

A Steel of a Deal at Camp Anaconda



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Camp Anaconda, Iraq

I had always known that contingency contracting was going to present challenges, but I was not quite ready for the initiation I received at Camp Anaconda, Iraq. Once there, I inherited approximately 50 open contracts from my predecessor. In addition, there were a dozen new contracts that were assigned to me on my first day. I remember wondering out loud, “Where do I begin?”

There were various tasks set before me that needed immediate attention, and I began the methodical process of organizing everything. At the same time, I needed to meet with new customers, soldiers and officers as well as contractors and vendors, most of whom were Iraqi citizens. For each contract, I identified the greatest need and then matched those demands with the vendors who could best fulfill the needs

through the current bidding process. Initially, this method was slow going, but then I developed a Web site that listed all of my bids.

With all of my bids organized in order of submission, discounting any extenuating circumstances, I made force protection my first priority, as did many other contracting officers. I was particularly interested in getting the military escort Humvees outfitted with better armor. The situation in Iraq involves asymmetric warfare, which makes transporting supplies throughout the country in the ongoing effort to rebuild Iraq extremely hazardous. The Iraqi vendors are often hampered in their efforts to conduct business due to threats on their lives. Thus, traveling between their places of business in Baghdad and our logistical base at Camp Anaconda posed a dangerous proposition. The primary mode of transportation for the escorts was the Humvee. None of the Humvees had armored protection for our soldiers and the Department of Defense (DoD) was still testing a variety of steel for approval.

One day while organizing and initiating contracts, a captain came by to tell me excitedly that he had found a local vendor who could cut steel doors for the Humvees. “Great,” I said. “Have you





tested the steel to see if it will stop ballistics?”

“Tested?” he replied with a puzzled look.

“Yes, you know, shoot it with real bullets to see if it will protect you and your soldiers.”

“Well, no sir, we didn’t do that, but it’s got to be better than what we have.”

“O.K.,” I said, “Let’s do this. Have him cut a piece of steel, one foot by one foot, take it down range about 20-25 meters and ‘fire it up’ with 5.56, 7.62 and 9 mm rounds. Bring me back the results. If it stops bullets, I’ll have the guy sign a contract.”

A couple of days went by before the captain brought back the piece of steel...full of holes. “Sir, this steel won’t work for us.”

“Yes, I see,” I said. “I am asking all the local vendors who work with steel to submit a one-foot-by-one foot sample of their products. Would you be willing to test them once I receive them?”

“Most definitely,” he replied.

Shortly thereafter we found what we needed. Mr. Al Bashir’s product was 6 mm thick, and at a 20-meter distance it stopped all of the above-

mentioned rounds with few to no indentation marks. I was not only impressed by these results but was even more impressed with the price. Mr. Bashir would fit an entire Humvee with four doors, four bottom plates on the floor and four plates on the back for a fraction of what I had expected.

During my seven months in Iraq, I signed at least a dozen contracts with Mr. Bashir to fit more than 3,000 vehicles in northern Iraq with protective, armored steel plates. Many of the “battle captains” would later testify that their soldiers were saved from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other rounds because of this added protective measure. Frequent post-testing was conducted to ensure honesty and integrity.

When my time was over in northern Iraq and I handed over my responsibilities to my replacement, I assured the soldiers and Mr. Bashir that these services would continue.

Our nation owes a great deal of gratitude to those Iraqi citizens who have risked their lives to provide the products that have saved our lives as well as those of countless soldiers performing their daily missions.

(Above) Iraqi contractors installing the armored plates onto the Humvees.
(Opposite) Maj. Meehan standing in front of his former contracting office.