

CHARLIE COMPANY - TAJI

Towards the end of 2016 Charlie Company saw their tempo increase, in preparation for their deployment to Iraq as part of Task Group Taji – IV. Members from Charlie Company assisted 1st Armoured Regiment in the conduct of mission rehearsal activities and provided vital capability running live fire qualification ranges. Soldiers and officers alike were keen to enhance in their medical and cultural skills through well constructed scenarios. At the completion of this training the Task Group mobilized for a farewell parade. Whilst our New Zealand counterparts used their protected identity status to dodge the formalities, the Australian men and women of the Task Group stood proud in front of hundreds of family and friends in attendance.

Once Charlie Company had arrived and bedded down in Taji Military Complex (TMC) they were deconstructed into a non-conventional structure. The Company, Platoon Headquarters and the two Manoeuvre Support Sections remained under the T30 callsign; the remainder of the sections were spread throughout the Task Group. They were employed in multiple roles from Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to training teams' Force Protection. In addition to providing an Infantry-centric capability, all members of Charlie Company were employed to fill vital roles within the administration and quartermaster chains.

Within a week, the Task Group settled into a productive battle rhythm and saw training audience numbers decrease over the usual Christmas stand-down period. As it turned out, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) like issuing public holidays as much as the Northern Territory Government and were more than happy to take some well-earned end-of-year leave.

For the vast majority of the Company and wider Task Group, it was their first Christmas whilst deployed. Everyone was pleased to see that Santa had dropped by and were treated to an audience with the 'fat man' himself (and his Elf assistant) during the Kris Kringle. A generous Christmas lunch with a large spread of traditional dishes was supplied in the TMC Dining Facility (DFAC) which exceeded all expectations. Post lunch the entire Task Group, including the UK trainers joined for 'friendly' games of cricket, soccer, volleyball and dodge ball. Overall, the day was a good opportunity for all members to get together in an informal setting and celebrate as a team.

Training audience numbers sharply increased shortly after the New Year. The Task Group received over 1900 new policemen and the Training Companies were responsible for training a large number of new recruits. The trainers experienced the complexities of teaching policemen of all ages and abilities. Diggers within force protection enjoyed observing the training audience interact with their peers between lessons. Overall the locals are a jovial bunch who enjoy a sense of humour. For the most part, the training audience was willing to learn about life-saving techniques and vital tactical rehearsals.



As opportunities arose, Charlie Company soldiers provided force protection to trainers on Mobile Training Teams (MTT). MTTs were established to seek out training audiences that may not be able to travel to TMC for training. To date, two locations have been used; one in western Iraq and one further north of TMC. The soldiers thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Not only did they get a change of scenery from the ever present blandness of 'T' walls, they enjoyed the opportunity to operate as an autonomous section and the freedoms that provided. The Iraqi soldiers in these areas were also more experienced, having fought in Ramadi, Fallujah, Mosul or a combination of all three. A highlight of these days was interaction with the training audience during morning PT. This was a distinct change from TMC life as the ISF's morning PT sometimes consists of a light walk around the camp and a stretch session.

Day to day life within TMC is certainly more pleasant than initially imagined. When not on a direct training task, members have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities to help pass the time. Plenty of the soldiers enjoy swinging off a bit of tin in one of the two well equipped gyms. Immediately after this they can be observed attempting their best 'Top Gun' pose down at the beach volley area. There is also an opportunity to grab a brew at a US owned coffee shop nearby. Friday mornings provide the opportunity for members to conduct



some personal administration and attempt a bit of a late start. As a result, Thursday nights are generally more sociable and trainers and team leaders head to the 'boardwalk' for a Shisha and couple of deceptively named 'near beers', which neither taste nor look like the delicious malt beverage. In addition to the Christmas sports day the Task Group has also hosted multiple social events like the Australia Day Carnival, which involved novelty sports orientated activities in a relaxed camp fire atmosphere. These social activities provide a good means

to interact with members from other nations in the coalition and break up the routine of training and force protection.

As well as training ISF members, it is crucial for everyone to maintain their own skill set. Whilst the training areas within TMC may seem 'ghetto' by Australian standards, they provide excellent urban training facilities and good opportunities to conduct live- fire scenarios. Abandoned buildings within the compound make realistic structures for the conduct of urban clearances which is especially relevant training for ISF members as they train in preparation for their battles further north in Mosul. Once ISF training has concluded, trainers and force protection often take the opportunity to use the builds to hone their own skills. Coupled with this, everyone has enjoyed learning about and firing foreign weapons, from AK 47s to Iranian made .50 cal sniper rifles.

Overall all, members of Charlie Company are honoured by the opportunity to represent the Battalion on operations. Members of all ranks are gaining great experience on a wide range of subjects which they can use in their future in the Battalion or on promotional courses. The Task Group is rounding the halfway mark of the deployment and looks forward to the second half of the operation.



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