



## ***Military Installation "K1" grows in Kirkuk***

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The sound of Soldiers marching turns his head. As he looks up, his eyes squint in the searing midday sun to see the Army formation in the distance. He stares at them for a while, and probably wonders why they, too, are out in this miserable heat.

Before returning to work, the craftsman wipes the sweat off his brow, and breathes through his mouth as if he were blowing out a candle. It is very hot today in Kirkuk.

The Iraqi Army's 3rd Brigade, stationed in Kirkuk, marches in front of their newly-constructed barracks in the "K1" compound. GRN Photo

For this worker and for hundreds more, this is just another day on the job. For many, this is the first job they have had in years and maybe for the first time in their lives. Typically, they were unskilled and untrained. However, their plight improved when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) arrived.

In May 2004, USACE, through contracts with multiple U.S. and Iraqi construction contractors, began constructing a multi-phase, permanent military installation for the Iraqi Army's 3rd Brigade. Commonly referred as "K1," the plan called for the construction of approximately 127 structures ranging from dining facilities, barracks, maintenance shops and laundry facilities to bakeries, observation towers, offices, and a refueling station for 3,000 Iraqi Army soldiers and their equipment. Almost anything you might see on any U.S. military post or base would be built here in support of them.

Originally scheduled for completion within 90 days, the base grew out of the barren desert where nothing previously existed. This was not the site of a "former" base. Nor was it a site with any running water, electricity, waste water facilities, or any type of established infrastructure. And to compound these challenges, there were very few, if any, local workers with any construction experience. Even though unemployment in the largely Kurdish region was extremely high, many workers wanting to work on the project had no training and no understanding of Western construction methods.

To complete such an ambitious project in such a short period of time with an unskilled workforce would require intensive training, determined "hands on" leadership, and a professional security team. Thankfully, all of those elements came together through the cooperation of USACE, California-based Environmental Chemical Company (ECC), and a South African professional security escort team called, Overseas Security and Strategic Industries or OSSI, as well as numerous local Iraqi sub-contractors.

Within the first days of the start of the project, it became clear that bridging the communication gap would prove to be the key to success. Stan Toney, Project Supervisor of ECC, stated, "What's amazing to me is that these people - Kurds, Turkomen, and Arabs - are so enthusiastic and willing to put aside any differences to get the job done. And they come to the job site every day to do the best job they can," said Toney. Through hand and arm signals and creative interpretations, the workers learned to mix cement, lay block, drive nails, hang doors, emplace fixtures, plumb bathrooms, and so on. They learned to build scaffolds, pour concrete floors and walls, dig footings and foundations, and paint new offices.

Most importantly, they learned to create something useful from nothing and without serious incident or accident. In an area where insurgents still attempt to disrupt growth and progress, their accomplishments are nothing short of amazing!

However, the quality of their work is probably the greatest success story at K1. The Iraqi Army will be able to enjoy a solid, safe, and secure installation in which to train and, eventually protect Northern Iraq. The local work force, which previously was unemployed and unskilled, has a greater chance for future employment as reconstruction takes hold in Iraq.

Again, the Iraqi worker focuses on his work. He dons his safety glasses after wiping his eyes, and bends to retrieve his hammer. He points at it and smiles, indicating that he made it himself. I look at it and cannot believe that this wood shim and odd piece of angle iron serves him. But it does.

Of the 58 Iraqi military facilities planned throughout Iraq, 30 are ongoing and 24 completed.