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Army engineers provide training, guidance to ensure sustainable infrastructure for the future of Iraq

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Hourguettes' poster of John Wayne in "The Green Berets" hangs in his Kirkuk office. A quote at the end of the movie reminds Hourguettes daily, "...[children] are the reason we're fighting this war." (Photo by: Charmaine Warren, Kirkuk Resident Office)

Kirkuk, Iraq – Engineers with the Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, are teaching and mentoring their Iraqi counterparts on every aspect of reconstruction project development, preparing them to continue building and managing Iraq's infrastructure after the Coalition leaves.

Lt. Col. Jack Hourguettes is an Army engineer assigned to the Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team—a joint effort to integrate infrastructure projects in the province; training, coaching, advising, increasing engineering expertise, and improving decision-making, while balancing political and engineering requirements.



Kirkuk Province's Deputy General Nori (left) was happy to accept the final Sewer Master Plan for the city of Kirkuk from Hourguettes. The plan will replace existing septic tanks with a modern sewer and rain water system; and the final or working design has been funded by the Central Government. (Courtesy photo)

"We've been in Iraq five years and have had PRTs for three years," Hourguettes said. "We (the U.S.) are still cleaning up from Katrina after three years. Our efforts in Iraq will not be an overnight success. It will take the Iraqi people maintaining and pursuing from this generation to their grandchildren's generation, but the rewards will be so much better than if we had just walked away."

PRT engineers are teachers and diplomats, simultaneously ensuring their Provincial Reconstruction Development Council is capable of performing engineering assessments; designing scopes of work and conducting quality assurance and quality control; accomplishing construction processes and managing projects.

Hourguettes splits his time equally between the Kirkuk Government Building downtown and in remote villages. He works with the deputy governor of the Kirkuk Province, as well as the deputy generals for water, sewer, roads and bridges, and electricity. Other Kirkuk PRT members work with the deputy generals for Rule of Law, education and others, he explained.

"The deputy generals are appreciative, well-educated people who are experts in their field of work," he said. "They have a great ability to visualize and conceptualize projects and I have the greatest confidence in the world in them."

Today, the city of Kirkuk looks and plans ahead 20 years. Funds from the Iraq Central Government have been secured for the first phase of the 32-kilometer Kirkuk Southern Bypass Road that will allow the city to expand for residents and businesses; a sewer master plan will replace existing septic tanks with a modern sewer and rain water system. The final or working design is funded by the Central Government, which Hourguettes said, "...is a major milestone for them to take ownership."

Both of these infrastructure upgrades are included in a four-volume, 20-year master plan for the city of Kirkuk, commissioned to a private British contractor and funded with Economic Support Funds.

"The 20-year Master Plan reflects where the city of Kirkuk started and where it is today

with a breakdown of its infrastructure,” Hourguettes explained. “The plan identifies how property can be used more efficiently and outlines where the city can grow geographically and the best areas for industry and business. It’s not a directive, but a map to how Kirkuk can attract business and grow accordingly.”

When the Coalition Forces first arrived in Iraq, they brought with them the funds and the ability to hire experts to design key reconstruction projects. “Now we’re finishing the design work and turning it over to the provincial governments,” said Hourguettes, “and it’s incumbent on them to secure funding to actually build these projects. It’s the same as a state in the United States securing federal funding for an infrastruc-

ture improvement.”

Hourguettes biggest enjoyment here is out in the remote villages and talking to the village elders. “We try to assess realistic needs of the village and put together realistic project proposals; submit them to the PRDC; and follow through to funding by the Iraq Central Government in Baghdad. We’re here such a short time (10 – 12 months) that we may get to see only a few projects to the end.”

“I guess the tag line to us being here in Iraq,” Hourguettes said, “is that we’re trying to bring a better infrastructure, stability and unified peace to Iraq’s children and grandchildren.”



Hourguettes (left) is working with village elder Sheik Yassir on a water project and health clinic for his people. (Courtesy photo)

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