



Our first stop this morning was to sift through the rubble of a former air defense artillery site to find any leftover fuses. Most the ordnance exploded when the site was destroyed, but the fuses that screw into the nose of the shells contain a small amount of explosive and can be dangerous, particularly to all the kids that play in the area. "This goes against everything we learned about UXOs.", Matt remarked. What he meant was our training taught us to not mess with unexploded ordnance, ever. Here Matt holds up the tungsten sabot core from an armor piercing round.



In this photo you can get a pretty good idea of how these armor-piercing sabot rounds work. I'm no ordnance expert, but you can see how there is a rod-like round in the core with a plunger-like disc which is probably what makes it propel into the target on impact. The inset is what the fuses we were looking for look like.



"Holy shit! A 120mm mortar round!" Thank god there was no fuse in the round (observe hollow screw-in point), but still pretty disconcerting to happen upon. This would make one hell of an IED. (What CNN calls "roadside bomb" we call "improvised explosive device", or "IED".) We didn't touch this one, we just marked it and left it for the EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) guys deal with.



Everywhere we go, we get mobbed with kids. They are impossible to get rid of. What makes it really complicated is they commonly have really cool shit to sell sometimes. In this photo Matt is buying a Benchmade automatic, a knife that sells for \$180 in the PX, here he is buying it for thirty bucks. They

mob us, annoy and insult us to no end, they have stolen knives, pens, and sunglasses right off our vests, they have stolen cameras and GPS devices out of Humvees, and they basically make it impossible for us to do our jobs. Later in the day I would whack one of these kids in the shin *hard* with an Asp baton in an attempt to get him to go away, but it wouldn't work. His response was basically, "Dude, that really hurt. Why'd you do that? I'm not gonna leave you alone." I got in a staring contest with another kid-- and lost. Just like the detainees we commonly deal with, they know how to posture, they have the macho front routine down pat, they even know how to take a beating, but they will flip into abject apology mode in an instant if it suits their purposes. If they're not shamelessly begging us for food and water, they're spitting at us. I'm no sociologist, but this behavior seems endemic of Arab culture.



Our next two stops were to a couple of the poorest families in the area. We dropped off some food for them. This was the second of the two stops. None of the men were there when we came by, so very little organization was present on how to disseminate the goods. The children disputed bitterly.

At this location there were four families living in an abandoned set of buildings. In the seventies these buildings were a clubhouse for the town's semi-pro soccer team. But after some of the people in the area attempted to assassinate Saddam (one of his body-doubles actually), he decimated the town. The soccer field was destroyed and the clubhouse was converted into an air defense artillery site. These families were using the buildings to house a group of water buffalo and about a dozen cute little snot-nosed ankle-biters.



This is our company commander. He is an assistant district attorney in Manhattan. He is the kind of guy that uses terms like "broad" and "fella". In my humble opinion, he is the only sane man in our command structure. We trust him. And he's no dummy. He made sure to take his helmet and sunglasses off before offering an open packet of Pringles to this girl because, you see, the civil affairs guys were snapping pictures of everything he did.



A girl behind a tree and a caricature of an oppressor both eye me warily.



Little Iraqi girls.



Somehow the youngest ones are taught how to look like poster children for Amnesty International.



Next stop, the local mosque. So here's a little religious conundrum: A Sunni mosque in the center of a Shiite Town in the center of the Sunni Triangle in the center of a predominantly Shiite country.



We hung around the mosque area for a couple hours while the civil affairs and psy ops guys did their thing.



Strike a pose, buff style. That's Matt on the M4 and Anthony on the M240B along with his newly buffed-out Mossberg 500 (collapsible stock, pistol-grip pump). Mark, that's your sling on his Mossberg.



It seems as though there is a marriage everyday in town. Today the celebratory gunfire was very close and a bit excessive. "Hold your fire, men! It's celebratory fire!", our commander barked. Everytime someone says 'celebratory', all I hear is 'celibatory'. Then the ICDC came on the scene-- right in my sector of fire! Moments later a shiny new car drove by covered in all color of ribbons trailed by a bus full of singing revelers.



After we were done hanging around the mosque, we secured the town police station while our commander attended a meeting there. The same kids always know where to find us. They are insufferable. They now know elaborate curses in both English and Spanish, most involving them pimping out your sister and mother while you are sucking a dick because you are a piece of shit. Here a kid shows his push-up prowess. "Schnow!" (rhymes with "now"), means "Do push-ups" in Arabic. Anthony gave him a dollar for doing enough to pass an Army physical fitness test.



People will also use the soldiers as their free medical clinic. Here, Matt puts a clean bandage on a guy's foot who recently got stitches for a gash.



The children of Iraq have a very special message for you: "Fuck You! Gimme water, Mister! Gimme you sunglasses! You my bitch!"