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**BRITISH ARMY WORKSHOP EMPLOYS LOCAL IRAQI MECHANICS**

When the war against Saddam was raging earlier this year, many of the residents of Umm Qasr, a port town in southern Iraq, thought that the Coalition Forces were a threat to their well-being. All that has changed now, and many of the locals are actually employed by the British Army and enjoy working alongside their military counterparts.

“When I decided to apply to work with the British, many of my neighbours were angry with me,” says former marine engineer, Auday Salim. “But now that they see how the Army is helping to make things better in our town they are much happier.” He acknowledges that there are trouble-makers who will attempt to disrupt the progress of the Coalition, but says that his experience is that the British are kind-hearted and good to work with.

Applicants hoping to work in 5 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineer’s (REME) workshop had to prove their mechanical skills by completing two days of practical tests. The role requires mechanics to complete major vehicle repairs, such as engine and gear box changes. Auday passed with flying colours, and had the additional benefit of a good command of the English language.

Auday and 11 others are collected from Umm Qasr by the REME, and returned home again at the end of the day. They are provided with lunch prepared by the Army chefs, and are allowed to take an extra half hour’s lunchbreak for prayers. In return, they often bring a traditional breakfast to share of lamb kebabs freshly prepared by their wives.

The workshop detachment, staffed entirely by TA soldiers, is the envy of the camp. “Everybody wants these lads. They are excellent at what they do, and are prepared to work hard,” says Sergeant Major Steve Hopper. He says that relations are very good with the workers, and that this has had a positive influence upon relations with the residents of Umm Qasr as a whole.

“I would like to invite the British soldiers to my home,” says Auday. “And perhaps one day I will be able to visit them at home in England.”

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**MORE INFORMATION FROM: Captain Gemma Hardy**