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## V CORPS' 1ST ARMORED DIVISION BUYS WEAPONS OFF OF KARBALA'S STREETS

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**KARBALA, Iraq** -- When word went out on the street here recently that the 1st Battalion, 37th Armor of V Corps' 1st Armored Division would be buying weapons for a few days, dozens of local Iraqis walked or drove to the police academy in south Karbala in hopes of selling arms and ordnance.

Soldiers from the battalion's C Company conducted the weapons buy-back program in conjunction with other task force and coalition troops, with the aim of getting weapons off the streets and either into the arsenals of Iraqi Civil Defense Corps troops or destroyed.

Known as the Weapons Reward Program, the initiative also had the goal of putting more than \$30,000 in the pockets of citizens to stimulate the local economy.

"The prices [we offer] are pretty competitive. We have had very few people complain," said 1st Lt. Eric Iliff, a C Company fire support officer.

Gripes usually come from those who are trying to sell inoperative weapons, he said.

"They want to get the full price, but for a broken AK (47 assault rifle) we are only going to pay a small percentage of what we pay for a functional weapon," explained Iliff.

The program started when a Polish army psychological operations team distributed flyers and broadcast messages to citizens about the buy-back.

The buy-back program was scheduled to take place at an Iraqi Police Service station for four hours each day, for about a week. Each morning villagers gathered near the station. Some salesmen were looking to hawk ice or cigarettes to the crowd, but a few had weapons to turn in.

As sellers approached the police station gate, Iraqi police officers greeted them and took possession of the weapons. They searched each seller before turning the weapons over to coalition explosive ordnance disposal and military police Soldiers, who identified, inspected and secured each weapon.

After a short paperwork process, sellers were paid the going rate for the class of weapon they brought in. Some weapons were worth \$200 to \$300 each. A wide variety of weapons and ammunition were collected, including dozens of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, assault and other types of rifles, hundreds of hand grenades, and other explosives.

After the first couple of days of the buy-back, Iliff said he felt the program was going well.

“Another unit did the same program down in Najaf. They started off a little bit slow. After a couple of days the people began telling their neighbors and friends,” the lieutenant said.

Iliff said that as word got out, other residents started saying, “Hey, the Americans are giving good prices for buying back these weapons. Since we are not fighting any more, let’s sell them back.”

The program does not stop with the purchase. After gathering the weapons, coalition forces destroy them or, if possible, put them to use.

“We will turn these weapons over to the Polish army contingent,” Iliff said. “The ones that don’t work will be destroyed.”

“All the weapons that do work will be given to the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. That way the new Iraqi government doesn’t have to buy all new weapons to equip their soldiers. (The weapons) are already here in the country. We just put them in the right hands.”

