



Public Affairs Office  
Honolulu District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Fort Shafter, Hawaii 96858-5440

Contact: Dino Buchanan  
or Joseph Bonfiglio  
Telephone: (808) 438-9862

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## GWOT Update: District Volunteer Makes a Difference in Iraq

By Dino W. Buchanan  
Honolulu District Public Affairs

**(FORT SHAFTER, HI NR 07-09)** Honolulu District Mechanical Engineer Jon Hosaka returned in February from his 2008 deployment to Iraq where he worked as part of the Japan District's Forward Engineering Support Team - Advanced (FEST-A).

In the last (Honolulu District news magazine) *Pacific Connection* Hosaka detailed one of his reasons for deploying as "that he believes USACE's (U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's) Iraq military construction program's ultimate purpose is to serve the Soldiers."

"I wanted to experience the Soldier's life and to do my part and support where they needed us most - the "rebuilding" of Iraq," Hosaka said in a recent interview.

Hosaka said deploying gave him added field experience while "learning International Building Codes and standards as well as being able to relay good construction practices to the local contractors."

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## **2-2-2 MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

“The results of our efforts were safer facilities and a higher quality level of construction. Our efforts made a big difference.”

He added that the mission impacted the citizens of Iraq on several levels.

“In the short-term, the construction provided steady work for approximately 1,100 contract laborers on site from Iraq and neighboring countries. We were primarily constructing a Theatre Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center (TIFRC), which is essentially a half-way house for persons caught doing questionable activities. The mid-term impact is the TIFRC is designed to take these people off the street, house, educate, train and reform the detainees who will eventually be released back as productive members of society. The short and mid-term benefits help the long term stabilization and positive growth of Iraq. A stabilized Iraq helps make Iraq and surrounding countries safer.”

Hosaka said that no matter what job civilian personnel had, everyone worked to the best of their abilities.

“Many personnel were working in positions that were different from their normal jobs (at home). We had Design Engineers doing Quality Assurance, IT (information technology) personnel doing construction inspections, project managers reviewing designs, unskilled laborers doing construction for the first time and using unfamiliar materials. Everyone pulled together, relied on individual strengths, covered each other's weaknesses and together we got the job done.”

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### **3-3-3 MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

Hosaka said the FEST's "unique blend of experience served Task Force 134 (TF-134) well as we became the on-site engineering team with authority for inspection and acceptance of all portions of work within the TIFRC."

"Building the \$80 million TIFRC was like constructing a small city. The 90-acre TIFRC included administration and dining facilities, laundries, a medical facility, special detainee housing units and cells, dog kennel, classrooms, textile mill, brick factory, recreation areas, water, sewage treatment and electrical plants."

Despite the aggressive work schedule Hosaka said he always felt safe.

"Since the TIFRC was located on the secure compound, we didn't have to travel outside the wire. We did, however, have the opportunity to travel through Baghdad and visit and tour Saddam Hussein's various palaces and compounds."

Hosaka added that there were constant reminders all around - bunkers, armed guards and reports of incidences happening on and off base - that helped keep everyone vigilant.

"Once while taking a shower, I heard a garbled, incomprehensible announcement over the Big Voice intercom. After quickly finishing up, hair wet, toiletry bag in hand, shorts and t-shirt on and towel over the shoulder, I went outside to see Soldiers in full battle gear running frantically around the living area site and banging on doors to get others out. As I was about to duck into a Scud Bunker, one of the Soldiers poked his head out. He must have noticed the obvious concern on my face, then he smiled politely and said 'Oh...this is only an exercise.' I still laugh about it now."

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#### **4-4-4 MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

“Generally the environment is not as bad as you see or read about in the news. Similar to back home, when you read about an incident that may have happened in your town or near your neighborhood, you may ask yourself ‘Did that happen here?’ You may talk about the incident at work, but other than that, you still feel safe at home. The same applies in Iraq - incidents may happen in your ‘back yard’, but you still feel safe.”

Hosaka said although work hours were long and days ran into each other, “working with the local contractors, raising concerns, having the Corps and contractors implement your suggestions, and seeing that the facilities the team constructed met higher quality and life safety standards in comparison to other facilities on base, was very satisfying and rewarding.”

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