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COALITION FORCES CLEAR IRAQI ARMS DUMP

BRITISH and Italian military explosives experts have begun the systematic clearance of a massive arms dump outside the city of An Nasiriyah.

Dangerously unstable ammunition and charges litter the 14 sq km site at Tallil after locals looted it following the conflict last year.

Hundreds of artillery shells were pried apart by the looters, who stole the brass casings to sell for scrap. Several looters died when one shell exploded, setting off a devastating chain reaction.

Major Chris Henson, who is overseeing the project, said 300 tonnes of ammunition had already been removed from Tallil by the military.

“A particular problem at the moment is the heat,” he said. “It can cause some of the shells to leak, and in some cases they can spontaneously explode.

“It will take several weeks to completely clear the site,” he said. “First we will remove ammunition that we can recover for the New Iraqi Army, and then we will destroy anything which is too dangerous to move.”

Italian explosive experts have also been involved in the operation, helping to clear the site of the most dangerous material and also recording the vast quantities of ammunition stored at Tallil.

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