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Mosul passenger terminal ready for flights to Mecca

By LuAnne Fantasia
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MOSUL, Iraq – Less than three months after Mustafa Yoldah left his company's office in Turkey in September and came to Mosul with a new foreman and extra workers, the Mosul Passenger Terminal project was finished.

"He made it happen," said Alda Ottley, project engineer for this facility that initially lagged behind, but is now ready for the more than 2,800 Iraqis who are hopeful of making their way to Mecca in December.

"The hajj flights will be the first commercial flights since 1993," Ottley said. The original airport was built in 1992-'93, but commercial flights were available for less than a year before the Mosul air space became a no-fly zone.

The Mosul airport fell into disrepair over the years. It is currently located between two Coalition bases; FOB Diamondback and Marez. Recent renovations include a new air-traffic control tower in addition to the passenger terminal, both with program and construction management by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"It's always good to see a project finished; considering the problems we encountered and how we overcame them," said Ottley. "I learned from this project... from a construction and engineering standpoint.

"The Government of Iraq has asked for a reduced presence of Americans around the airport when the flights start, but...we will still be working outside the terminal,



For the first time in 15 years, the Mosul airport is ready for commercial flights — beginning with the mid-December Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. (USACE photo by Alda Ottley)

asphalting the main roads and the parking lot," she added.

She explained that passengers will be processed through security and baggage checks at another location, and then transported directly to the entrance of the passenger terminal.



For the first time in 15 years, the Mosul airport is ready for commercial flights — beginning with the mid-December Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. (USACE photo by Alda Ottley)

R.C. Shackelford said, “A hajj committee agent will stay with his or her group of 76 people 24/7 through the entire trip—until they return to Mosul.” Shackelford is the provincial program manager for the Department of State’s Iraq Transition Assistance Office in Mosul. “The Iraqi government hopes to have two commercial flights daily to Baghdad by spring, which would be a real boost to the economy.”

Although a couple of minor issues remain to be finalized inside the passenger terminal, Ottley said it will be ready for the Muslim pilgrimage. “The baggage claim belts haven’t arrived yet, but should be here by the first of December.”

Ottley has been a project engineer in the Gulf Region North district more than two years. She deployed from her home district in St. Paul, Minn., to Sulaymaniyah in 2005, and worked there until she moved to the Mosul Area Office in February 2006. Currently, her other reconstruction projects include the Mosul Courthouse (which was extensively damaged in September by a truck bombing) and the Ibn Sena cardiac surgical wing renovation (only the second one in Iraq.)

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