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Ordnance disposal mission in Iraq ends

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Nearly nine years after the Army requested ordnance support, Huntsville's Ordnance and Explosives Directorate, U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, ended its munitions disposal mission in Iraq.

The Coalition Munitions Disposal mission was completed Nov. 12, at the direction of the U.S. Army. CMD stood up Nov. 21, 2008, replacing the Coalition Munitions Clearance mission that had mobile teams conducting ordnance clearance and disposal missions all over Iraq.

"The CMD mission was a static operation, in that all munitions were delivered to a centralized disposal point at forward operating base Hammer where the actual disposal occurred," said Bill Sargent, chief of the International Operations Division. "Complete demobilization from the site was completed Nov. 12; however, the last demolition shot was executed Oct. 24."

Preliminary numbers show 3,731 tons of unserviceable ammunition, 479 tons of enemy remnants of war and 214 tons of munitions belonging to the United Kingdom were destroyed, totaling more than 4,400 tons combined.

Also destroyed in the demo shots were weapons, other sensitive items, expired drugs, etc. Munitions disposed of included artillery projectiles, mines, grenades, rockets, small arms ammunition, some bombs, detonation cord, etc.

"The majority of the munitions and other items disposed of were sent to us by the U.S. Army," Sargent said. "We also destroyed some explosive items for the U.S. Air Force. When the British Army pulled out of Iraq, their excess ammunition also was sent to FOB Hammer where it was destroyed."

The munitions disposal mission started in July 2003 as the Captured Enemy Ammunition Disposal Program. The focus of the CEA mission was the securing of six major captured Iraqi ammunition depots and the disposal of ammunition not being retained for the future Iraqi Army. The CEA mission became CMC and the Depot Operations Program in February 2006. CMC was tasked with the subsurface clearance of previously destroyed ammunition sites in Iraq with a focus on denying Improvised Explosive Device capable materiel to a rising insurgency. The Depot Operations Program was tasked with initially standing up and operating two ammunition depots for the newly formed Iraqi army. One depot was later closed by the Iraqi Army with the other becoming Bayji National Depot.

Under the CMC Program, mobile contractor teams moved from site to site, clearing collapsed bunkers and uncovering buried munitions. When the ammunition sites that were a concern under CMC had been cleared and the depot turned over to the Iraqi army for their own control and operation, the mission was changed from a mobile mission to the CMD effort with a centralized collection point for unserviceable U.S. munitions disposal.

During the five years of the CMC program, more than 346,000 tons of explosive remnants of war were destroyed at 51 clearance sites, denying the enemy from using these hazardous materials for IED that would have caused untold loss of life and property, said Col. Rock Donahue, former director, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Engineers (C7), at the change of mission ceremony.

At the height of the program, 18 mobile teams were operating in Iraq to support the CMC mission, and local national labor and subcontractors were hired at each of the 51 clearance sites.

“The toll on these honorable men and women performing this inherently dangerous mission was high: 43 contractor personnel and an untold number of local nationals lost their lives denying the enemy ammunition, ordnance and cache sites,” Donahue said.