

Erbil hosts Iraq's first scheduled airline service

Combined efforts of Iraq civilian and U.S. military personnel help restore commercial travel to Iraq

By Tech. Sgt. Russ Wood
506th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron

While it may not be possible for most Americans to travel to Iraq, many western countries have the opportunity thanks to the collaborative efforts between the U. S. military and Erbil International Airport.

Beginning Dec. 11, Erbil has regularly scheduled flights to and from Vienna, Austria. This wouldn't have been possible without hard work of the Airmen of Kirkuk Regional Air Base.

The 506th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron Combined Enroute Radar Approach Control provides air traffic control service for the flights to and from of Erbil. Controlling aircraft traffic into Erbil isn't new for the Kirkuk controllers since several Middle East companies already provide charter service.

However, this marks the first scheduled commercial airline flights into Iraq since 2003, requiring the development of new procedures for the Erbil facility.

"The combined efforts of 1st. Lt. Derek Molloy and the airfield operations flight and the Multi National Coalition-Iraq officials developed a number of new procedures," said Senior Master Sgt. Rich Sironen, CERAP Chief Controller.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Gene Lappe

Staff Sgt. April Brown and Airman 1st. Class Michael Edmonds, 506th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron Combined Enroute Radar Approach Control, monitor and coordinate the flow of aircraft transiting northern Iraq or landing and departing from Kirkuk AB ensuring a safe flying environment is maintained at all times. The 506th EOSS CERAP also provides the same control for four Army airfields and two civil international airports, including Erbil, Iraq, where the first regularly scheduled flights from a western nation began Dec. 11.

"These efforts produced instrument approach procedures, additional airspace for positive control of Erbil arrivals, and a Memorandum of Understanding between Kirkuk Air Control Center and Erbil Advisory (soon to be Erbil Tower)."

Other Kirkuk agencies have also played a part in this success. The 506 Expeditionary Communications Squadron established communications landline with Erbil Tower.

Also, Maj. Doug Benton, 506 Expeditionary Civil En-

gineering Squadron, performed a pavement evaluation to validate whether runways and taxiways at Erbil could support Air Mobility Command assets.

Airman 1st Class Molly Kesteloot, 506th EOSS CERAP, recently traveled to the ancient city while attending a meeting with the Erbil Airport authority in an effort to standardize air traffic control procedures.

"The AEF 3/4 team has definitely left a lasting impression on Northern Iraq and has helped this emerg-

ing nation make a giant leap forward in the rebuilding process," said Sergeant Sironen.

The city is one of the largest in Iraq and sits about 50 miles north of Kirkuk.

Primarily Kurdish, it is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and has many tourist attractions in the form of archaeological and historical sites.

At this time, the U.S. State Department prohibits the general US population to travel to Iraq. One day, however, when the insurgents have laid down their weapons and calm is restored over this historic country, Iraq may become a top tourist destination for people the world over.

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