

Infantry Marches into INSTALLATION

Story by Grant Sattler



Israeli Ministry of Defense Director General Amos Yaron, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer and Brig. Gen. Merdith "Bo" Temple, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers North Atlantic Division, cut the ribbon July 15, 2003, for the Southern Infantry Training Base, marking the completion of the first of three installations to be built under the Wye River Memorandum program.

"This first of the bases sets a positive focus for the program," said Kenneth Goldberg, Southern Resident Office, Resident Engineer. "It shows that the Corps with its partners can deliver a quality product. We've done that to great success and to our customer's great satisfaction."

The base construction is one of the concrete steps lined out in the 1998 agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed at Wye River, Md. Funding for the bases — \$42 million for the Southern Infantry Training Base and \$266 million altogether — was included in the Fiscal Year 2000 Consolidated Appropriation Act as a Foreign Military Sales case authorized under the Arms Export Control Act.

The new bases provide a place for Israeli Army training activities in the West Bank to redeploy to within Israel. The Israel Defense Forces Paratroopers of the 35th Brigade now occupy the new base, just two years after ground was broken.

Construction began mid-May 2001 on the Southern Infantry Training Base situated near Shomryyi, about 20 kilometers north of Beersheva in the Negev

desert region. Although delayed by two of the worst winters on record for the region, and the precautionary withdrawal of U.S. personnel during Operation Iraqi Freedom, key facilities and infrastructure were all ready a month and a half ahead of the contract completion date. "The Israelis were able to move in before the contract completion date and begin training because the core facilities and systems were ready," Goldberg said.

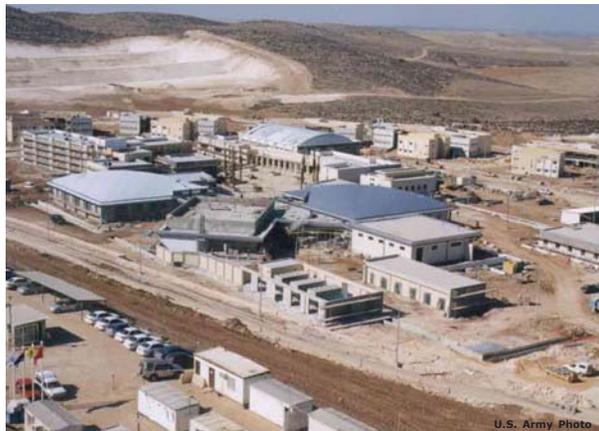
Construction was done as a joint venture by Solol-Boneh and Minrav Holdings Ltd. Goldberg said the contractor adapted well to the Corps way of doing business and received high compliments from the Israeli Ministry of Defense. "The MOD, our customer and partner in this project, said the contractor performed honorably and delivered in both quality and performance," Goldberg said.

Under the Wye River program, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District Israel Program Office is also managing the construction of a second infantry training base near Hadera for the Golani Brigade and a reserve division storage base east of Tel Aviv. The Northern Infantry Training Base mirrors the southern base in design, but is site modified for a hilltop location adjacent to an existing Israel Defense Forces training camp. All of the installations are of Israeli design.

As the first major military construction project the Corps of Engineers has done in Israel since building Ovda and Ramon Air Bases in 1979-1982, the Corps has benefited from the Southern Infantry Training Base experience. "I think we've learned to improve on our

▲ **Southern Infantry Training Base is the first of three bases constructed under the \$266 million Wye River program.**

▼ **New barracks facilities.**



U.S. Army Photo



U.S. Army Photo



Courtesy

▲ **Aerial view of base as it nears completion.**
▶ **Kenneth Goldberg and Michael Iarosis discuss construction progress of the Southern Infantry Training Base.**



U.S. Army Photo

cooperation and coordination with foreign customers and construction contractors," Goldberg said. "We've also shown that the Corps can help establish and maintain partnerships to make sure everyone is working together with a clear goal in mind." Michael Iarosis, Israel Program Office Resident Program Manager, said the Southern Infantry Training Base is a perfect example of a successful Project Delivery Team engagement and execution. "In addition to the Corps elements, the PDT included the IDF Project Manager, IDF-managed Israeli designers, and the Ministry Of Defense Construction Department providing supplemental Quality Assurance support and in-country administrative assistance with the Israeli Government," he said.

The 10 company quarters areas, company headquarters, staff housing and all the support facilities of the Southern Infantry Training Base are located in one of the isolated military reserve areas used by the Israelis for training.

Goldberg said the Southern Infantry Training Base is a new concept in facilities for the Israelis in terms of design and quality. "Unlike other Israeli bases that have been built piecemeal over time, this base is a first-class facility designed to fit into the overall training concept for fighting companies," he said. The facility houses infantry trainees together for both basic and advanced training to benefit unit cohesion.

"All of the Israeli design and planning team members involved in the project had served in the Israeli Army, many with combat experience,"

Goldberg said.

"They said they were building the base for their children, based on their experiences in training and combat."

Israel Defense Forces Logistics Branch Construction Center designers considered the

psychological aspects of training a cohesive infantry company and the impression the design and layout of the facility will make upon trainees.

While most of the southern base is straightforward vertical construction, all of the infrastructure — potable water, fire suppression systems, electricity, communications, sewer lines, and drainage culverts had to be built before any buildings were begun. The installation's positioning across a narrow hill valley, bisected by a rainy season stream called a wadi, required that a giant culvert be installed beneath the site and 360,000 cubic meters of earth and stone to be drilled, blasted and dug from the hillsides. Three quarters of that material was reused as fill in low places and as berms for 14 weapons firing and maneuver lanes in two ranges that are part of the base. Topsoil from the cuts was saved and stones were crushed into gravel on site for compaction into pads to serve as level foundations for buildings. But the base itself is by no means flat — facilities are positioned at varied elevations.

Although the base's mission is utilitarian, aesthetics were also considered. The MOD/IDF design incorporates regional style with cut stone facades along the main street and rooftops designed to hide unsightly air conditioning units.

Compared to training locations now used, the southern base and its sister base, the Northern Infantry Training Base, have larger rooms, more barracks space, more common use areas, a larger, more efficient dining facility, a gymnasium and running track.

Nevertheless, it is their new locations within Israel that trainees and their families will most appreciate.

For Goldberg, who returns to the Corps of Engineers Philadelphia District and the dredge McFarland, being a part of the Southern Infantry Training Base project was a privilege.

"Working with a dedicated group of people who are extremely supportive of our efforts to assist them during a critical time in their nation's history has been both a pleasure and an honor," Goldberg said.