



Dover, DE
Bronze Star Medal

Major Brian Russell

Major Brian Russell of the United States Marine Corps helped transform an Iraqi infantry battalion into an effective fighting force able to take the lead in its area.

In December of 2006, Major Brian Russell of the United States Marine Corps arrived in Iraq to take on the tough task of leading an eleven-man team of Marines advising an Iraqi Army battalion in Habbaniyah, a then dangerous area of the Sunni Triangle. The day he arrived in Habbaniyah, all of the battalion's positions were attacked and three were badly damaged. The job ahead would not be an easy one.

Russell was able to convince the incoming battalion commander to correct this and move as many of his troops as possible into the fight. This not only meant fighting the enemy, but also a better chance to cultivate relationships with the local civilians. Russell also pressed for developing leaders at the company and platoon level, giving the Iraqis the opportunity to understand local concerns, and to take pride in themselves as soldiers. Under his leadership, the team of advisors trained the Iraqi non-commissioned officers to become capable leaders, allowing the unit to increase the number of its patrols. Along with those increased patrols, Russell helped build relations with the local police forces. His work resulted in an upswing in cooperation with Iraqi police, and the incorporation of neighborhood watch units into local security efforts.

As his training of the Iraqis progressed, Russell moved his team of American advisors into more of a supervisory role. He made recommendations that the Iraqi's should expand their area of responsibility. For instance, Russell recommended that the battalion increase its presence in a certain tribal area that happened to be the point of origin for several insurgent attacks. By expanding the presence of security forces there, he contributed to the section being mostly emptied of insurgents. After clearing an area of insurgents, he assisted the unit in devising reconstruction plans and improving local support for the Iraqi Army. The plan started with quick, cheap projects designed to gain the trust and loyalty of the population. It eventually grew to include more than \$1.5 million in infrastructure projects.

But the centerpiece of Russell's plan was ensuring that the battalion and its commanders could execute these tasks in the future, without coalition help. Towards the end of his time in Habbaniyah, the unit was able to execute operations without significant aid from the advising team. This was in stark contrast to when he first arrived, when the battalion could barely field half of its forces without extensive help from the American advisors.

Thanks to his extraordinary efforts, Major Brian Russell helped transform an entire Iraqi battalion into an effective fighting force, a feat for which he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.