

# Soldiers Help Preserve Archeological Sites

By Sergeant Sean Kimmons

Some 4,000- and 5,000-year-old artifacts from Iraq's multicultural past were discovered on Kirkuk Air Base, in Iraq, when soldiers of a Reserve engineer battalion dug into a hill while gathering dirt for defense barriers. Once the engineers found the artifacts, they stopped, backed off, and notified the brigade tactical operations center. The next day, an officer—who was an anthropology major from St. John Fisher University—went to the site to verify whether or not it was an archeological find. The hill was validated as an archeological site, as were the nearby hills in the vicinity of the base. It's amazing that soldiers can step outside their living quarters and be at the doorstep to ancient civilization. US soldiers are operating in and protecting this birthplace of civilization.

Throughout the month of May, local archeologists from the Museum of Antiquities were invited on base to identify artifacts and other potential archeological sites. As Americans, our policy is to respect the cultures of the countries we are in. That's one of our main missions in civil affairs. The Director of the Ministry of Antiquities,

who appreciated the efforts of the Army and Air Force in safeguarding Iraq's ancient history, stated through an interpreter, "I realize how sincere [the Army and Air Force] are to the Iraqi culture. Before I knew about this, I was concerned about the sites beneath the earth in the area. Now I know they are here trying to protect and preserve these sites for the Iraqi people."

At first, the site was believed to be a grave site. Closer examination revealed that its animal bones and pottery were related to an ancient settlement and not a contemporary mass grave. Some of the pottery found on the base is about 5,000 years old and linked to the Yorghun Tepe or Nuzi people of the Hurrian civilization.

Nuzi was a provincial agricultural town in the small Hurrian kingdom of Arrapha, whose capital is today buried under Kirkuk. Arrapha was situated along the southeastern edge of the area under Mittanian domination. Babylonia laid to the south and to the west was Assyria, whose revolt against the Hurrian kingdom of Mittani probably led to



Photo by Sean Kimmons

Pottery pieces found on Kirkuk Air Base, Iraq

Nuzi's destruction in the 14th century and ultimately contributed to Mittani's collapse.

In 1927, Harvard University excavated the town of Nuzi, which is about 10 miles south of Kirkuk. One remarkable item recovered from this site was the world's oldest map, which was etched on rock dated at 5,500 years. The Iraqi territory was known as Mesopotamia, which is credited as being the cradle of civilization and its inhabitants as the initiators in the development of the agricultural system, a writing system, and metal alloys.

Iraq is a country sitting on top of the world's oldest and most significant history of mankind. This is why it is important to safeguard these particular sites on base until the Ministry of Agriculture in Baghdad decides what to do with them. For now, it will be our responsibility to make sure no damage is done to the sites.



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Examining ancient artifacts discovered on Kirkuk Air Base, Iraq