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RIVERINE PATROL SERVICE RECRUITMENT STEPS UP A GEAR

RECRUITMENT for the Iraqi Riverine Patrol Service (IRPS) is set to step up a gear as the number of recruits on its training courses increases.

The latest batch of 12 recruits has just completed selection, but in future the number of trainees will double to 24. The two-week course, run in Basrah, covers weapon safety, small boat handling, boarding procedures, searches and maritime law. By the end of the course, the recruits will be able to board ships on the move, search them and check their documentation. The IRPS tackles crime and security on Iraq's rivers, including the Shatt-al-Arab, the major waterway in southern Iraq.

Chief Petty Officer Adrian Lightfoot, of the Royal Navy Training Team, said the recruits were very enthusiastic.

"They go at everything one hundred per cent," he said. "Some of them have experience in the old Iraqi Navy and Army, but many of them are completely fresh recruits."

Once they pass selection, the IRPS move to their base at Umm Qasr, where they patrol and board vessels alongside the Royal Marines.

"They will be boarding every day and night in all kinds of weathers. They will be very, very busy."

A major part of the training and the course's final exam is dealing with scenarios which may occur during a boarding. These focus on reassuring ship's captains that the IRPS are there to help.

"When they board a ship the team will check documentation and search it if necessary," CPO Lightfoot said. "Very often they will have to explain to people who they are and what they do on the river.

"We want people to realise the IRPS is on their side and that they are there to help," he added.

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Images are available from Reuters or AFP. Also, the website www.operations.mod.uk/telic contains a library of images that you can download free of charge.