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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Baghdad International Airport: Iraq's Gateway to the World

by Norris Jones
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Allan Nelson and Lt. Col. Culen Robinson, both members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, visit the Baghdad International Airport. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Baghdad International Airport currently has between 18 and 24 flights transporting more than 1,000 passengers daily to destinations inside and outside the country. The environment there feels like any other airport in the world with its duty free shops, restaurant and other stores that sell books and clothes.

Allan Nelson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, says about 1,200 Iraqis are employed there and he's proud of the numerous improvements that have been completed over the past two years.

"We installed 2,600 new runway lights and 350 kilometers of cable," Nelson noted. "It was a tremendous undertaking and a very satisfying moment when we turned those on and the airport was lit up for the first time in years."

He says when he started in November 2004 none of the air conditioning units worked, the sewer lines were blocked, and water was pouring from the bathrooms out into the corridor.

He oversaw the installation of 6,000 new florescent lights in the terminal and the renovation of more than 250 bath-



Signs in the Baghdad International Airport mark the way for passengers navigating in the terminals catching flight or returning from them. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

rooms.

"We re-polished the marble floors, painted the walls, replaced about 500 broken panes of glass, put in a new potable water filtration system, new street lights for the section of highway leading to the airport, and cleaned the carpets," he continued.

"We put in two new 2400-ton chillers and rebuilt the two existing 1700-ton chillers. Today there's plenty of air conditioning capacity," he said.

Currently, he's working on a project where 80,000 meters of new 33kV feeder

lines will provide a more stable source of power to the area, assisted by three electric substations that have been rebuilt.

"The new terminals were opened in the early 1980s and little was invested in routine maintenance over the past few years. Much of the infrastructure there was non-functional when I arrived," said Nelson.

He singled out the Iraqi airport manager's staff for special praise saying, "They're doing their job for the same reason we're doing our job – to make it better."

Nelson is concluding two and half years in Iraq and returning to his job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District. The 54-year-old has three daughters and is heading home to see the arrival of his third grandchild.

He resides in Hager City, Wisconsin, and plans to retire next year and find time to do a little fishing as he lives on a 40-acre farm near a trout stream.

"I appreciate this opportunity to serve in Baghdad and help with the airport project," he said. "It's been a pleasure working here and to walk away and see what you've done has made a difference and will benefit this country for years to come."

Note: For additional information, contact Norris Jones, Public Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Central District at (540) 665-2644 or Norris.Jones@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, email cegrd_pao@tac01.usace.army.mil or visit our Web site at www.grd.usace.army.mil.