

Between sea and sand



ORIGINALLY A TINY FISHING COMMUNITY ON THE EDGE OF THE DESERT, RAS LAFFAN IN THE NORTHWEST OF QATAR HAS BECOME OVER THE LAST EIGHT YEARS WHAT IS CURRENTLY THE FASTEST-DEVELOPING INDUSTRIAL SITE OF THE GAS INDUSTRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. IN THIS GIGANTIC, CONSTANTLY GROWING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, THERE'S PLENTY OF POTENTIAL FOR A MULTI-TRADE SERVICE PROVIDER LIKE THYSSENKRUPP XERVON.

TECHNICAL MANAGER Axel Bub's team, still familiar in Ras Laffan as "Peiniger International Qatar", has a good reputation among the biggest state-run companies Qatar Petroleum and Qatargas as well as most of the larger plant engineering companies. Since September 2005 for example, almost 50 of the industrial service providers have been in action on a gas production platform in the North Field, upgrading the corrosion and fire protection systems – and word of their fine work gets around in a country that attaches a lot of importance to personal recommendation. "We owe this to our excellent workmanship, the specialist knowledge and skills of our project managers and staff, and our punctuality," explains Bub, "not to mention project preparation and logistics just-in-time."

In Ras Laffan itself, the first major contract was successfully completed in December. For the construction of the new ORYX-GTL Plant – a joint venture between Qatar Petroleum and South Africa's Sasol (South African Synthetic Oil) – 50,000 square meters of large tanks were coated within a year. In GTL (gas-to-liquid) plants, gas is converted into liquid products. The ORYX Plant worth three billion US dollars will go into operation in March 2006 and produce 34,000 barrels of fuel per day. ThyssenKrupp Xervon was responsible for the external and internal coating of the 18 new liquid product tanks, inclusive of the necessary scaffolding. The last of the tanks measuring 72 meters in diameter and up to 21 meters in height was completed before Christmas and handed over to the plant engineer for trial operation. Being able to complete this work within a year is no mean feat in view of the summer heat. At temperatures of up to 48°C and conditions in the tanks like in an oven, some of the work has to be shifted into the night hours and fans have to be used for a supply of cool fresh air. This

sounds simpler than it is, because cooling the air raises the humidity, particularly if the air comes from the sea. "We had to closely monitor the dew point, because coating has to stop if humidity exceeds 85 percent," Bub recalls. These values persisted sometimes for days, but thanks to the personal commitment of individual employees, the schedule was kept to all the same. During the end phase of the project, the operations managers were on site for up to 16 hours per day to organize the work in consultation with the client and other trades involved and make efficient use of every hour. This way decisions could be taken on the spot and all resources effectively exploited.

For the Qatargas 2 LNG plant, ThyssenKrupp Xervon has now bid for the execution of the corrosion protection and scaffold erection work. For the next 20 years, a total of 16 LNG and seven GTL projects as well as five gas and seven ethylene plants are planned in Ras Laffan. The port, already one of the world's biggest LNG export ports, is also being extended. Seven terminals are scheduled to join the existing four by 2009.

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Qatar's future is in natural gas. The emirate's North Field is the world's largest continuous natural gas field with established exploitable reserves of 900 billion cubic feet. As a consequence of the discovery of these huge gas resources, Ras Laffan Industrial City was created north of Doha at the end of the Nineties. Today, this industrial complex already has the world's biggest gas liquefaction plants and its own port. In 2002 production of liquefied gas came to 13.5 million tonnes. The Qatargas 1 LNG plant, in operation since 2004, produces an extra 10 million tonnes per year.