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Corps, USAKA Open New Kwajalein Vehicle Repair Shop

By Sarah H. Cox, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(KWAJALEIN – NR-04-07) U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Honolulu District and U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA) officials held a ceremonial ribbon-cutting ceremony Jan. 23 to open the newly constructed Vehicle Paint and Prep Shop (VPP) on Kwajalein Atoll.

“They’ve done a beautiful job on this paint and preparation facility,” said USAKA Commander Col. Stevenson Reed at the ceremony in reference to the Corps and the project contractor, San Juan Construction Company.

Since the military began using Kwajalein for military purposes in 1944, combating corrosive damage to vehicles and equipment has been a constant problem. According the Project Manager, Rodney Leong, the main cause of premature equipment and vehicle failure on the island is corrosion caused by the constant exposure to the salt-laden air of the atoll.

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2-2-2 KWAJALEIN VPP

“The new VPP provides USAKA with a safe, modern facility in which to perform rust-protection coating of its vehicles and equipment, to help support the Army’s Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) mission,” Leong said.

Kwajalein’s extreme marine environment makes preserving military and contractor’s equipment an absolute necessity. All new equipment arrives on the island via a long 2,100 mile-long barge journey or a costly airplane flight.

Being able to combat corrosion and properly maintain the equipment on the island saves money on transportation, repairs and replacements and allows more effective and efficient use of limited installation funds.

Honolulu District’s Kwajalein Resident Office (KRO) managed the \$10 million, 20,000 square foot VPP project which includes rooms for hydro blasting and undercoating, booths for abrasive blasting, metallization and paint spraying. The facility also features administrative space and support facilities including utilities, paving, storm drainage, information systems, air conditioning, 25-ton dehumidification and mechanical ventilation.

“In the new metallization, paint spray and undercoating booths, the workers can paint effective barriers on the equipment to combat the harsh elements and keep their equipment operating in excellent running condition for a longer time,” Leong said.

Leong added that in the new hydro blast and abrasive blast booths, small corrosion and rust spots can be removed before they have a chance to spread and ruin the costly and sophisticated equipment.

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3-3-3 KWAJALEIN VPP

Leong says Kwajalein's location "in the middle of nowhere" also presents a big construction challenge. "When contractors begin a project, they have to bring everything they need with them," Leong said.

"Costs are further affected by the fact that there are a limited number of contractors who have the special expertise required, and want to take the risks involved, in performing work in such remote areas as Kwajalein. This drives up the costs and makes for a tough construction market." Leong said.

In fact, Honolulu District had to obtain Dept. of the Army authority to award about 20% over the programmed amount.

"The VPP will definitely save the government money in the long run and will be safer for the environment as well," he added. The VPP employs an abrasive-media recovery system, and air and water filtration systems which prevent harmful emissions from reaching the environment.

The Corps' Kwajalein Resident Office was established in 1964 when the U.S. Army assumed command of the island from the U.S. Navy. The office has administered hundreds of millions of dollars in construction contracts, including recent large projects such as the 13.5 megawatt power plant on Roi-Namur, launch test facilities on Meck, and a cold storage facility on Kwajalein.

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4-4-4 KWAJALEIN VPP

Kwajalein is part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and is three miles long. It is the largest coral atoll in the world with 97 small islands surrounding the world's largest lagoon.

Kwajalein is the home of the Ronald Regan Ballistic Missile Defense Test site, the Corps Kwajalein Resident Office and approximately 2,000 American military and Department of Defense civilians, support personnel and their families.

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