

407th EXPEDITIONARY CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

407th Installations Squadron

407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron

STATIONS

Great Falls (later Malmstrom) AFB, MT, 18 Dec 1953-1 Jul 1957

Tallil AB, Iraq

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

LTC Joel A. Clark, 2006

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

2006 ALI AIR BASE, Iraq - Like the trunk and limbs of a tree, the infrastructure of a base gives its inhabitants certain reliability - places to work, to live and to have fun. And like the tree, the

base will continue to grow, responding to changes in the environment to add or remove certain infrastructure and to repair damage done by the elements.

At Ali Base, Iraq, that job – maintaining the base infrastructure and restoring buildings after any attacks - falls to the men and women of the 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron structures flight, which is made up primarily of Air National Guard members. “We provide flexible facility construction to maintain and improve the structures on Ali Base to sustain the force and to recover the base after an attack,” said Senior Master Sgt. Christopher Foster of the 145 Civil Engineer Squadron, North Carolina ANG, structures shop superintendent.

“We want to make sure we take care of that infrastructure and provide the best possible service to our customers - we want to take care of our Airmen’s facility needs to help them Otis members help keep Ali Air base in repair Tech. Sgt. Paul Jacques stands guard in a Humvee parking lot. Firefighters from the 102nd Civil Engineering Squadron put out a tent fire at Ali Air Base, Iraq. accomplish their missions.” To meet that need, the flight’s operations range through all forms of construction, said Master Sgt. Roger Chouinard, a member of the 102nd Fighter Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base, Mass.

One day we may be fixing tents in Bedrock (the Air Force community) and the next we may be building ductwork for new air conditioning units.” Mornings for the flight begin early -usually starting outside work around 6 a.m. to beat the desert heat, which in July was nearly 120 degrees in the middle of the day. The afternoons, said Sergeant Chouinard, normally are spent working on indoor projects and preparing for the next day’s activities. The mission is somewhat different from that at home for this crew, most of whom are Guard members on a standard four-month rotation.

“Our mission here is much faster and much more critical,” said Staff Sgt. Charles Saunders, deployed from the 117th Air Refueling Wing, a Guard unit in Birmingham, Ala. “I enjoy the ability to serve other folks here and hear their appreciation.” There is a lot more construction to do here than at home, said Staff Sgt. Sean Winchcombe, here from the 131st Fighter Wing, a Guard unit in St. Louis. He appreciates the opportunity to get much more hands-on experience and the sense of accomplishment he gets building something from nothing. “It is important to me to make life better for the Airmen here and to improve the mission,” he said. Their construction work brings together lot of disciplines, said Sergeant Chouinard.

“We have carpenters, masons, welders, sheet metal mechanics and sign makers,” he said. “We construct or work on facilities using metal, lumber and various types of fasteners. We are lucky to have a great inventory of battery-operated tools here that allow us to travel to remote worksites and not have to worry about power. We also have a carpentry shop and a welding area with all the appropriate stationary machinery.” The team has put all its skills to use, said Sergeant Foster, working a number of projects for the installation.

The team extended the vehicle parts warehouse by 1,400 square feet, helping the vehicle maintainers keep their repair parts inside. The parts were originally kept outside in storage boxes, so it was difficult to inventory and access them. They also built additional space for the Ali fitness center, known locally as Muscle Beach, to open up space for more workout equipment, and even put together a dunk tank for Ali July 4 activities. The team’s biggest challenge is to complete all the projects they have and get home safely, said Sergeant Foster. Another big enemy, though, is dealing with the heat. “The heat can really wear you down,” said Sergeant Chouinard. “Sometimes you don’t realize how much it has affected you until it’s too

late.” Even with the heat, the opportunity to build and improve facilities around the base gives the team the chance to meet many of the people at Ali. “It’s nice to know that the job you do is helping make someone else’s work area a more conducive place to work,” Sergeant Chouinard said.

2008 ALI BASE, Iraq – Nine Iraqi firefighters graduated from the Basic Firefighter Skills Course conducted by the 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Fire Department, March 24. The six-week course is aimed at teaching Iraqi students “the basics of fighting fires, search and rescue and life saving skills,” said Chief Master Sgt. Jeffrey Horne, 407th ECES fire chief.

Horne is also the fire chief for the Nebraska Air National Guard. Hazim Nadoom, an Iraqi who has been translating the course for the firefighters since 2006, said the course is working. “We have a guy from two classes ago who was able to save a little baby and a 3-year-old in a house fire because of this training,” he said. Years before those children were saved, Air Force and Iraqi firefighters responded to a hospital fire. “(The Iraqi firefighters’) training and equipment were minimal,” according to an Enabling Forces Assessment, dated Nov. 24, 2006, a compilation of interviews and information about the need to form a training relationship between the two fire departments. The program was stood up by Air Force firefighters and has been continuing since.

The program has two main agendas: to train the firefighters on the basics and to give the Iraqis equipment donated from fire departments in the United States. The Iraqis attend six, three hour training blocks, including courses such as basic fire principles, putting out live fires, or “live burns,” and medical training; all of which are found in a new recruit’s first weeks of training at the Department of Defense Fire Academy.

“Out in town, these guys are just hired and then learn how to fight fires on the job. They don’t attend an academy,” said Tech. Sgt. Robert Bogle, 407th ECES Fire Department assistant chief of training. “Most of these guys have more than a year’s (worth of) experience fighting fires, but they may not understand exactly what they’re fighting or how to fight it safely.” So eight to 10 local firefighters, chosen from more than 1,400 in the area, travel by bus to attend the training in hopes they “take these skills back to those in the fire houses, so they can impact all the firemen that can’t make a class out here,” said Bogle, another member of the Nebraska Air National Guard fire department who is currently deployed in Iraq.

As for the basic principle of firefighting, “we are using very old techniques still and it’s great to learn the latest techniques on how to save people and put out fires,” Hazim said. Although the Iraqis’ techniques may be old and their equipment nearly non-existent, this doesn’t mean the Air Force firefighters can’t learn from their foreign counterparts. “We both learn something from this,” said Horne. “We show them and they show us. They’re very resourceful with what they have.” The assessment detailed the cross-flow of information saying “Iraqi fire fighters utilize hand tools and have taught the U.S. Air Force firefighters very effective extraction skills using locally available tools when reacting to emergency situations.”

“Locally available tools” and old techniques may put the fire out, but if a firefighter is injured in the process, he’s just another victim. “Air Force firefighters are taught to consider their safety first; if you become another casualty you’re in no position to help anybody else,” Bogle said. “(During the class) we spend a lot of time on safety and how to wear their gear properly, because they don’t have this at their fire houses. It’s all new and unfamiliar to them.” For safety

reasons and so the Iraqis can utilize their new training, the Air Force firefighters here try to find departments back home to donate excess equipment.

“They are fighting fires in coveralls and plastic helmets,” he said. “It’s the most important thing they need and they just don’t have enough for the 1,400 firefighters protecting the 750,000 people who live here.” “With the limited equipment and fire protection in buildings, it’s really an uphill battle for them,” the chief said. “That’s why we’re depending on local fire departments back home... the ones who get refitted with all new gear (to) send us their excess.” Although the Iraqis and Americans employ different skill sets and wear different cloths, a firefighter is still a firefighter. “It doesn’t matter what country you’re from, we’re all one family and the Iraqis come in here and joke and have fun just like the rest of the firefighters,” Horne said.

Most people either love them or hate them. Maybe it isn’t that melodramatic, but when people are sweating at their office or trying to sleep after duty hours, they don’t have many good things to say about the heating, ventilation and air conditioning, or HVAC, shop.

“We take one day at a time,” said MSgt Kevin Meyer, 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron HVAC shop noncommissioned officer in charge. “I have very knowledgeable and concerned individuals who know the workings of HVAC equipment and how to keep our fellow Airmen comfortable while dealing with the heat, sand and bugs.”

“Personally, I think half the people probably hate us,” said MSgt Meyer, who is deployed from the Indiana Air National Guard. “But what they don’t realize is this equipment is very old, and we keep nursing these units back to health; they don’t repair themselves.”

During this rotation, the 10-person shop has fixed more than 400 ECU units, air conditioners and refrigerators, MSgt Meyer said. They also service and do routine maintenance on every unit each month.

Blocked air ducts, sand and weather cause wear and tear on the electrical components. “This job is harder to do here mainly because of the different climate,” said SSgt Steven Reed, another HVAC specialist from the Indiana ANG. “Dust and sand are constantly being sucked into condenser coils, and we are dealing with hotter temperatures than back home.” It isn’t just dust being sucked into the units. The shop has pulled out other items, from ping pong balls to soccer balls.

“One of the units that we brought back to our shop to repair (had) at least 50 Styrofoam cups in the return section of the unit,” said MSgt Jeffrey Winchester, who has been doing HVAC work since joining the Vermont ANG in 1985. “It looked like an entire package of cups had gotten sucked into the return air duct.”

Most jobs in a deployed location can be challenging, but they can be rewarding, too. “You can’t just go downtown if you don’t have the correct parts,” said MSgt Winchester. “But it is extremely rewarding when you consider we are a 100 percent Air National Guard shop. Some (of the HVAC specialists) do not do this sort of work for a living, and now they can go to a unit that is not operating properly, troubleshoot and repair it.”

AHMED AL-JABER AIR BASE, Kuwait

Firefighters from the 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron participated in an airfield exercise at Ahmed al-Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, Aug. 16. The exercise was an opportunity for

service members from multiple branches to cooperate on one of the most intense scenarios a firefighter could be called for: an aircraft on fire on the flightline. “We had a simulated MV-22 (Osprey) engine fire,” said Marine Corps Sgt. Casey Madigan, Marine Wing Support Detachment 473rd Expeditionary fire and rescue. “We arrived on scene, the crash truck put out the fire in the engine. Our rescue crew brought out five casualties and we provided them [simulated] medical care.”

Emergency service vehicles arrived on-scene and simulated putting out the fire in the Osprey, then provided immediate medical care to the victims. Firefighters and medical personnel included Airmen, Marines and Sailors. “Working with all branches in the military gets us familiar with protocol procedures that everybody does with our actions and how we handle things on-scene,” Madigan said. “It really helps with real-world scenarios.” Accurately recreating this realism required equipment, aircraft and vehicular support that the fire station provided.

“We use all our crash vehicles like a video game,” said Tech Sgt. Aaron Alcaraz, 407th ECES fire station captain, deployed from the Illinois Air National Guard’s 182nd Airlift Wing. “They have joysticks we use to physically fight the fire before transitioning to exterior operations with traditional handlines and fire hoses.” Alcaraz summed up the results, saying all members benefited from the exercise. “People come from all different parts of the country,” Alcaraz said. “We have to take all of them and bring them into one cohesive fire department, and the only way to do that is to train like we did today.”

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

MSgt Jon Hanson. *Air Force Civil Engineer*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2006.