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COALITION FORCES RE-ERECT LOOTED PYLONS

VITAL repairs to electricity lines in southern Iraq are set to accelerate after Coalition Forces perfected a new method of replacing damaged pylons.

British Army engineers and a crew from the Royal Air Force used a Chinook helicopter to lower a repaired pylon back into place outside Az Zubayr.

The new technique means pylons can also be replaced in the southern Marshes, where the ground is too boggy for conventional cranes.

The Chinook helicopter from 1310 Flight, based at Basrah airport, took 30 minutes to lift the 4.5 tonne pylon and lower it into place. On the ground soldiers from 37 Armoured Engineer Squadron and Iraqi engineers from the Ministry of Electricity pinned the pylon into place.

The job took close co-ordination between the helicopter and the ground, especially as winds were gusting to 30 knots.

Squadron Leader Simon Paterson (31), who piloted the Chinook, said it took a lot of concentration to get the pylon in place.

“We literally had to move it inch by inch to get in there,” he said. “It was about as difficult as I thought it would be. We’re very pleased we managed to get it where it had to go.”

Major Alex Hilton, of 37 Armoured Engineer Squadron, said that by using the helicopter pylons could be replaced in places which were otherwise totally inaccessible.

“This method is a lot faster than trying to rebuild a pylon and re-erect it by hand,” he said. “Many of the pylons also have to go into the marshes, and this will make it a lot easier to do that.”

“There are 30 pylons to erect between here and Al Faw. The quicker we can get the pylons up the quicker we can get lines up and get electricity to people.”

The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity is also working hard to repair the damaged power-lines, which were demolished by looters looking for copper cables.

“The new cables will be aluminium, not copper, so hopefully they will not be a target for looters,” Maj Hilton said.

The lines will also be guarded by the military and security forces from the Ministry of Electricity.

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