

Marines Share American Traditions with Iraqi Highway Patrol Story and photos by Capt. Paul Greenberg

AL-ANBAR PROVINCE, Iraq — Reserve Marines from Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5 shared the tradition of Thanksgiving fellowship with the Iraqi Highway Patrol at a remote desert police station Nov. 23.

The newly-formed IHP and Marines are working in cooperation on a security and stability mission here in western al-Anbar province.

The Marines arrived at the station, about 10 miles east of here, in the late morning. Gunnery Sgt. Lovett, the 39-year-old platoon commander from Massapequa Park, N.Y., and Sgt. Joseph Potucek, 25, the patrol leader from Nastic, N.Y., met with IHP leaders to discuss joint operations and address current challenges.

“We’re really impressed with your station and thankful for your cooperation,” Lovett began, addressing Iraqi Maj. Ali Eid Abid, 36, the station commander from Ramadi. “Collaboration between the IHP and Marines is very important for establishment of security in preparation for the upcoming elections.”

Abid enumerated on his policemen’s recent successes, which included finding weapons caches in the desert and establishing joint checkpoints for vehicles along the local highways that lead from Jordan and Syria to Baghdad.

Abid, through an interpreter, said his working relationship with the Americans has been “very positive” with “good cooperation toward the same goals.”

After the meeting was done, the Marines of Weapons Company and the highway patrolmen played a friendly game of soccer.

With clear skies and temperatures in the low 60s, the weather was perfect for what the Iraqis refer to as “football.”

Assisted by an interpreter, Potucek took the opportunity to explain the history and tradition of American Thanksgiving to the Iraqis.

“In the spirit of Thanksgiving, we are presenting you and your men with this soccer ball and these gifts,” said Potucek, indicating a box full of hygiene and comfort items.

The box contained zip-lock bags, each filled with some combination of pens, chewing gum, shampoo, candy, cough drops, skin lotion, hand sanitizer, toothpaste, tube socks and laundry soap, among other items. Each bag had a label on it, which read: “Thank you for your support in maintaining freedom. You are in our hearts and prayers and we are so thankful that you are making the world a safer place. Have a happy Thanksgiving.”

The packages had been prepared by a women’s organization in Carlsbad, Calif., and sent to the

Marines by Judie Michael, who has been working for the past three years to support U.S. troops deployed in support of the Global War on Terror. Her goal is to mail out four boxes every other month.

Michael, 69, is now retired after a long career in industrial sales and owning her own business.

“I think it’s wonderful that you chose to give the packages to the highway patrol. Anything all of us can do in Iraq to help these people should be done,” said Michael, whose father served in both World War II and the Korean War during his 30 years in the U.S. Navy.

The Marines handed out the packages to every patrolman on shift. As the Iraqis opened their bags, the Marines did their best to explain, through gestures, the purpose of each item.

“I would like to send my appreciation to the people who sent (these items),” said Samir Abdullah, a 30-year-old Ramadi native who has been on the police force for about five years. “I think your Thanksgiving is a very good celebration.”



AL-ANBAR PROVINCE, Iraq-Lance Cpl. Luke Aryan, a Reserve Marine with Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, provides security for an Iraqi highway patrolman during a joint-checkpoint operation along a highway in Iraq's western al-Anbar province Nov. 23. The newly formed Iraqi Highway Patrol and Marines are working in cooperation on a security and stability mission here in western al-Anbar province.

After much laughter, handshakes, and gestures for communication, the troops took to the playing field, which consisted of a layer of gravel spread over the desert sand and rocks.

Both teams played their hearts out, and in the end the Marines came out ahead by a score of 4-2.

In a spirit of good sportsmanship, the two teams shook hands afterwards and the Marines headed out to continue the day’s patrol at a joint checkpoint along the highway.

“It’s great having another agency to share the responsibility for security of this area,” said Potucek, who recently graduated from Long Island University with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and was one month into the New York State Police Academy when he was mobilized for his second tour in Iraq. He has a spot reserved to begin the program again when he returns from deployment next year.

“The (Iraqi Highway Patrol) are great—very competent and professional,” said Potucek. “It’s their country, and it’s good to see the Iraqis stepping up to the plate. The simple fact that we are patrolling together right now is a deterrent to the insurgency in itself.”