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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Chief of Engineers Praises Ongoing Work to Rebuild Iraq

By Norris Jones
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BAGHDAD, Iraq – The United States Army's 52nd Chief of Engineers visited Gulf Region Division and its three districts June 22 and spoke highly of the staffs' ongoing efforts to help rebuild Iraq.

During a Gulf Region Central district town hall meeting at Camp Victory, Baghdad, Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp said, "When I look at your board of pictures, at who is in a Resident Office, in the Resource Management Office, or the Contracting Section, I see the work you do is of a magnitude for the size of the teams you have. That's just phenomenal."

He provided his insight about the word "T-E-A-M".

The 'T' is for trust, "and I think we've got some work to do here."

The 'E' is for excellence. "I think it's so important that we deliver not just projects, and not just on time, but projects that will stand the test of time."

The 'A' is for "all about people." He noted that when newcomers arrive in Iraq and step into this environment, it can be a lonely experience. He recognized everyone for welcoming those people to the team. "If you're going to have a world-class organization, you have to attract world-class people. And what attracts them? You have to have a mission that has a purpose and



Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, the U.S. Army's 52nd Chief of Engineers, speaks to approximately 200 engineer and Corps personnel about his vision for the organization at Victory Base Complex near Baghdad, Iraq June 22. (U.S. Army photos by Norris Jones)

we have that. People can get more experience with us in a short period of time than anything they could do anywhere else. We need people of character in the Corps of Engineers. In this room, one of the things that describe all of you is that you are people of character."

The 'M' is for motivating. He questioned "how does one keep their motivation?" He then singled out Gulf Region Central districts's Chief of Contracting Sherry Gaylor and asked her how many overseas expeditionary tours she'd done. Gaylor answered "11 tours." He asked, "What keeps you motivated?" She responded, "the people." Van Antwerp agreed.

He pointed out that when they called and asked if he would be willing to be the Chief of Engineers and go another four years – "that was an interesting question – Are you willing."

At that time Van Antwerp had 35 years service and was already a lieutenant general.

He continued, "In a job like you are in, you have to come to grips sooner or later, with the question that makes your life worth living. My wife and I and our kids have decided that it's only worthwhile if we live it for someone else. If you're just living it for yourself, being selfish and just thinking about yourself all the time - that gets old. Our motto is the only life worth living is a life you're doing things for others. And I want to tell you, you all are doing things for others on a big scale, both in your internal group and then external. I think it's crucial."

He noted the districts are centered in one of the most dangerous places in the world, "and I don't have to tell you how important it is to get this right." He said, "What happens in Iraq is a strategic corporal (a project or program that has strategic implications for the whole organization). What you do, and I don't want to put rocks in your rucksack, but the truth is a lot of our reputation is being built here and gained here -- you are so much a part of that."

He explained his six priorities.

"The first one is to support the Global War on Terrorism and expeditionary mis-



Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, visits a project site near Basrah, Iraq June 23 in the Gulf Region South district area of responsibility. (Photo by Lisa Coghlan)

sions" and GRC is definitely part of that.

The 2nd priority is to enhance the quality of life of Soldiers and their Families, Civilians and their Families, "and we've added one for the Corps of Engineers ... the public."

The 3rd priority is to complete the transformation of the Theater Engineer Commands.

The 4th priority is to enable the Gulf Coast recovery.

The 5th priority is to plan and prepare for disaster relief.

And the 6th priority is to deliver military programs, civil works, research and development.

"The verb 'deliver' is very important. To get customer satisfaction, you've got to deliver what they need, it means you're working with stakeholders," he said, "I know this is a tremendously hard environment, but a lot of our reputation is on delivery."

Along with those priorities are three tenets: communicate transparently, focus



Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, poses for a photo with the staff of the Gulf Region North district near Tikrit, Iraq. (Photo by LuAnne Fantasia)

on the mission, and teaming. On that final tenet, Van Antwerp said the Corps of Engineers has about 35,000 employees, and their contractors involve another 300,000 people. "Can a project be delayed or not delivered because a contractor doesn't do what we've asked them to do? Yes. So they aren't just a partner, they can make or break us. They've got to be part of the team."

It is Lt. Gen. Van Antwerp's intention to take the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

from a good organization to a great organization and he's using those six priorities and three tenets as the foundation of that effort.

"I want to say thanks from the bottom of my heart for the heavy lifting you're doing for the Corps and the Iraqi people. You are one of the strategic corporals. Our reputation rests with you to a great degree. So go out there and deliver."

Editor's Note: Norris Jones is a Public Affairs Specialist with the Gulf Region Central district, Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact the public affairs office at 544-665-1233 or by email at CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.