

Helping Iraqis Rebuild Iraq

By Colonel James I. Vosler, Lieutenant Colonel Clarence D. Turner, and Captain Kevin J. Schrock

Task Force Neighborhood, an aggressive community outreach program, was developed by V Corps to help Iraqis rebuild their country. The initiative consists of “task forces” of coalition forces that go into neighborhoods and assist hired Iraqis with projects. V Corps’s 130th Engineer Brigade took the lead in this effort. After gathering support from the local communities with these Task Force Neighborhood projects, Iraqis are contracted to develop and execute their own local community repair projects.

The 555th Engineer Group (Task Force Able), sometimes known as the “Triple Nickel,” joined 4th Infantry Division forces—explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and civil affairs teams, interpreters, contracting specialists, and medical/dental, military intelligence, and media personnel—to participate in the infrastructure repair program with reconstruction projects that included the following:

- Removing debris.
- Removing arms, ammunition, and unexploded ordnance (UXO).
- Constructing roads and bridges.
- Assessing facilities.
- Restoring power, water, and sewage treatment.
- Restoring hospitals, clinics, and schools.

Purpose

Specifically, Task Force Able’s goal was to reinvigorate the Iraqi labor force to promote an upward trend in the economy and create advancement in civil works and engineering to rebuild the infrastructure of local communities. This enables forward progress in their social and communal



U.S. Army photo by SPC Adam Nuelken

A masonry specialist with Bravo Company, 142d Engineer Battalion, replaces wooden desktops and seats at the school in Al Hurriyah, Baghdad.

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living and move toward stability and helps develop a positive perception of coalition forces.

Organization

We are structured to use the enablers to facilitate the rebuilding of Iraq. The use of the local population more than triples the engineer combat power in Task Force Able, enabling platoons to accomplish tasks normally assigned to a company or higher. An example of this is the repair of an eroded causeway of a bridge over the Tigris River. The division of labor for this project consists of 90 percent from local labor and equipment and 10 percent from Task Force Able's organic resources. These resources are organized through community action teams composed of Task Force Able engineers, local labor, and division augmentation. Task Force Able uses community action teams to conduct assessments of the condition of local infrastructure.

Contracting

Putting Iraqis back to work is our main intent. The 555th Puses Office of Coalition Provisional Authority funds to hire local Iraqi workers and equipment operators. We also contract for resources such as rock, gravel, and sand to complete infrastructure projects that require them. Some of these projects are for joint use by the Iraqis and U.S. military. For example, the task force hired several former plant workers to fix the water pumps and generators to a water treatment plant in the town of Abu Rajash. This feeds water into the northern Tikrit area and the Al Sahra Airfield, which houses thousands of 4th Infantry Division soldiers. A member of Charlie Company, 223d Engineer Battalion (Task Force Knight), Mississippi National Guard, was able to put his civilian water treatment plant expertise to use and help negotiate the purchase of parts that brought the water treatment plant to full operation.

In addition, personnel from the 14th Engineer Battalion (Task Force Rugged) contracted for 350 loads of rock, gravel, and sand and used 20-ton dump trucks to repair an eroded causeway over the Tigris River. The gravel and sand will also be used to repair road craters in Iraqi Highway 1, which was damaged during the war. The 14th also contracted for equipment to rebuild the causeway—five 20-ton dump trucks, two excavators, two bucket loaders, a fueler, a grader, a water distributor, a roller, and a dozer. Task Force Rugged will provide the remaining equipment necessary for this repair. In addition to the above examples, personnel from the 223d Engineer Battalion negotiated several asphalt contracts to repair the Al Sahra airfield and several large road craters on Iraqi Highway 1 between Tikrit and Mosul.

UXO Clearance

Most of the UXO found in Iraq is submunitions that present a safety hazard to the local communities throughout the country. UXO also posed a similar



U.S. Army photo by SPC Adam Nuelken

A metalworker with the 535th Engineer Company braces a steel door while grinding off the rough spots. Soldiers welded hinges and repaired doors at an elementary school in Al Hurriyah, Baghdad.

hazard to the rebuilding of Highway 1. The 47th Ordnance Company EOD team provided support to remove 150 cluster bomb munitions from three road craters in Highway 1, thus enhancing the safety of the local population. Alpha Company, 14th Engineer Battalion led a mine-clearing armor-protected (MCAP) D7 dozer crew to further clear the route. Additionally, Bravo Company, 14th Engineer Battalion, and the 47th EOD team cleared 51 cluster bomb munitions from a local community (Tall ath Thahab), enabling them to once again use the land for farming.

Engineers

The Task Force Able engineers repaired a local water treatment plant, constructed an improved ribbon bridge across the Tigris River, completed a 500-meter bypass on the Buffalo Soldier Bridge, repaired several major road craters on Iraqi Highway 1, constructed a landfill, and replaced windows in the Tikrit hospital. The 565th Engineer Battalion (Provisional) (Task Force Renegade) constructed an improved ribbon bridge that provided assured mobility for U.S. forces



Soldiers from Bravo Company, 37th Engineer Battalion, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, stand at the bottom of a 20-foot-deep crater made by an American bomb at an airfield in northern Iraq.

and the Tikrit community. Alpha and Charlie Companies of the 14th Engineer Battalion constructed a 250-meter causeway for this bridge. Following its completion on Saddam Hussein's birthday, the bridge was named the "Birthday Bridge."

Similar to this project, the 14th Engineer Battalion established a contract with the community of Az Zawiyah to restore the causeway on the Buffalo Soldier Bridge. On 25 May 2003, the battalion completed work on a 500-meter two-way bypass on the southern side of the Buffalo Soldier Bridge causeway, 20 kilometers north of the city of Bayji, Iraq.

This project was undertaken to provide assured mobility across the Tigris River for Task Force Iron Horse and the local community. Before the bypass was completed, access to the bridge was via a rapidly eroding causeway that barely permitted one-way traffic. If this causeway failed, the nearest passable bridge would be in Tikrit, 60 kilometers to the south. Completion of this project ensures that the people of Iraq have a safe means to cross the Tigris River near Bayji.

The Bayji bridges, 9 kilometers to the south, were destroyed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Charlie Company, 14th Engineer Battalion, undertook this project, which is only the first phase in repairing the causeway to full use. Later phases, which will be accomplished using mostly contracted labor and equipment, include measures to prevent future erosion and reconstruction of the original causeway, thus returning to the Iraqi people a vital lifeline across the Tigris River. Initial construction on the bypass was started on 5 May 2003, enabling one-way traffic. The battalion closed off the causeway and began rebuilding it with the use of Iraqi workers and equipment on 7 June 2003. This causeway is also of vital interest to Task Force Iron Horse as it is one of the division's alternate supply routes.

The 14th Engineer Battalion is repairing Iraqi Highway 1, just north of Bayji. The project is broken into four zones. Before the repair of Zone A, this section narrowed to one lane around one 15-meter-wide hole and a smaller 5-meter-wide hole, the results of an aerial-delivered bomb. A collapsed concrete box culvert that ran beneath the southbound lane complicated the repair. The culvert was demolished using explosives, then it was removed and replaced with new culverts to restore water flow beneath the route. In lieu of box culverts, we used round culverts and sandbag headwalls. Then the crater, along with collateral damage, was filled and compacted to accept traffic.

This is the first of four such repairs planned by the 14th Engineer Battalion. The remnants of an aerial-delivered bomb complicated the second set of craters, Zone C. More than 150 cluster bomblets were destroyed by the 47th EOD team to set conditions for future repairs. Completion of this project removes a bottleneck and ensures that the primary V Corps north-south main supply route remains open as a high-speed line of communication. It also facilitates the use of Highway 1 by local travelers. The use of local materials and equipment on the project is another example of the division's efforts to help Iraqis rebuild Iraq. This repair also prepares this section of Highway 1 to be repaved, restoring it to preconflict condition. The 14th also constructed a city landfill for a local community, just northwest of Tuz, Iraq, which will prevent random dumping of trash in the nearby community.

Infrastructure Assessments

The 14th Engineer Battalion conducted several infrastructure assessments during Operation Iraqi Freedom, which are used to identify future projects. The primary goal was to assess the condition of power, water, oil/gas, and infrastructure using the red, amber, and green rating method. These ratings allow Task Force Able engineers to prioritize future work. The assessments are used to hire local Iraqi workers and equipment, utilize troop labor and equipment, or seek a private cooperation to conduct the repairs.

Bravo Company, 5th Engineer Battalion (Task Force Fighter), conducted the following assessment of the Az Zawiyah.

General

We entered the town and looked for an English-speaking man. We were approached by a man who worked at the Bayji refinery and lives within the town of Az Zawiyah. He is the nephew of the town sheik, who lives farther east within the town (no location given). After a tour of the local water plant, the town deputy mayor, who spoke very good English, approached us. He was a colonel in the Iraqi Helicopter Corps during the war.

Utilities

- **Water.** *The water-pumping facility consists of four pumps from the Tigris River to two (30' x 8' x 15') holding tanks. Connected to the holding tanks are two chlorine-filtering tanks. Water distribution to the town itself consists of two pumps from each tank to the town. Currently, only one pump from the river works. However, there is no filtering of the water, and only one pump to the town actually works. The water pressure to the town is currently two bar (mostly gravity fed). Due to the poor quality of water, most of the town is suffering from dysentery, and a large portion of the town funds are going toward medicine to treat the illness. We have hired two local plumbers to fix the pumps. We have also hired personnel to add 12 kilometers of piping to provide water to the remainder of the town.*
- **Electric.** *The overhead power lines were strung in the 1970s and are in disrepair. Due to the problems with the power grid, there are daily power outages, which last from 2 to 6 hours. This severely degrades the town's quality of life and shuts down the local school.*

Schools

Due to power outages and money, many of the teachers do not come to work each day. As a result, the students are being held back this year in an attempt to help them catch up next year.

The company conducted a similar assessment in the town of Sharquat. The hospital needed some plumbing and carpentry work, and the school needed similar repairs. Task Force Rugged is working to hire someone to repair the plumbing in the hospital and school, and either Task Force Able engineers or contracted labor will perform the carpentry work.

Another key to helping Iraq is restoring the bridges damaged or destroyed through neglect and war. To enable one repair, an assessment was conducted with a representative from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Forward Engineer Support Team of the two damaged bridges in Bayji. These bridges will be repaired through contracted labor.

Limitations

Task Force Able engineers overcame several limitations as they executed Task Force Neighborhood:

Design

Since there were no box culverts available for the Zone A road crater project, we designed a culvert system with round culverts and sandbags as headwalls. The temporary fix should last long enough to allow the Iraqi government to reestablish itself and provide a more permanent solution. We also designed the causeway for the Tikrit Bridge using a geotextile. We constructed the causeway directly on the Tigris River using river rock, gravel, and sand. The geotextile allowed much better compaction of the aggregate.

Language

To overcome the language barrier, we used local community personnel or Task Force Iron Horse interpreters.

Cultural Differences

We adapted our work efforts to accommodate Iraqi culture differences. Since they do not work on Friday, we performed maintenance that day.

Resources

We negotiated the use of local rock quarries, labor, and equipment to overcome some of our resource shortfalls. The MCAP D7 dozer only clears UXO to a depth of 12 inches. Submunitions were found at 24 inches, so we used D9 dozers to overcome this limitation.

Force Protection

No project was started unless a thorough force protection plan was established and executed.

Conclusion

Operation Task Force Neighborhood is vital to the rebuilding of Iraq. Task Force Able engineers continue to assess infrastructure and hire local Iraqis to rebuild their country, while providing the coordination necessary to efficiently prioritize, resource, and manage the projects until the government is reestablished and this role can be turned over to the Iraqi people.



Colonel Vosler commanded the 555th Combat Engineer Group when this article was written. Previously, he served as the Executive Director of Military Programs at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers headquarters in Washington, D.C. He also commanded the 35th Engineer Battalion at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Lieutenant Colonel Turner commands the 14th Engineer Battalion. He previously served as a brigade executive officer and S3 in the 1st Armored Division Engineer Brigade and battalion executive officer in the 40th Engineer Battalion.

Captain Schrock is an assistant S3 in the 14th Engineer Battalion. Previous assignments include platoon leader and executive officer in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 16th Engineer Battalion, and operations and training officer for the I Corps Transformation Office.