

Marine Reassigned Over Coin Flap

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea follows this article.

BAGHDAD - The U.S. military confirmed May 29 that a Marine in Fallujah passed out coins with Gospel verses on them to Sunni Muslims, a military spokesman in the Iraqi city said. The man was immediately removed from duty and reassigned.

The coins angered residents who said they felt that the American troops, whom they consider occupiers, were also acting as Christian missionaries in a predominantly Muslim nation. "It did happen," said Mike Isho, a spokesman for Multi-National Force West. "It's one guy and we're investigating."

The Marine was passing out silver coins to residents of the Sunni Anbar province with Arabic translations of Bible verses on them. On one side, the coin read, "Where will you spend eternity?" and on the other, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16."

Following a McClatchy Newspaper report about the proselytizing coins, a force was sent to the western gate of Fallujah and the Marines there were searched, Isho said. One man was found with the coins, removed from the gate and will no longer be working in predominantly Sunni Anbar province, he said.

On May 29, the U.S. military apologized for the incident and said that action would be taken following an investigation.

One Marine making a mistake shouldn't brand the work of hundreds of Marines, said Sgt. Maj. Neil O'Connell in western Anbar province. He went on to tell the story of two young Marines who took the blow of a truck bomb to protect Iraqi police. "Such an action will not pass without proper punishment," O'Connell said. "We started a formal investigation to figure out exactly what happened."

The correspondent was taken around the base in Fallujah and into the dining facilities to show that there's no religious proselytizing or discrimination on the military base. A poster on a base billboard advertised Friday prayers to observant Muslims, and Iraqi employees eat in the same dining facility where leading U.S. officers dine.

A U.S. military spokesman said he was unsure where the silver coins came from but speculated that they may have been sent to the young Marine from outside Iraq.

"Regulations prohibit members of the coalition force from proselytizing any religion, faith or practices, and our troops are trained on those guidelines before they deploy," said Col. Bill Buckner, a Multi-National Corps spokesman, in a statement.

For two days, residents were being handed the coins when they passed through the western gate where all residents are searched and their residence badges are checked. Many considered the move an affront to their religion, humiliating and straining the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Iraq.

The military is sensitive about the latest religious mishap following the May 11 discovery of a Quran, the holy book of Islam, which had been used as target practice. Iraqi police found the Quran riddled with bullets and filled with graffiti. The U.S. service member involved was removed from Iraq. "This has our full attention," said Col. James L. Welsh, the chief of staff

of the Multi-National Force West in a statement. "We deeply value our relationship with the local citizens and share their concerns over this serious incident."

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: As part of our evangelism effort, we have passed out thousands of these same coins to those in our community. We do so because those who are lost need to hear that God loves them and has provided a means of salvation through Jesus. This Marine loved the Iraqi people enough to give them the same message of love and hope. Our leaders should encourage our soldiers to do so. The Iraqi people are currently enslaved under the death loving lies of Islam and nothing would be more stabilizing in the Middle East than seeing more and more Muslims set free from their slavery by the loving gospel of Jesus. Actions like this by the pentagon clearly show that we are a nation that has lost its rudder, and shipwreck will be the result.