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## Carson Troops Ease Poverty

### *Squadron spent more than \$120,000 in October to help*

By Sgt. 1st Class Gary L. Qualls Jr., USA

*TO OUR READERS: We asked officials with Fort Carson's 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment to e-mail weekly updates on the soldiers' activities to The Gazette. This story has been edited for style and length.*

QAIM, Iraq -- While engaged in increasingly intense combat operations on the Syrian border, 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, has been involved in another battle — the war on poverty.

First Squadron most recently helped school-age children. The squadron spent \$42,240 last month on school projects, such as replacing broken windows and doors in more than 40 area schools.

The squadron gave students and teachers at one school 200 new backpacks complete with school supplies.

"The children were very excited," said Staff Sgt. Mario Franco, noncommissioned officer in charge of the squadron's civil affairs section. "We all really enjoyed that trip."

The squadron also has been involved in sewer and water projects, and contributed sports equipment to local youths.

The soldiers gave necessities such as clothes, blankets and food and other items such as toys and candy to needy adults and children.

In all, the squadron spent more than \$120,000 in October on bettering the life of area Iraqi citizens.

"The support of our civil affairs team and the squadron are the only things that have kept basic services in these cities running," said Capt. Dan Ruecking, squadron information operations officer.

The squadron continues to work with the mayor and other community leaders to make them a part of the solution, he said.

"And our soldiers have shown constant professionalism while dealing with the Iraqis," Ruecking said.

"The soldiers make every effort to minimize collateral damage. They are professional in their treatment of females and of detainees. There is command emphasis at every opportunity for soldiers to be professional in all their dealings."

The squadron would like to do even more for the people but are constrained because of security reasons, Ruecking said.

"Most people in the communities here are peaceful and just want to resume normal lives, but the actions of

aggressors place them in a situation where they feel they can't publicly support coalition forces," Ruecking said.

"I feel the people here are just like us, just like Americans, but when things get a little sticky, they react differently," said Staff Sgt. Mario Vasquez, a cavalry scout in Bandit Troop of 1st Squadron.

"They're not bad people, but desperate people can do desperate things," said Sgt. Chris Bandel, a nuclear, biological and chemical specialist in Dragon Troop of 1st Squadron.

Spc. Stephen Moore, a tanker in 1st Squadron's Apache Troop, said he has mixed feelings about the people.

"I was assigned at the Haditha Dam for a while, and we had a pretty good relationship with the Iraqis there," he said. "But here at the border, they're all shooting at us.

"I have no animosity toward the people in general, though. Unfortunately, the ones I have problems with are the ones I'm dealing with."

Vasquez said he would like to see things get better for the Iraqi people. "I hope that in the time we're here that we will have made the situation better and made a foundation for others to build on."

Bandel remembered helping Iraqi security personnel work on a job-related issue and having lunch with them. He called it the highlight of his deployment and said it gave him a better sense of what the soldiers are doing in Iraq.

As a minority, Moore said, he can relate to the struggles of the Iraqi people.

"I look at their lifestyle, and it's like they haven't even evolved," he said. "They too have been discriminated against. There's no doubt that as long as we're here, I want to help them."

Moore said his sympathies don't extend to those who "continue to fire upon us."

"When we get through this spell, we're going to be in a great position for the future," Ruecking said. "By removing these aggressors, we're going to open the way for the squadron to move forward, to do all the things we've wanted to do to assist the community in rebuilding."

"Everything has a season, and this (the intense fighting) is just one season," Franco said.