

Corps of Engineers completes last demolition in Iraq

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After almost three years of hard and dangerous work, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers celebrated the last major demolition under the Coalition Munitions Clearance Program in Iraq.

Col. John Rivenburgh, commander of the Huntsville Engineering and Support Center, Dr. John Potter, chief of the Ordnance and Explosives Directorate, and Bill Sargent, program manager of the Coalition Munitions Clearance Program, recently traveled to Iraq to witness the last demolition and initiate the next phase of the ordnance destruction work.

“The last demo consisted of over 248 tons of stockpiled ammunition,” Potter said. “Even though this was the last big one, there will still be some minor demolitions.”

The demolition of stockpiled munitions took place at the Arlington Depot, which was originally controlled by Saddam Hussein’s army before the war. The Arlington Depot is located approximately 170 miles north of Baghdad.

“When the U.S. Army started taking over control of the Iraqi depots, they experienced many challenges,” Sargent said. “The Iraqis had no storage or compatibility procedures. High explosive items were stored with detonators, which could cause a big explosion. The Corps organized the depots and folded six depots into two.”

The destruction of ordnance items was taking place almost every day. This demolition contained items that either the new Iraqi Army did not need or the insurgents could use during attacks, such as rocket propelled grenades, hand grenades, landmines and other large ammunition.

The completion of the last demo signifies a change in mission. Instead of a clean-up mission, the Corps will now oversee a depot operation mission.

“One Corps employee per depot will handle quality assurance, contract surveillance and oversee the depot operations,” Sargent said.

The Corps hired a new contractor, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technologies, Inc. The contractor will operate the depots and train the Iraqis to take over running them.

“The Iraq cadre will learn how to maintain, pack and store ammunition, along with securing a depot. When they get it, we will leave,” Potter said. Both Potter and Sargent agreed that their trip was worthwhile and helps them to better understand what deployed employees are experiencing. They would go back if they were needed.

“The experience was eye-opening. I got to see first hand the security issues and appreciate the risks our employees deal with daily,” Sargent said.

“There is a lot you can’t appreciate from 9,000 miles away,” Potter said.