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V CORPS' 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION SETS UP CENTER TO HELP RESOLVE ISSUES, PAY CLAIMS AND HELP IRAQIS FIND JOBS

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, Tikrit, Iraq – As part of its efforts to help the Iraqi people become self-reliant, V Corps' 1st Infantry Division recently opened a Civil-Military Information Center here.

The "Big Red One" division's two main objectives for the CMIC are to provide security for the region and help the local governments govern themselves, officials said. The center also addresses issues and locals' complaints, and serves as an employment office of sorts where military officials meet and hire Iraqi contractors.

"The Army has done a great deal to fix the civilian problems in the absence of (an Iraqi) government," said Capt. Tim S. Crowe, head of operations at the CMIC and civil-military operations officer for the division's 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry.

"We are trying more and more to get Iraqis to help solve problems for themselves," he said. "We want to make the police department better so they can police themselves, so we don't have to."

The CMIC is comprised of four agencies: Task Force 1-18 Infantry; the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion; the division's 2nd Brigade Legal Team and the Coalition Provisional Authority. The CPA is charged with manning the civilian portion of the center.

Crowe said the civilian and military sections at the information center complement one another and work together on issues.

Under the 4th Infantry Division, the CMIC was located within the city of Tikrit. The 1st Infantry Division opted to open the center on FOB Danger, to provide a more central location for soldiers and civilians assigned there. Security was also a factor in the decision to move, Crowe said.

Officials at the CMIC cannot solve every problem, but Crowe said he's confident Iraqi citizens seeking help at the center can be "steered in the right direction." For instance, Crowe received a letter concerning a pay problem at a local hospital. Instead of the matter being handled by the country's Ministry of Health, the Iraqi man who wrote the letter sought help from the CMIC.

Many Iraqis in the area also go to the center seeking compensation for damaged property, said Capt. Eric D. Magnell. Claims are settled by the brigade trial counsel with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Combat Team. The majority of cases are for vehicle accidents, Magnell said.

While the United States is not required to reimburse the locals, Magnell said doing so strengthens ties between the people and coalition forces.

"We do it to show good faith with the locals," Magnell said.

Money used to compensate the locals and support rebuilding comes from the division Commander's Emergency Relief Program established by the fiscal year 2004 Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations.

Future CERP-funded projects include establishing regional vocational trade schools, improving basic industry structure and capability, and lowering the unemployment rate.

"We like to say that everyone is a contractor in Iraq", said Crowe, adding that while unemployment in the country is a major problem, he hasn't seen anyone who needs immediate help.

