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Potential war with Iraq brings work to local firm CTL | Thompson doing quality-control jobs on military island

BY PAT FERRIER

The possibility of war with Iraq is bringing new urgency and meaning to work being done by a local company on the tiny island of Diego Garcia in the heart of the Indian Ocean.

CTL | Thompson, a soils and materials testing firm with offices in Denver and Fort Collins, has a \$13 million contract for three jobs on the British island inhabited solely by the U.S. and British military.

Diego Garcia, 1,000 miles from the southern tip of India and 3,000 miles south of Iraq, acts as a refueling and maintenance station for long-range bombers, including the B-2 Stealth and B-52 bombers.

The island, which the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* once referred to as "Gilligan's Island with guns," is home to about 1,700 military personnel and 1,500 civilian contractors. Only about 50 troops are British, according to British news media.

CTL | Thompson, 375 East Horsetooth Road, is providing quality control management on soils and materials being used to build a fuel-spill containment wall around fuel storage tanks, several munitions igloos for the storage of bombs and an aircraft maintenance facility, said Vice President Jeff Groom.

"The climate of an island like Diego Garcia, 7 degrees south of the equator, is hard on buildings," Groom said.

"The salt in the air and in the water had to be taken into consideration when establishing the concrete proportions necessary to create lasting structures."

Seth Buckman of Fort Collins has been on the island almost a year and is expected home in March, said Tom Chapel, branch manager of the Fort Collins office.

Security is tight on the island, which is accessible only by military transport.

Although Buckman has access to e-mail and is a civilian working on the military base, all media questions are required to go through public relations personnel, he wrote in an e-mail to the *Coloradoan*.

Groom, Buckman's boss, said CTL | Thompson's role on Diego Garcia is giving employees a new sense of pride in their work.

"Honestly, it sounds too corny, but I personally feel a great sense of pride," Groom said.

"These guys are doing a great job. We know what we're doing will help (the United States) do our job to a certain level. I think it's great."

The job itself is not very difficult, Groom said, "but knowing what it's going toward makes it different."

CTL | Thompson got the contract through San Juan Construction, a Montrose company that's building the three projects.

"The work initially came about because of Afghanistan," Groom said. "Things were hot and heavy there, and that accelerated the work."

The contract required all materials they were going to use to be tested prior to using them, Groom said.

The lab that does the work needed accreditations that two of CTL's main competitors lacked, he said.

"The job literally fell in our laps," Groom said. CTL | Thompson also has bid on additional work on Diego Garcia that hasn't been awarded yet.

Buckman's two dozen co-workers in Fort Collins keep in touch with their colleague via e-mail, Chapel said.

He sends us information and updates, and we send him Christmas cards and things."

Whether Buckman gets home on schedule depends on if and/or when war breaks out.

"There have been times during this project when people were unable to leave the island if they increased the level of security," Chapel said.

"Seth could come home sooner or could be there longer."

In the meantime, Chapel said Buckman is spending his off hours deep-sea fishing and playing golf.

"I don't think he's hurting too bad. It sounds like a pretty pleasant place to be in terms of the weather. ... It's always sunny."