



With Al-Qaeda Gone, Combat Outpost Construction Begins

By Sgt. Michael Connors, USA
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CAMP VICTORY, Iraq, Jan. 24, 2008 – Just days after a precision air strike rooted out al Qaeda in Iraq operatives in the Arab Jabour area, south of Baghdad, combat engineers arrived to build Multinational Division Center's newest combat outpost.



Army Pvt. Jamie Bennett, from Columbia, S.C., a heavy construction equipment operator with 3rd Platoon, 535th Equipment Support Company, 479th Engineer Battalion, gets a momentary promotion to two-star general by Army Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, commander of Multinational Division Center, during Lynch's visit to Combat Outpost Meade, in Iraq, Jan. 16, 2008. Photo by Sgt. Michael Connors, USA
(Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

On Jan. 15, soldiers with 535th Equipment Support Company, 479th Engineer Battalion, convoyed from Camp Stryker, in Baghdad, to Zambraniyah, 15 miles southwest in southern Arab Jabour, to begin construction on Combat Outpost Meade. Coalition air strikes hit more than 40 targets Jan. 10 to secure the area in support of Operation Marne Thunderbolt.

Army Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, Multinational Division Center commander, visited the area Jan. 16, stopping at Combat Outpost Meade, Patrol Base 2 and a former al Qaeda safe house that was captured and converted to a coalition forces observation point.

"I just want to tell you I'm proud to be here with you," Lynch told the combat engineers gathered around him at Combat Outpost Meade. "You all have had more impact than you'll ever know. ... The whole world is turning right here right now at Combat Outpost Meade. We'll fight the global war on terrorism here so we won't have to fight it back home."

After rallying the troops, Lynch handed out commemorative Task Force Marne pocket knives and his personal coins.

On site for less than two days, the engineers already had graded the ground, and a significant proportion of the outer wall was completed. Soldiers built the wall with Hesco barriers -- wire-framed, fabric-lined containers filled with dirt.

Army Pfc. Charles Brosnahan, from Granton, Wis., explained his unit's mission. "We're just trying to build up a spot so the infantry can come in, clean house and keep their sweep going to push the terrorists further away," he said. "(Soldiers) can't do that without a place to live, so we come out here first and build it up."

Combat Outpost Meade is being cut out of an empty field in the vast rural community. Surrounding land is relatively flat, with a smattering of date palm trees and dry shrubs. Homes are spread out over a checkerboard of colorless, sandy fields and thriving green farmland.

Abrams tanks from 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, and Bradley fighting vehicles from 6-8 Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 3rd Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team, stood guard around the perimeter of the new base.

In what is known as "terrain-denial fire," Kiowa helicopters from the 3rd Infantry Division's 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade fired munitions in the distance at passages leading into the area. The overall scene sent a strong message to any lurking al Qaeda elements that coming back was an impossible proposition.

The terrain denial fire blasts occurred several times per hour. Though startling at first, they blended into the din of heavy equipment construction as the day wore on. The combat engineers went steadily about their work, unfazed by their job shaping land so close to frontline fighting just days before.

The 535th was joined at Combat Outpost Meade by soldiers of Company C, 864th Engineering Battalion. While the 535th got a head start on horizontal engineering -- working the land, the 8-64th will be responsible for vertical engineering -- building the structures.

The new base is scheduled for completion by mid-February, said Master Sgt. Joe Constante, from Kerrville, Texas, the division's engineer noncommissioned officer in charge. Multinational Division Center has built 16 bases since March.

Army Spc. Richard Kunard, from El Paso, Texas, a combat engineer with the 535th, echoed Brosnahan's remarks on the purpose of Combat Outpost Meade.

“Ultimately, it will push the insurgents out of this area,” he said. “If they have no place to stay, they’re always going to be moving, and it will be easier for us to pick them off or locate them and deter any further attacks.”

(Army Sgt. Michael Connors serves with the Multinational Division Center Public Affairs Office.)