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## PRESS RELEASE

On Wednesday 17 December soldiers from the First Battalion The Light Infantry in Basrah broke up a major tribal feud after two days of violence in the city. The fighting, between the Al Abtut and Al Hamadne tribes, ended after a one-hour gun battle between a hundred tribal members which left at least ten people injured.

The dispute began in the Al Hartha area on Wednesday 17 December after a disagreement over a CD recording in the local market. It quickly spiraled into violence, and within hours groups of armed men were on the streets.

British troops moved in to keep the tribes separated, and one Iraqi man was shot dead after he aimed a rocket-propelled grenade launcher at one of their vehicles. Major Karl Hickman, commander of D Company 1LI, said a truce which, had been hastily brokered, broke down a few days later. "One of the WARRIOR crews on patrol spotted a large group of armed men, and another firefight began," he said. "We deployed to the area to try and identify the troublemakers without becoming embroiled in the firefight itself." The British troops were fired upon on several occasions with small arms and RPGs. One rocket hit Maj Hickman's WARRIOR, but bounced off and caused no damage. "There was a bright flash, and that was it," he said. "There is a small dent in the side of the vehicle, but that's about it."

As the firefight continued, two Challenger 2 tanks from D Sqn The Queen's Royal Hussars were deployed to assist. Showing great discipline, the troops encircled the battle and began firing warning shots to encourage the tribes to disperse. As the fighters scrambled away, they were followed by the Challengers' thermal sights, which enable the houses they were hiding in to be identified. A search operation was mounted and 25 men were arrested, many of whom were heavily armed.

Four heavy machine guns, ten AK47s, an RPG launcher and a considerable amount of ammunition were recovered, including 25 RPG rounds. The captured

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

tribesmen were handed over to Iraqi Police. “The fighting was so intense that a large number of innocent people could have been shot and killed,” Maj Hickman said. “This kind of fighting has restricted the amount of reconstruction work we have been able to do in this area. “I’m quite certain that it would have been a lot worse if we hadn’t been there.”

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Cuthbert, Commanding Officer of The Queen’s Royal Hussars Battlegroup, called a meeting with the Sheiks of the tribes involved and brokered a ten-day ceasefire to allow them to come to a peace agreement.

“These two tribes have been feuding with each other for the last 40 years,” Maj Hickman added. “But we have left the sheiks in no doubt that any further violence will be severely punished, and that the blame will be laid firmly at their doors.”

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