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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Bennett proud of partnering effort-helping Iraqi children battle cancer

By John Connor
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BASRAH, Iraq – Art Bennett, a veteran of over 28 years with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, spent most of the past year in Iraq as the project manager for a key USACE initiative, a children's hospital in Basrah.

The 94-bed Basrah Children's Hospital (BCH) is the first new hospital built in Iraq nearly three decades. In addition to giving Iraq a state-of-the-art pediatric facility with a focus on oncology, the project provided hundreds of jobs and strong support for the local economy.

As with others who are immersed in the project, the children's hospital became a labor of love for Bennett. "When I met our BCH Iraqi partners in September 2007, we shook hands," he recalled. "When I depart, there will be embraces of appreciation and friendship."

Bennett came to his current assignment from the Corps' Jacksonville, Fla. District. He's now winding up his third tour in Iraq, a tour spent riding herd on a complex project with multiple partners and contractors. The partners include Project HOPE, a nongovernmental organization devoted to making health care available to people around the globe, especially children, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which is administering a grant of nearly \$22 million from the Government of Spain.

Bennett said his departure "will be very difficult but I take comfort in knowing that USACE will press forward to completion and the children of southern Iraq will



Art Bennett, Project Manager for Basrah Children's Hospital, studies engineer drawings for the site. (USACE photo)

be treated in this new one-of-a kind hospital when it opens in 2009."

The project is managed by USACE's Gulf Region South (GRS) District, which does reconstruction works in Iraq's nine southern provinces. Bennett performed a dizzying array of tasks while serving as project manager, including maintaining close coordination with partners, managing project monies and addressing new funding needs.



About 500 Iraqis are currently working on the Basrah Children's Hospital project with the 160,000 sq. ft., 94-bed main facility expected to be completed by year's end. (USACE photo)

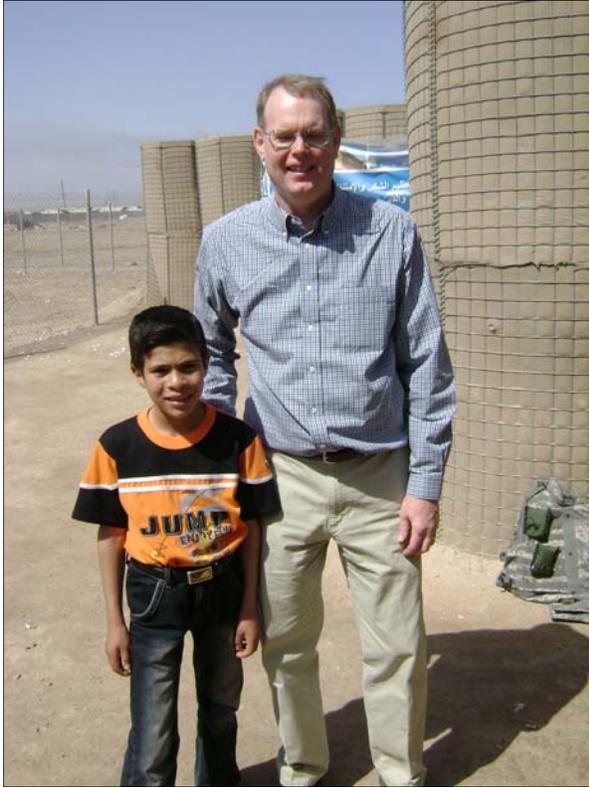
Those to be commended form a long list, starting with "the nine GRS Iraqi Engineers who work on the site every day," said Bennett. He also cited the BCH leadership from the Ministry of Health Basrah Health Directorate, saying these leaders "have stepped up and remained steadfast in taking steps to partner with the U.S. government in construction, maintenance agreements, permanent electrical power, and working with Project HOPE to plan staffing and receive training in the various aspects of hospital equipment and management."

Bennett also praised and thanked the GRS engineers, architects and construction representative, saying they served as the integrators of the project's many pieces, always pushing toward the goal of providing an operational hospital.

"Seventeen contracts make up the construction and equipment provision being accomplished by the U.S. and UNDP," he said. "It is GRS's responsibility to piece all this together as the integrator to realize a functioning hospital by next January."

The hospital is designed to support Southern Iraq in its objective of reducing child mortality by half within five years after opening - a goal that will affect over one million children. While it will be a national leader in children's health care, the hospital will primarily be a pediatric referral center with a special focus on pediatric oncology, providing high-impact specialty services not otherwise available in Iraq.

Components of the project include a 160,000 square foot 2-story, 94-bed children's hospital building, mechanical and electrical plants, a 38-bed dormitory,



Art Bennett says hello to a youngster from Basrah.

medical waste treatment system, oxygen generation plant, warehouse, back-up generators, roads/parking and landscaping. Furniture and computer equipment are provided under a HOPE and U.S. government partnership. Iraqis will train to operate the array of mechanical and electrical systems that are the backbone of the facility.

The project's overall price tag now stands at \$163.8 million and encompasses more than U.S. funds. It includes the \$22 million grant from Spain being administered by the UNDP, \$30 million from Project HOPE for high end medical equipment and hospital staff training, and \$9.8 million from the Iraqi Ministry of Health for consumables. The MoH also is providing permanent electrical power, a wastewater treatment plant, and all the staff to operate the facility. In addition, \$50 million of the total was spent by the previous pro-

ject manager, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), before the job was handed over to USACE in 2006.

The partnership of the Corps, HOPE, and UNDP will yield about 8,000 pieces of medical equipment, furniture, computers, and other necessary items to equip the hospital for operation, according to Bennett.

"With the help of the Iraq Ministry of Health, they will complete the list with the necessary consumables to stock the shelves and warehouse for successful operation," he said, noting that clinical and management staff training is provided by HOPE as well as the World Health Organization through a UNDP grant.

GRS is pressing for a substantial completion on all U.S. and UNDP-issued contracts by the end of this year. Bennett said MID Contracting Company, the prime contractor for the main hospital building, mechanical and electrical plants, is currently about 88% complete and that UNDP contracts are about 11% complete.

During his first tour in Iraq, Bennett found time to partner with some friends to arrange a life-saving operation for an Iraqi boy. During his second tour, he established a system to provide, via donations from churches, schools and individuals in the U.S., needed items such as shower shoes, clothing, and other personal items for wounded American soldiers in Baghdad.

During his third tour, Bennett realized one more step in his quest to help Iraqi families – this time the construction of a modern pediatric hospital to help Iraqi youngsters battle childhood cancer. "It was an extreme privilege to walk alongside my Iraqi friends and coalition partners as we worked together to improve the level of medical care in southern Iraq," he said.

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