



Success Taught Here

Seabees are teaching Iraqis how to place concrete, swing hammers—and rebuild their war-torn nation.

STORY BY LT CHRIS NEISH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PH2(AW) MICHAEL D. HECKMAN
AND BU2 JEROME KIRKLAND

Within days of arriving in the Al Anbar Province, Seabees with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 4 from Port Hueneme assumed management responsibility for the successful Iraqi Civilian Apprentice Program (ICAP).

Think of it as a sandy new version of the TV show “Home Improvement,” but with people who can actually use the tools.

With the ICAP program, basic construction skills have the real potential to evolve into a larger source of inspiration—and a source of community pride. ICAP was created to increase the number of skilled construction workers in Iraq, help reduce unemployment and provide a new way for Iraqi youth to enter an emerging workforce with a foundation of skill to rebuild Iraq. Seabees provide the classroom and hands-on training for Iraqi men ages 14 to 25.

“I have a sense of excitement,” Builder 3rd Class Robbie Moore of Scroggins, Texas, said of his new assignment. “I’m interested in teaching them what we know and building from there.”

The work at ICAP begins each day with a convoy brief that starts long before sunrise. Shortly thereafter, a necessarily heavily armed and well-defended convoy takes to the streets to get to the ICAP worksite. When the Bees enter the site, always visible everywhere are a large number of Marines providing ample force protection. Feeling safe, the ICAP students can concentrate on their roles—as students learning essential

construction skills.

Within an hour, more than 38 ICAP students arrive in the classroom, don their construction clothes, safety boots and hardhats. Fifteen of these students had just graduated the first phase of the program the day prior and now make up the primary workforce providing direct labor to construct their projects.

During the morning hours, 23 newer students received some classroom training on construction fundamentals and then entered the construction site to practice their basic construction skills.

Seeing two recent ICAP grads teaching new students surprised some of the Seabee ICAP crew. Moore remarked that it demonstrated how ICAP was successfully imparting critical skills.

“I am very pleased to see this leadership from within. It shows a strong sense of character and willingness to take charge,” Moore said. “These two are natural leaders who lead by example and possess strong work ethic. Every day, they listen to the interpreters and then direct students and other graduates on what to do,” said another Seabee instructor. “They demonstrate how to use a hammer, a square, tape measure, generator, circular saw and acetylene torch. Within minutes, the new students repeat the same processes they learned from their Iraqi instructors.”

The two hard-charging Iraqi men now serving as teachers had been the most distinguished ICAP graduates of the class



that graduated the day before. It didn’t take long for their new apprentices to cycle through the round-robin training and start learning basic construction skills critical to developing a solid foundation for consistent, quality construction practices.

The result of these evolutionary steps in the ICAP program is that Iraqis are



The Seabee-led ICAP construction skills school is churning out numbers of Iraqis who can help rebuild their own nation (left). CDR Willington Lin, CO of NMCB 23, officiated at a graduation ceremony marking matriculation of 17 more trained students (below). "Iraqis rebuilding Iraq begins with each one of you; I wish you luck as construction tradesmen." Lin presented each graduate with a completion certificate and a large, donated tool kit.



rebuild Iraq so we can be great again."

It's easy to see by their enthusiasm that Iraqi construction students are proud of their work and are gaining confidence as they learn. Many of these students have fostered friendships with classmates that extend outside of ICAP.

To facilitate outplacement of ICAP graduates into the Iraqi construction force, Iraqi Ministries of Labor are maintaining a list of former ICAP students so contractors can hire graduates who have known construction skill sets. Additional measures to place graduates into jobs is promoted by writing clauses into work contracts that give Iraqi contractors incentives for hiring ICAP graduates.

Further, Iraqi contractors conducting new business with the local officer in charge of construction contracts are given a short brief about ICAP. They are

able to conduct on-site job interviews with ICAP graduates.

The ICAP students have identified many positive results directly attributable to their construction training. Day-to-day contact with them confirms that graduates have earned respect within their communities and experience a sense of ownership and pride by rebuilding their own country.

One of the older students summed it up succinctly.

"I take what I learn here and have used

it to make my home better" the student said with a smile. Soon many local communities will see benefits from increased stabilization because of this program.

An American volunteer group called "Spirit of America" (SoA) has helped provide the tools and resources to support the ICAP program—including impressive tool kits that are awarded at graduation. The kits are maintained at the ICAP site for six weeks or until graduates earn work elsewhere. Experience has demonstrated that students develop additional confidence and a sense of ownership by using their own tools.

Former First Naval Construction Division Commanding Officer RADM Charles R. Kubic told the SoA organizers, "The ICAP students have been very pleased to receive the tool belts. One student said he had never seen such high-quality tools and another has placed his tools on display at his home so his family and friends can see the impressive set of tools.

"The Spirit of America tool kits have provided an additional and tangible incentive for these brave young Iraqi ICAP students to resist pressures to join anti-Iraqi forces bent on the destruction of their emerging free society. This has made these tool kits instrumental to the success of ICAP and therefore to the success of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*."

As the successes of ICAP continue to grow, the seeds of Iraq's peaceful future are planted. 🌍

helping other Iraqis teach how to rebuild their own country. Through an Iraqi translator, one student said, "I am earning decent money for my family while I learn valuable construction skills. My family can provide more for meals because of the extra money I bring home weekly."

"I am respected in my family and village because of the job I have," another student said through a translator. Another student added, "Although some of us must be careful about security concerns, it is important we learn how to build. We must