

Training instructors build tactical course for Iraqi airmen

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10/8/2008 - **AL TAJI AIR BASE, Iraq (AFNS)** -- Military training instructors saw an unmet need in the Iraqi air force basic military training program and found a way to fill the need.

For Staff Sgt. Matthew Coltrin and Tech. Sgt. Chris Ramsdell, MTIs deployed from the 322nd Training Squadron, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, no BMT course is complete without a Warrior Week block. The two men are air advisors assigned to the coalition air force transition team where they advise Iraqi air force basic military training instructors.

"When we came out here to be advisors, one of our first objectives was to establish a warrior week program similar to the one we have back at Lackland," said Sergeant Coltrin, a Lake Charles, La. native. "They had two days set aside for the course but only about a day and half of curriculum written into the course."

The goal of a tactical course is to help trainees learn basic movements with a weapon while in combat conditions. The duo wanted to build a Lackland style obstacle course but knew they'd be limited by the resources available.

"We knew we could not come up with money for bringing materials in from all over the place so we improvised," said Sergeant Ramsdell. "We looked in junkyards and trash piles and found tires along the way."

Sandbags were in big supply all around the base, and local construction companies donated wood and other equipment.

Once the men had all supplies in hand, they got busy designing the layout of the course.

"It took about a week of planning to decide where we were going to put the course," said Sergeant Ramsdell. "Then we had to ensure there weren't safety issues like sewage running through the area."

Sergeants Ramsdell and Coltrin had a lot of help from their BMT teammates, but especially Tech. Sgt. Brent Warren, who performed a huge chunk of the manual labor.

"I was very excited when I first heard of the prospect of building an obstacle course," said Sergeant Warren, a Gloversville, N.Y. native. "Plus just to be outside building stuff from scratch I thought would be a lot of fun."

It took about 12 hours a day of physical labor during a two-week period to build the various obstacles. A mujas, a break Iraqi airmen take in the middle of training, helped free the advisors to finish construction faster.

"We slowly built each obstacle on our own time when we weren't dealing with the trainees," said Sergeant Coltrin. "We would stay late and build an obstacle here, build an obstacle there and then come back later and make improvements."



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An Iraqi air force warrant officer shows his excitement after low crawling under barbed wire during his run of the basic military training tactical course while carrying his blue training rifle at Al Taji Air Base, Iraq, Sept. 27. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Paul Villanueva II)

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As the trainees watched the course slowly become a reality, they began querying the advisors.

"When we told them they'd be the first class to go through the course, they jumped down to the ground and started high crawling on it because they were so excited," Sergeant Coltrin said.

Sergeants Warren and Coltrin ran the course first to show the Iraqi instructors and the trainees how it should be done.

"Sergeant Coltrin and I were pretty tired after running it, so we knew it would be a challenge for them," said Sergeant Warren. "It was tough but they were up for it."

Sergeants Ramsdell, Coltrin and Warren were quick to praise each other's contributions toward the course. But as far as feedback goes, the Iraqi airmen who made the first test run gave them the best endorsement of all.

"The first time they went through the course, they were pretty pumped and excited," said Sergeant Ramsdell. "That's all the feedback we really needed."

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