



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Helps Introduce New Military Unit to Muthanna-

By Barry Greenberg
Special Correspondent

April 28, 2008

Muthanna Province, Iraq - The State Department's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and elements of the 82nd Airborne Division are engaging in an unprecedented level of cooperation to affect a true reconstruction partnership with Iraqis in this southern province.

On April 21st members of the PRT traveled for the first time via military convoy -- courtesy of the 82nd's 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion (BSTB) -- deep into the province to perform two ribbon-cutting ceremonies marking the completion of local civic engagement projects. The 82nd Airborne will assume "strategic overwatch" or backing up of local Iraqi security forces for Muthanna province on May 23rd. The PRT hopes to create an atmosphere of trust and respect with the local Iraqis as the 82nd is introduced gradually to the province.



PRT Team Leader Paul O'Friel joins a local Iraqi official and LTC Fred Drummond in cutting the ribbon to two new classrooms funded by the PRT at the Al-Wathbah elementary school

According to PRT Team Leader Paul O'Friel, "When local Iraqis see that the entirety of the American presence in Muthanna -- civilian and military alike -- is working to improve their lives through new roads and schools, medical care for the most rural communities, and innovative support in the agricultural sector, then the province will be a safer place. "If we continue to work with civil and tribal leaders of the Province to identify local needs and then actually work to meet those needs, the militias and other insurgent elements will hold far less sway. Doing good is our best weapon," O'Friel asserted. The first destination of the day for the PRT and U.S. military members was to the newly-constructed Al Jareeb Bridge. This bridge replaces a crumbling 1947 structure that was wholly inadequate for modern vehicles. The new, heavy-duty span improves farm-to-market access for a huge rural area on the outskirts of the town of Warka. The local mayor, several sheikhs, and a cross-section of residents joined the Americans to formally open the bridge. Moments later, as if on cue, a truck heavily-laden with cement blocks crossed over the bridge. There was a palpable sense of community pride as the residents watched the truck rumble by -- symbolizing the rebuilding of the province. Next stop: the Al-Wathbah elementary school. This project provided two new classrooms to this poor, rural school. The new construction stands in stark contrast to the rest of the school, which is in dire need of repair. The 82nd Airborne, as part of its new civic action program in the province, also plans to rebuild the school's sanitary facilities.

Lieutenant Colonel Fred Drummond, the commanding officer of the 82nd's BSTB, relished the opportunity to engage with the schoolchildren. He entered one of the small classrooms filled with twenty girls and, with the permission of their teacher, spent a few moments talking about his own children back in the U.S. He then introduced SGT Hemmingway, a female soldier in his battalion, and explained, to a chorus of giggles, that some of the women under his command are "a lot smarter than some of the guys." While Drummond was in the classroom, his soldiers distributed soccer balls and played with several of the schoolboys in the courtyard. These two projects were funded through Quick Response Funds, a special State Department mechanism for development projects in Iraq. During the past year, PRT Muthanna has funded nearly 60 of these projects spread evenly among the major tribal areas of the province.