

# A bridge is broken in Bayji



PHOTOS BY STEVE LIEWER/Stars and Stripes

Insurgents blew up the center support for this highway bridge near Forward Operating Base Summerall on Nov. 13, effectively cutting off a key military supply route. Engineers from the 216th Engineer Battalion of the Ohio National Guard have nearly completed a mile-long bypass around the bridge.

## In new insurgent attacks, U.S. troops lose connection to once-peaceful city

BY STEVE LIEWER  
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FORWARD OPERATING BASE  
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What in the world has gone wrong in Bayji? By Iraqi standards, this crossroads city of 125,000 on the Baghdad-Mosul highway used to be peaceful. But military leaders worry that a spate of recent attacks have eroded months of U.S. work to rebuild the region.

Attacks against U.S. forces averaged fewer than one a day in the 80-by-60-mile region around Bayji, patrolled by the 1st Infantry Division's Task Force 1-7.

Then on Nov. 9, all hell broke loose.

That day, insurgents attacked Task Force 1-7 patrols in several parts of the city at once and turned Bayji's main

north-south artery, Highway 1, into a shooting gallery. The firefight lasted more than five hours. There were no U.S. casualties, but about 25 enemy fighters died.

On Nov. 13, rebels blew up the center support of a crucial bridge along a city bypass near FOB Summerall, forcing convoys supplying the base to roll through the heart of the city. The next day, the rebels provoked another firefight that lasted all morning and caused more destruction to Bayji's business district.

And on Nov. 17, a suicide car bomber attacked an Army Bradley fighting vehicle, killing a dozen Iraqis and injuring more than 20 other people, including three U.S. soldiers.

"The last two weeks have been pretty intense," said 1st Sgt. Michael Grinston, 36, of Jasper, Ala., the senior noncommissioned officer in Task Force 1-7's Battery C.

During the first three weeks of November, insurgents attacked coalition military or civilian targets 82 times in the Bayji region. That was more than double the previous record of 37 attacks, set in July and equaled in October.

Task force commanders were most surprised by a big jump in roadside bombs. Soldiers have gotten better at both finding them and protecting against them; they've defused nearly half of the 56 bombs discovered this month before they detonated, and injuries have been few.

Tactically, the Bayji battles have been a huge vic-



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tory for the U.S. forces. No Americans have died, and only a few have suffered injuries, while dozens of insurgents have been killed.

But Lt. Col. Kyle McClelland, the task force commander, said the battles have eroded months of strategic progress in rebuilding Bayji — especially its downtown shopping thoroughfare, which Americans call Market Street — into a busy commercial hub.

He said the insurgents have staged most of their battles from the Market Street shops, because few Iraqis live there and American vehicles make easy targets on the narrow street.

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WAYNE SANDERS/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

Top: An M1 tank from Battery C of the 1st Infantry Division's Task Force 1-7 rolls down Highway 1, the main north-south street in Bayji, Iraq. The street has been shut to daytime traffic, except for U.S. supply convoys, because of rebel attacks in recent weeks. Above: Task Force 1-7 soldiers talk with Bayji shopkeepers. Left: Spc. Greg McMeekan, 23, front, and Sgt. Melvin Davis, 32, scan the Bayji skyline from the roof of the mayor's office. McMeekan and Davis are members of Company A of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment from Schweinfurt, Germany, but are currently attached to Task Force 1-7.