreed to talk with his son about it."

After leaving the suspect's house, the platoon stopped in at a local supermarket to speak to some of the local residents.

Before the patrol left, Ray stepped inside and bought a case of orange soda for a group of children socializing under the store's outside lights.