

Short annals, big program

Compiled by Julie K. Shoemaker
Public Affairs Office

The Middle East Division (MED) was activated on April 20, 1976, to meet the demands of the growing Saudi Arabia-funded engineering program. Headquartered in Riyadh, it had three districts: Riyadh, Jidda and Al Batin.

Also reporting to the division were the Engineer Logistics Command, responsible for directing and coordinating all logistics activities, and an Ordnance Program Division that worked with the Saudi Arabian Army Ordnance Corps in operating and maintaining its logistics systems for wheeled and tracked vehicles. The MED's rear echelon was located near Winchester, to manage the large volume of design work and award contracts.

"The Corps was chosen for work in Saudi Arabia because we are an organization known for our integrity and our ability to produce quality construction on time at a reasonable cost," said Brig. Gen. Richard M. Wells in 1978. Wells was MED's commander from July 1976 to July 1978.

"We hit the ground running, having assumed construction responsibility for 21 construction contracts worth \$1 billion in what can only be termed as the most important and diplomatically sensitive construction program in the history of the United States Army Corps of Engineers," said Col. Phillip D. Engle, district engineer, Jidda District, on its first anniversary as reported in the April 1978 issue of the division newsletter.

MED assisted the Saudi Arabian government with a \$14 billion design and construction program that included military cantonments, headquarters complexes, housing, air bases, navy bases, port facilities, hospitals, military training centers and schools, and all associated utilities and roads.

According to a 1986 article in the division newsletter, Larry Mathews, chief of Supervision and Inspection Branch, was a part of MED's program in Saudi Arabia beginning in 1975. He reminisced about the early days during a reorganization ceremony in Saudi Arabia. "It all began in the '60s with planning and design efforts severely hampered by the remoteness of the Arabian Peninsula ... Looking across an undeveloped land, pioneering Corps' personnel were awed by the lack of amenities so taken for granted in their homeland ... In an undeveloped town, with practically no electricity, it was a triumph just to survive."

Among the projects during the 10-year existence of MED were a \$320 million Ministry of Defense and Aviation complex (Saudi Arabia's equivalent to the Pentagon), the \$300 million Royal Saudi Naval Forces

community housing complex southeast of Riyadh, the \$1.5 billion King Abdulaziz Military Academy (Saudi Arabia's equivalent to West Point), and the \$6 billion King Khalid Military City.

Maj. Gen. Mark J. Sisinyak, the Corps of Engineers' director of engineering and construction at the time, represented the Corps of Engineers' commander during MED's deactivation ceremony on Sept. 30, 1986. His remarks included praise for work that had far-reaching implications – "way beyond the Corps. Not only was MED's the largest program ever in the history of the Corps, but the work you performed contributed to the [United States'] international relationships and the internal stability of our foreign allies," he said.

This construction formed a portion of the major infrastructure that supported U.S. military operations in Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990-1991.

Outside of Saudi Arabia, the division managed construction contracts for military bases in Oman. MED also saw the beginning of the Corps of Engineers' involvement with the multimillion dollar Peace Vector and Peace Pharaoh projects in Egypt and an \$8 million biomedical research laboratory in Cairo.

Foreign military sales efforts began in Bahrain and Sudan; site surveys were done in Gabon and Mauritania; contracts were awarded for military housing in Liberia; and a computer center for the Air Defense Base in Kuwait was expanded.

A Voice of America transmitter complex was built in Morocco, and transmitter stations were designed for Thailand and Puerto Rico.

Headquarter's Location: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Rear Echelon: Virginia

Districts: Riyadh, Jidda and Al Batin

Other elements: Ordnance Program Division and Engineer Logistics Command

Redesignated Middle East/Africa Projects Office, Sept. 30, 1986

Commanders

Col. Charles T. Williams, February 1973 to June 1976

Brig. Gen. Richard M. Wells, July 1976 to July 1978

Brig. Gen. James N. Ellis, July 1978 to June 1980

Maj. Gen. Ames S. Albro Jr., June 1980 to August 1982

Brig. Gen. George R. Robertson, August 1982 to August 1984

Brig. Gen. James W. Ray, October 1984 to December 1985

Col. R. E. Schroder, December 1985 to June 1987

Rear Echelon Commanders

Col. Donald J. Palladino, May 1977 to May 1979

Col. Daniel D. Ludwig, June 1979 to June 1980

Col. James B. Hall, June 1980 to August 1981

Col. Claude D. Boyd, III, December 1981 to July 1984