



## US Issues Deck of Cards on Iraq's Archaeology

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New York -- American troops in Iraq are being sent another deck of playing cards, this time showing some of the country's most precious archaeological sites and advice on how to respect them.

The Pentagon is sending 40,000 new decks to units in Iraq and Afghanistan, four years after it issued soldiers with a more gung-ho pack showing pictures and information about the most-wanted former members of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The cards are part of an archaeology awareness programme designed to make troops aware of the damage they can cause to sites and to discourage the illegal trade in artefacts.

Archaeologists working at Ford Drum, New York, where troops are trained for deployment in Iraq, hope soldiers will know what to avoid when it comes to bivouacking or setting up gun installations.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Americans built a helicopter pad on the ruins of Babylon and filled their sandbags with archaeological fragments from the ancient city.

Each playing card shows a site or artefact, some of them from Afghanistan, or else the card provides a tip on preserving antiquities.

The suits have different themes: diamonds for artefacts, spades for digs, hearts for "winning hearts and minds" and clubs for heritage preservation.

The seven of clubs carries a picture of the Ctesiphon Arch in Iraq and a caption which asks: "This site has survived 17 centuries. Will it and others survive you?"

The five of clubs is more direct, advising: "Drive around - not over - archaeological sites". The two of hearts shows ancient ruins at Samarra, Iraq, saying: "Ninety-nine per cent of mankind's history can be understood through archaeology".

In another defence department programme, US pilots have received training in recognising and identifying ruins, cemeteries and other sites so they don't accidentally bomb them.

A third involves soldiers in simulating incidents, such as practising what they would do if they were taking hostile fire from an archaeological ruin.

In such a circumstance, soldiers would be advised to put their safety first but to consider whether they might be able to return fire without harming the site, said Laurie Rush, an archaeologist at Fort Drum.

Miss Rush said of the heritage awareness campaign: "Most troops are honourable people who want to do the right thing. But we're not naïve. Damage to sites in this conflict is enormous."

The US military has long recognised that educational playing cards are a good way of exploiting the long periods in which troops are waiting for orders.

During the Second World War, cards were issued with silhouettes of Allied and Axis planes.

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