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Al Anbar outlook more optimistic

By Norris Jones
Gulf Region Central District

Ramadi, Iraq— “In one of Iraq’s most turbulent areas, we’re seeing signs that the situation is changing,” says Navy Cmdr. James Lee. Lee just finished a six-month tour with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as their representative on the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for Al Anbar Province, which includes the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah

“At one point the local tribal leaders and the population at large fought against us. But as they observed our continuing efforts to improve their communities, they’ve taken noticeable steps switching their alliance from sympathizing with the insurgents to helping us get the security situation under control,” Lee explained.

“We’re working on schools, water and sewage treatment plants, hospitals and primary healthcare centers, electrical generation and distribution networks, waterway maintenance, roadways, police and fire stations, and the local residents appreciate our efforts. Those times I would get discouraged about the ongoing challenges, it just took a stop in one of the many villages we were assessing for projects to get re-energized about our mission. The thankful smiles of their youngsters did it for me every time.”

Lee joined the PRT just as it was getting organized and he was one of the first on the ground at their new office in Ramadi. He worked directly with Al Anbar Governor Ma’Moun Sami Rashied, a fellow engineer. “He’s a courageous man, having survived over 20 assassination attempts on his life. I believe in my heart he’s a patriot of Iraq and there’s no question he loves the Al Anbar Province and its people. The sacrifices he and his family have made (including the kidnapping of his son who was eventually returned unharmed) is something to be admired.”



One of Ma'Moun's priorities has been economic development. "Iraqis face the same struggles we all do. They are concerned about the welfare of their families and their future. They want to be gainfully employed, doing productive work, earning an honest wage," Lee continued. "The PRT helped the Governor identify about \$9 million in U.S. funding and over \$100 million in various Government of Iraq funding that will provide thousands of jobs while improving essential services in Al Anbar. This effort is having a significant impact on the Iraqis. They're beginning to have confidence that their government is working and things are getting better."



Al Anbar Governor Ma'Moun Sami Rashied and Navy Cmdr. James Lee. [ARMY PHOTO]

in
 Ramadi,
 he
 says
 Ma'Moun
 and

a few of his staff were the only ones reporting at the Provincial Government Center. "Due to intimidation tactics, other officials stopped. With the recent support of the Council of SAs, however, some of those officials are now reworking and the Al Anbar Provincial Government is beginning to function as it should."

One of Governor Ma'Moun's primary interests is developing and promoting Al Anbar's renewable resources. "He believes agriculture is the backbone of the economy, something that's sustainable. He said Al Anbar dates are the best in the world. I taste and I believe it – they're humungous and very

The Governor also is interested in identifying growing plants for medicinal purposes that are suited to Anbar's desert climate. "Governor Ma'Moun impressed me with his breadth of knowledge. He knows what he wants for his people and intends

leave a legacy that will endure."

Lee volunteered for duty in Iraq because he wanted to help Iraqis rebuild their nation. "I was hoping I could contribute and our country would make a difference. It's been a very satisfying, rewarding experience."

He and his wife Dangsun ("Danielle") have three children Ryan, 10; Karis, 8; and Raina, 5. "They were concerned about my safety, but they're always very supportive. They knew I was coming to Iraq to do a noble mission and they've been behind me 100 percent."

His family has relocated to Springfield, VA., as Lee is concluding a three-year tour at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and is transferring to the Naval Sea Systems Command Headquarters in Washington, DC.

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