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Baghdad families welcome new primary healthcare centers

By Norris Jones
Gulf Region Central District



Some residents walk for miles with their sick children west of Baghdad to utilize the expanded capabilities of one of the new primary healthcare centers that have opened. Shown at right is Navy Cmdr. Steven Frost who headed up the efforts to get construction on those clinics finished. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

Using his skills as a Navy Seabee, he successfully managed construction projects in some of Baghdad's most turbulent neighborhoods.

Navy Cmdr. Steven Frost is concluding a year long deployment as the Deputy Commander with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Central district.

His staff oversaw hundreds of construction projects including a new \$50 million water treatment plant for Sadr City, hospi-

tal and school renovations, new courthouses, fire stations, sewer and water line installations, and road paving. But the work Frost found most satisfying was his role in encouraging contractors to finish a three-year effort constructing 30 new primary healthcare centers throughout Baghdad.

He headed up the assessment team that in early 2007 started visiting those sites to verify progress. He points out that

on 70 percent of those visits they encountered insurgent activity from sniper fire to roadside bombs.

At one PHC located west of Baghdad, Frost says his team was involved in a 40-minute firefight and one of their vehicles was destroyed by an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) while they were trying to exit the facility. On March 27 in east Baghdad, Frost's armored vehicle was hit by an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) and he was medically evacuated to Germany for surgery to stop internal bleeding. But he didn't get discouraged, returned to duty in Iraq and eventually got those PHCs finished and turned over to the Iraqi Ministry of Health.

"I saw a dramatic change in attitude in many neighborhoods, an historic turning point as the insurgents lost control. And the greatest reward has been the smiles I now see on people's faces when they walk through the doors of a new clinic.

They're proud of the expanded capabilities those new facilities offer their community. It's been a heartwarming experience and definitely worth the effort," he said.

A number of those PHCs are seeing more than 400 patients a day, considerably more than what was forecast. Each facility provides medical and dental examination and treatment rooms, X-ray capabilities, testing laboratory, and pharmacy as well as diesel generators for emergency power. "One of the goals of having those new PHCs open is to help Iraq reduce its overall infant mortality rate by providing better pre-natal and infant care," he noted.

This is Frost's third deployment to Iraq. He's been a Navy Seabee 21 years and says his current tour is a highlight of his career. "It's very satisfying to know our work will help Iraqis for generations to come."



Cmdr. Frost chats with families at a newly opened primary healthcare clinic. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

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