

Spanish Foreign Legion concludes training of 92nd Brigade in Iraq

Support mission to Iraqi Army

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USPA NEWS - The so-called "Graduation Day" held on last Friday at the Bismayah Military Base, only 30 kilometers from Baghdad, concluded a process undertaken to train the 92nd Brigade, the unit of the Iraqi Army that has been receiving training for the last three months from members of the Spanish Legion.

During the course of the day, under the blazing sun and with temperatures over 50 degrees, in order to achieve combat readiness to fight the terrorist forces operating in the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (DAESH), the troops trained by the Spanish contingent in collaboration with Portuguese and US instructors demonstrated the new skills they have acquired, especially in terms of urban combat. The graduation event was also attended by Colonel Julio Salom, head of the Spanish contingent deployed in Iraq, and General Sabbah, head of the Iraqi 16th Division of which the 92nd Brigade forms part.

This unit of the Iraqi Army was almost entirely wiped out in the summer of 2014 following the offensive carried out by DAESH in June at the gates to Baghdad. The brigade is mainly formed by soldiers from the province of Niniwaw, located in northern Iraq and the capital of which - Mosul - they will now help to recapture. The 92nd Brigade is the first unit of the Iraqi Army not to be trained by US instructors but rather instructors from another country of the international coalition, in this case, Spain.

One of the priority missions for the Spanish contingent deployed in Iraq at the start of this year as part of the international coalition to combat DAESH is to provide training to Iraqi troops. Among other duties, Spain leads the Building Partner Capability (BPC) project in Bismayah, one of the four training centres deployed by the coalition in Iraq. The other three are run by Germany (Erbil), Australia (Taji) and the United States (Al Asad). The main purpose of these BPC is to train 12 Iraqi brigades in order to incorporate them into the operations being undertaken against DAESH. Each BPC is responsible for training three brigades in training cycles of 7-8 weeks.

The Spanish contingent at the BPC in Bismayah consists of some 70 instructors from the Spanish La Legión Brigade. They were deployed during the first fortnight of February and, after working with the 82nd Airborne Division of the US Army to train the 75th Iraqi Brigade, assumed main control over training for the reorganised 92nd Brigade in early March.

The team of Spanish instructors comprises six teams: one responsible for training Iraqi personnel from the brigade's leadership on operational planning and execution; another three teams consist of infantry instructors, with each one having to train an Iraqi battalion; another team of artillery instructors is training an artillery group (equivalent to a battalion); and, finally, a sixth team of instructors is training one of the specific units of the Iraqi brigade in logistics tasks.

When the Spanish instructors received the 92nd Brigade in March, they were faced with a unit that not only lacked personnel and equipment but, above all, motivation and determination to achieve victory. In agreement with the General leading the brigade, the Spanish instructors decided to transfer as much knowledge as possible to the Iraqi soldiers in the shortest time possible so as to raise combat moral while strengthen self-esteem and confidence in themselves.

During an initial period of six weeks, training was provided to the troops of the 92nd Brigade on the perfect knowledge and handling of their weapons; to increase survival skills on the battlefield; on conventional combat techniques; and to specialise a particular group via specific courses. Considerable efforts were also made to strengthen leadership by those in charge of the brigade. One of the priority objectives for the instruction and training was to achieve a greater level of readiness for missions of an urban nature, where the "Ranger" Company of the 92nd Brigade achieved a very high level of readiness.

After concluding this first cycle, another three-week instruction programme was carried out to achieve a level of training equal to a Company, as well as a final exercise with live rounds and explosives, fire support teams, helicopters and sappers in which advanced manoeuvres were performed both on foot and in mine-protected armoured vehicles. The training provided by the Spanish La Legion, which undertook this mission based on extensive experience in such previous situations as Afghanistan, has enabled this brigade to become the second of the Iraqi Army to be fully re-equipped with modern equipment.

As is usually the case on all international missions in which the Spanish Armed Forces have taken part and continue to take part, relations between the Iraqi soldiers and the Spanish instructors were excellent. As highlighted by the members of the Spanish contingent themselves, the Iraqi troops especially appreciate the willingness among the Spanish soldiers to share the same adverse conditions as them, such as a lack of water and the high temperatures.

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