



For Immediate Release
November 23, 2008
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Operations evolve to support the Iraqi people's move to higher standards

By LuAnne Fantasia
Gulf Region North District

COB Speicher, Iraq - 'Construction quality management' was the focus of this year's Engineering Conference at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region North district, while improving quality and establishing a road map to get there was the conference goal.

"The theater-unique mix of USACE standards and tactics, techniques and procedures served us well during the tight security environment in the past," said LTC Gene Snyman, deputy chief of Engineering and Construction for Quality Assurance at GRN headquarters.

"With the security situation more permissive now, we'll work harder to include the Iraqi stakeholders from the beginning; we can get them to our operating bases easier now; and the project engineers and construction reps can spend more time on the ground at the sites," he added.

During the two-day, open-mike-type conference, area and resident engineers, project managers, and other leadership focused on raising the standards for their construction contractors, and mentoring them toward success.

"We can all learn lessons from each other and I think we'll see more consistency across the various field offices by having better quality documentation in RMS [resident management system] visi-



LTC Gene Snyman, deputy chief of Engineering and Construction for Quality Assurance (USACE Photo)

ble to all," said Wes Barber, a returning program manager at GRN headquarters.

Admittedly, no one thing will solve identified misalignments, and not all of the problems are on the contractors' shoulders. A review of internal processes will focus on high-turnover of volunteer personnel; project delivery teams; Iraqi

stakeholder participation; design-build submittal review system; and contract enforcement, according to Snyman.

The GRN Operation Order 08-11-01 for quality assurance was published, distributed, discussed and finalized during the district conference.

“We have a number of recommendations, which when combined, will provide a solid way-ahead,” Snyman said. “We need to get back on track by including the Iraqi provincial leaders in the decision-making process from the beginning, and produce reconstruction projects according to USACE standard.”

Snyman is also the Provincial Reconstruction Team engineer for the Salah ad Din Province. “The provincial leaders have hope now for their economy and their government, as well as a new hope for their infrastructure. It’s important that we stay in concert with their desires...and support their move to higher standards.”

Part of the Reconstruction mission in Iraq is mentoring Iraqi leaders and business owners to become self-sufficient and to sustain *through* reconstruction of their infrastructure, Snyman said. The focus in Iraq has shifted from security to capacity-development in which Coalition Forces seek to assist the Iraqi Government to be able to stand on its own feet. The Corps of Engineer’s role will include managers coaching the provincial and municipal governments on capital project management, and project engineers working with contractors to fully understand their requirements.

“If we bring our Iraqi counterparts into our process from the beginning, we have buy-in,” Snyman said. “However, we’re learning too, since USACE project engineers don’t have capacity-development responsibilities in the States. If contractors can’t do the job in the States, they don’t get the contract.”

GRN’s “way-ahead” is to create a semi-centralized training program that will target key practices; prepare new personnel for theatre-specific requirements; and combine training currently given in three different locations—Winchester, Va., GRN headquarters, and Area offices.



Wes Barber, Program Manager (USACE Photo)

Barber attended the first “Area Office University” training session offered in Winchester, Va., recently, and said the itinerary contains much more than quality assurance training, and more than the usual RMS training.

“I think it’s a good step toward improving the quality of RMS data keyed into each contract and illustrating what a powerful reporting and construction management tool RMS is when properly used,” Barber said. “Many construction issues were discussed during the conference and most of the discussion led to the same conclusion, i.e., the better we document,

the better we'll be able to manage the quality, schedule, and cost in our projects. And, RMS is how all this documentation can take place if the right people are trained to use it properly and consistently."

Barber said the Winchester training includes six activities: three-phase process; quality assurance documentation; RFI processing; submittal processing; change management; and pay application processing.

"If new employees are better prepared for the unique requirements here and have realistic expectations of their jobs, we think that will mitigate the loss of consistency associated with high theatre turnover," Snyman added.

An assessment team formed within the district will travel to Area and Resident offices to assess progress or effects and Snyman hopes to see a first round of assessments by next month.

"The training and assessments will improve our continuity and keep our processes consistent," he added. "This is the way-ahead and it will be dynamic. We'll constantly tweak the training program with lessons-learned; and we'll ask the stakeholders, customers and contractors for their feedback through surveys because we want to know how or if their perceptions of us are changing."

As a veteran of deployments to Iraq and its reconstruction program, Barber sees improvement in quality assurance. "From my perspective, construction quality overall has already steadily improved since the beginning and with experience it will continue to improve. More training will result in more rapid continuous improvement as more people deploying receive the training and as the word spreads."

Since the Iraq Reconstruction Program began in 2004, the US Army Corps of Engineers has provided project and construction management for more than 4,272 reconstruction projects in Iraq. Completed projects include health and education; electrical and oil; security and justice; public works and water; and transportation.