



THE

FREEDOM BUILDER

November 2010

MAGAZINE



Deployed families

Family time is all the time for select
Corps of Engineers employees

Jalalabad flood

The Tide Turns On Jalalabad Area

New resident office

Corps of Engineers prepping for build-up
at German air base

Camp Morehead's elite commandos

Esprit De Corps at Camp Morehead Gives
Afghans Edge on Assuming Control of Installation

Street lights

Afghan officials, Army Corps of Engineers
erecting solar streetlights in Kabul



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
Afghanistan Engineer District

District Commander
Col. Thomas Magness

District Chief Master Sargeant
Chief Master Sgt. Forest Lisner

Chief of Public Affairs
David A. Salazar

Layout & Design
Joseph A. Marek

Staff Writer & Multimedia Specialist
Hank G. Heusinkveld

Staff Writer
Paul R. Giblin

The Freedom Builder is the field magazine of the Afghanistan Engineer District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and is an unofficial publication authorized by AR 360-1. It is produced monthly for electronic distribution by the Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Afghanistan Engineer District. It is produced in the Afghanistan theater of operations.

Views and opinions expressed in The Freedom Builder are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Articles or photographic submissions are welcome and should arrive in PAO by the 15th of each month preceding publication. They can be mailed to the below address or they can be e-mailed. If electronically submitted, all stories should be in Word document format and all photographs should be high resolution and include photo caption information.

All photographs appearing herein are by the Afghanistan Engineer District Public Affairs Office unless otherwise accredited.

The mission of The Freedom Builder is to support the Commander's Internal Communication Program for the Afghanistan Engineer District. It also serves as the Commander's primary communication tool for accurately transmitting policies, operations, technical developments, and command philosophy to the Afghanistan Engineer District.

Submissions can be e-mailed to:
AED.PublicAffairs@usace.army.mil

Submissions can be mailed to:
Public Affairs Office
USACE-AED
ATTN: Qalaa House
APO AE 09356

COM: 540-678-2984, DSN: 312-265-2984

The Freedom Builder Magazine is available online at
www.aed.usace.army.mil

Cover Image:



Maj. William Nordal
pacos off a site where a
new Corps of Engineers
area office is being
built.

(Full story on pg. 11)

Photo by | *Paul Giblin*





CONTENTS

Volume 8, Issue 3

November 2010

www.aed.usace.army.mil

FEATURES from the NORTH

6- Deployed families

Family time is all the time for select Corps of Engineers employees.

8- Jalalabad flood

The Tide Turns On Jalalabad Area Office.

11- New resident office

Corps of Engineers prepping for build-up at German air base.

14- Camp Morehead's elite

Esprit De Corps at Camp Morehead Gives Afghans Edge on Assuming Control of Installation.

16- Street lights

Afghan officials, Army Corps of Engineers erecting solar streetlights in Kabul.



COMMANDER'S

By | Col. Thomas H. Magness

Column

We're committed to increase both construction and training in AED-N in 2011

To understand how we're going from good to great within the Afghanistan Engineer District-North, we have to understand very clearly what our mission is. Our mission is building Afghanistan.

There are two critical components to that: Build the infrastructure projects that we've been asked to build; and build capacity. That second part involves fostering the technical, engineering and construction proficiency of Afghan workers to such a degree that we can confidently say, "Our mission here is complete," and hand it over to them.

In both of those key areas, we've got to go from good to great.

As far as building projects, we've got to double our production. If you do the math of how much construction we're going to have to do between now and when we complete the mission – pick a date of when you think we're going to have to be finished – then divide that by the number of years, you can see that we have to double the construction placement we did last year.

That is a monumental task, but that is really the projector for good to great.

Our total program, in terms of projected contract awards for fiscal year 2011, is \$2.6 billion. That's every element of our program, from Afghanistan National Army bases and Afghanistan National Police stations, to U.S. and coalition military projects, to other infrastructure projects like small dams, counter-narcotics facilities and roads.

Now what is it going to take to get to that level of greatness in construction placement?

We need quick notices to proceed. As soon as we award contracts, we have to get our contractors working.

We have to commit to making quick decisions. We cannot have months and months go by without progress. We've got to accelerate our decision-making process, so we can keep our contractors working.

Another thing I'm real excited about is in our Afghanistan National Army program.

We're going to look at completely transforming the way we do Afghan army standard base designs. Instead of the traditional brick and mortar designs, we're going to look at things like K-Spans, the domed metal-roof construction techniques that potentially can go up lot quicker. They meet the requirement to get Afghan army soldiers under a roof with heat.

And we're looking at creative ideas.

Perhaps even before we award a construction contract for project, there's a way to award an earlier contract to build a perimeter wall. That way you have security in place and a construction contractor can come and start moving dirt inside a secure perimeter.

We're also looking at using government furnished equipment, so we can pre-purchase a lot of long lead-time items. Before we even award a contract, we know we're going to need generators and steel and waste-water treatment plants and those sorts of things. So how would we get into the business of government furnished equipment to accelerate these timelines?

Those are the kinds of efficiencies we're looking for and we're asking every single member of the team to have their heads in the game and look for solutions.

The second part to go from good to great is in the area of capacity building.



It's possible to win every battle and still lose the war. From the Corps of Engineers' perspective, that would mean we could build all those buildings and still lose the war if we haven't similarly invested in the Afghan people. We need to ensure they have the skills necessary to operate and maintain the buildings.

It's things like expanding our intern program with the National Military Academy of Afghanistan. We're going from three interns to 25, split between Afghanistan Engineer Districts North and South.

Those officers will be the future of the Afghan army-led operations and maintenance program at these large bases. We want to increase this cadre of professional facility engineers.

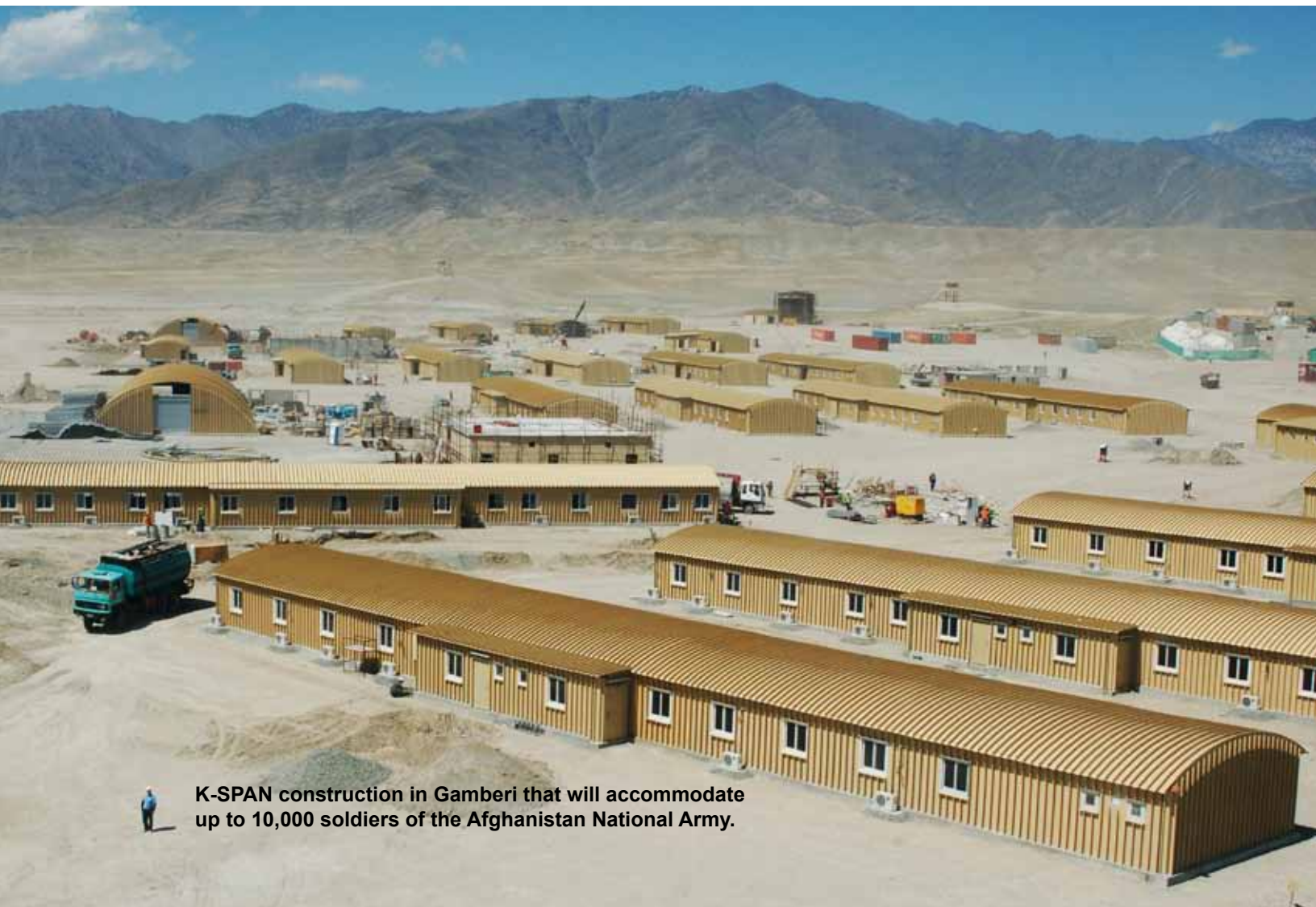
We want to invest in the engineering departments at all the universities in Afghanistan, and ensure that they are teaching in English, that they are using

quality textbooks, that their labs have the equipment that is necessary, so that professional engineers can come out of these institutions.

We're working with technical and vocational schools to train laborers who understand electricity and plumbing and those types of skills. We're looking across our area of responsibility to see how we can invest in technical and vocational schools.

It's those kinds of details that we've got to keep our eye on while we're building projects. I think it's possible to do both. And I think we need to do both.

It's only possible if 1,200 Afghanistan Engineer District-North employees have our collective heads in the game. If we're all communicating, if we're being aggressive and proactive, if we're taking responsibilities, we can get there. We can go from "Afghan good" to "Afghan great!" 🇦🇫



K-SPAN construction in Gamberi that will accommodate up to 10,000 soldiers of the Afghanistan National Army.



Solar streetlights in Kabul

Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Photos by | *Mohammad Idress Qasimi*

From right to left, Kabul Technical Deputy Mayor Abdul Ahad, Kabul Mayor Muhammad Yunus Nawandish, Sustainable Energy Services general manager Greg Hussey, U.S. Agency for International Aid executive Rachelle Ramirez and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lt. Col. Steve Danner commemorate the launch of a project to erect solar street lights in Kabul. In the background, other Afghan and U.S. officials take in the scene.

KABUL, Afghanistan – Kabul Mayor Muhammad Yunus Nawandish and other Afghan and U.S. officials unveiled a pilot project to install solar-powered streetlights along a one-kilometer portion of one of Kabul’s most important commercial corridors on Tuesday, Nov. 9.

The officials cut a ribbon in the street near the Jumhoriyat National Specialized Hospital to mark the start of the project.

Plans call for 28 solar-powered streetlights to be installed in the median of the road between the hospital and the Sherpoor traffic circle in the heart of downtown. They’re scheduled to operational by the end of the year.

The mayor’s office, in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is working with the firm Sustainable Energy Services Afghanistan to install the light poles.

“Lighting is essential to improving the quality of life throughout Afghanistan,” Nawandish said. “I’m proud that Kabul City is leading the way down the path to renewable energy for our country.”

The goal of the project is to support economic development by creating new nighttime commerce, said U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Joel VanEssen, who serves as the officer in charge of the Army Corps of Engineers’ Kabul South Resident Office.

The area outside the hospital already is a busy business zone, lined with shops selling stationary supplies, electronics, photo supplies and other goods; and street vendors selling fried potatoes, bananas and other food items.

Renewable energy is vital for Kabul, a city with more than 6 million residents, because three decades of war have left the city with power generation capabilities and a ruined distribution system, VanEssen said.

“Being that there are limited power generation capabilities and a limited number of distribution lines at this time, by going solar they’re not dependant on a network to provide power. It just draws from the sun,” VanEssen said.

The stand-alone poles will use light-emitting diode lamps that are energy efficient, low maintenance and environmentally friendly. Solar panels will collect power during daylight hours to power the lights during nighttime hours.

With more than 300 days of sunlight a year, Kabul is an ideal location for solar powered lights, VanEssen said.

The project is being funded through the Commander’s Emergency Response Program at the direction of Col. Thomas H. Magness,

commander of Army Corps of Engineers’ district in northern Afghanistan.

Additional projects are being explored for other streets in Kabul. 





The 100 year flood

THE TIDE TURNS ON JALALABAD AREA OFFICE

Story by | Hank Heusinkveld

Photos courtesy of | Jalalabad area office



JALALABAD, Afghanistan – Memories are still vivid of a massive flood that swamped the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ area office at the Jalalabad Air Field in the eastern portion of the country.

It began as just another ordinary day in late July. Skies were overcast, but nobody paid much attention. That is until the pitter patter of light rain progressed into a disaster that destroyed and badly damaged tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of government and personal property.

“It was just a freak downpour that happens in this part of the world,” said Global Security team leader Brandon McGlone. “Apparently they haven’t seen one of this magnitude in over 100 years. It was a mini-Katrina.”

Normally, it’s Corps of Engineers personnel who assist others during floods and other

natural disasters. Lt. Col. Matt Cadicamo, the officer in charge of the Jalalabad office, had experience with flood control as deputy commander of the Seattle District, but he and his team became the victims of the deluge. They were overwhelmed by the persistent rainfall.

“I was sitting at my desk and I could hear the splashing of tires rolling through the puddles,” he recalled. “Maybe 15 or 20 minutes later, I heard the same splashing, but then I could hear what sounded like waves hitting on the underside of a boat or a dock and I soon realized it was hitting underneath the office. At the time I thought to myself that this was a lot of water.”

Cadicamo stood up and saw water streaming up from underneath the door. A puddle on the floor of the office grew, and the



One day before going on Rest and Relaxation, George Triggs wades through three feet of water to salvage items from his room.

post in the center of the office streamed water through the joint where it went through the floor.

He made a snap decision to get his two computer hard drives off the floor. He reached for another, but it was too late.

“You could hear electrical zaps from when the water went into the sockets. When I opened the door to the office, I could see everyone outside walking in knee-deep water,” Cadicamo said.

People rushed to their rooms to whatever they could off the floor. They tried to collect all their sensitive items, but were cut short when utility personnel instructed them to clear the compound, because water was

getting dangerously close to the transformers.

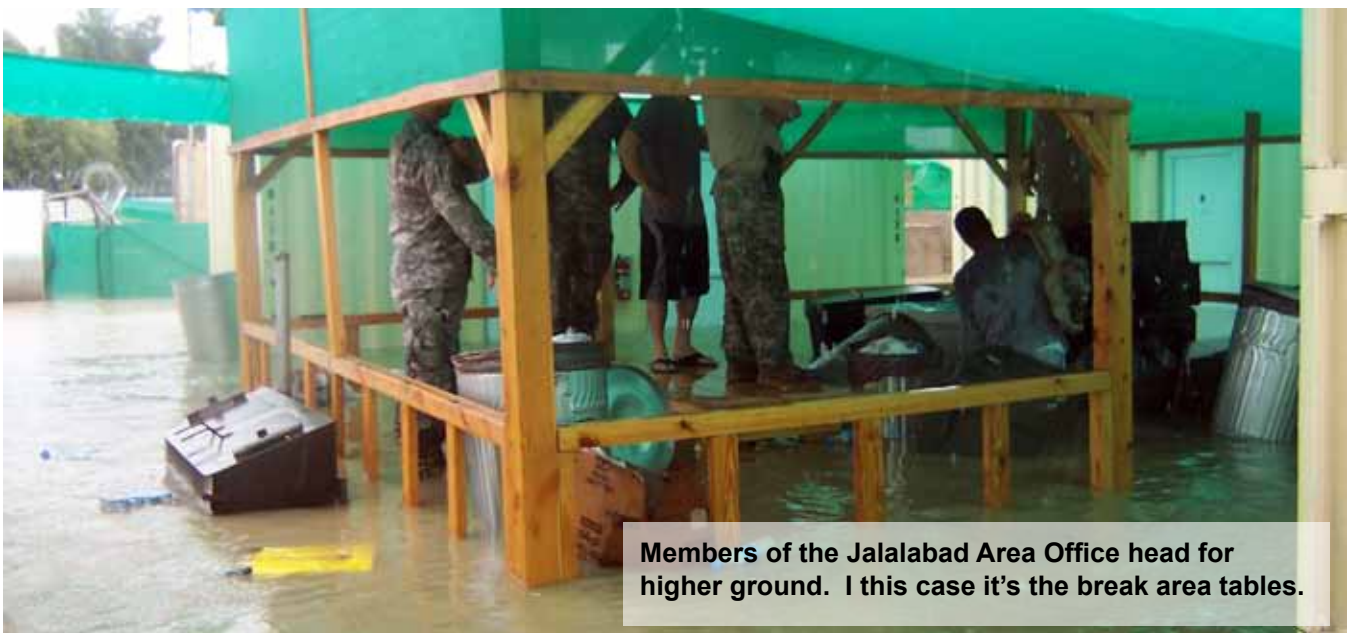
Eventually the team found higher ground and gazed at the new lake that formed in the compound. Even though their computers were gone, their living quarters fouled, and personal items such as stereos, bedding and mementos were destroyed, they pulled together to cope with the destruction.

“Everybody held a sense of humor, and everybody helped watch other,” Cadicamo said. “We were laughing at the situation. It was just a great group of people who overcame adversity. It was just wonderful to see everybody pulling together to help one another.”

The water receded about two days later. Cadicamo’s team was without drinkable water for those two days, and all their mattresses were soaked. To make matters worse, there was no electricity, and the weather stayed at 120 degree weather with 70 percent to 80 percent humidity for two days.

McGlone echoed Cadicamo’s sentiments of camaraderie. “We all mustered together, though, and morale was high surprisingly throughout the entire ordeal. Everyone pitched in to help, and we had a lot of support from other folks on Jalalabad Air Field,” he said.

Most of the floodwaters subsided within a day, but the cleanup took about a month. 



Members of the Jalalabad Area Office head for higher ground. In this case it's the break area tables.

Office space

Corps of Engineers prepping for build-up at German air base.



Story and photos by | Paul Giblin

Maj. William Nordal paces off a site where a new Corps of Engineers area office is being built on Camp Marmal, a German air base in the city of Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan.

MAZAR-E SHARIF, Afghanistan -- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel are racing to build a new resident office at Camp Marmal, a German air base in the northern part of the country.

A temporary office is in place, and a permanent office is scheduled to be complete in February.

The office is intended to provide the Corps of Engineers greater oversight of more than \$170 million worth of new U.S. military infrastructure construction at the installation. The facilities are being built to accommodate thousands of U.S. troops moving onto the base as part of President Barack Obama's military surge in Afghanistan.

U.S. troops share the air base at the foot of the Hindu Kush mountains with troops

from Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Croatia, Norway, Latvia, Afghanistan and other countries.

The bulk of the new American facilities will be built on the southwest side of the base,

which is mostly undeveloped. Demining crews are clearing the terrain of land mines and other unexploded ordinance left over from three decades of war.

The new Corps of Engineers resident office is being constructed on the southeast side of the air base, another largely undeveloped area

that's undergoing rapid expansion.

The officer in charge of the office, Maj. Bill Nordai, and project manager Truett Diegel, who initially worked in a tent from August until early this month, have guided the effort. Trish Seaman, a program manager

“We wanted to be sure we had the right resources and the right level of attention dedicated to those very important projects.”



Maj. William Nordai inspects the site where new Corps of Engineers area office is being built on Camp Marmal, a German air base in the city of Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan. The stones on the ground are used to reduce dust in the desert environment.

for facilities, who has since redeployed to the United States, contributed to the effort from Kabul.

The Corps of Engineers is opening the resident office in response to the influx of military construction work slated for Camp Marmal, said Lt. Col. Anela Arcari, the officer in charge of the Mazar-e Sharif Area Office, which is based at Camp Spann at the edge of Mazar-e Sharif.

Previously, personnel stationed at the Mazar-e Sharif Area office and its two existing satellite resident offices nearly exclusively oversaw construction of military and police facilities for Afghan forces scattered across the northernmost part of the country.

In contrast, the Camp Marmal work is intended for U.S. military forces. It will be concentrated, complex and expensive, Arcari said. "We wanted to be sure we had the right resources and the right level of attention dedicated to those very important projects," she said.

Plans call for the new resident office

and adjoining housing units to be built simultaneously. The buildings will be constructed using pre-fabricated shipping containers and joined by a breezeway and a single roof.

The \$614,000 complex is designed to accommodate 20 people – two Corps of Engineers military personnel, nine civilian engineers and construction representatives, five Afghan employees, an information technology technician and three security agents, plus visiting personnel.

The office building will feature work stations, private offices, a conference room and a kitchenette. The housing building will have 13 two-person sleeping rooms, bathrooms and a laundry facility.

Plans also call for on-site parking, a bunker and storage facilities. The complex is one of four buildings on a quadrant that also will house Europol, the European Law Enforcement Agency, among other organizations. The Corps of Engineers' facility will share design cues with the buildings around it.

"We're hoping that we can have completion of this in January, just in time for the bad weather. Then we can focus our efforts on the milcon," Nordai said using a term for "military construction."

Corps of Engineers personnel will oversee five major military construction projects in upcoming months. They are:

- ☞ A \$47 million special forces compound for hundreds of troops. It will feature a tactical operations center, housing units, a dining facility, a medical aid station, a gym, dog kennels, a vehicle maintenance facility and more. The compound also will have associated roads, a power plant and a waste water treatment facility.
- ☞ "It will be a fully contained little city for special forces," Diegel said. Hardened structures will be built to house the unit's planning, operations and tracking spaces.
- ☞ Construction is underway and is projected to be complete in April 2012.

- ☞ A \$33 million special forces aviation complex. It will have three hangars, a maintenance facility, taxiways, apron space for helicopters and airplanes, aircraft tie-downs, a water and sewage distribution system and more. Construction is underway and is set to be complete in August 2011.
- ☞ A \$10.4 million perimeter fence with guard towers. The 2.4-mile fence outside the southwest expansion will feature 10 guard towers, security lighting, a road and an anti-vehicle ditch. Construction has started and is slated to wrap up in October 2011.
- ☞ Officials are considering whether to alter the plans, Nordai said. A fence made of wire and plastic mesh would provide the needed security measures. However, a rock wall would offer the additional benefits of diverting flood waters and preventing disease-carrying fleas from entering the camp. The low-flying insects carry leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease that can

cause open soars on the skin that can last for months.

- ☞ A \$53 million helicopter apron large enough for 23 choppers. Work has started and is expected to be finished in December 2011.
- ☞ A \$27 million aircraft apron with connecting taxiways and shoulders. The job is scheduled to start in December and finish in November 2011.

In total, that's \$170.6 million worth of work that's slated to go up by July 2012.

Recruiting efforts already are underway, so that the new office will be staffed and operational as soon as it's built. Eight personnel were projected to be stationed in the temporary office by late this month.

"It will take us a good couple of months to get full strength, but we'll have at least enough folks on the ground to attack the first two projects that are getting awarded," Arcari said. "We are staffing it quickly." 



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel Joel Giblin (left), Cannine Leone (center) and Maj. William Nordai review plans at the site where the Corps of Engineers will open a new area office on Camp Manna, a Gannan air base in the city of Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan.

Taking control

Esprit De Corps at Camp Morehead Gives Afghans Edge on Assuming Control of Installation



Nicknamed “Camp Commando,” Camp Morehead is home to the elite Afghanistan Special Operations Command.

July of next year is the target date for Barack Obama’s goal of withdrawing forces from Afghanistan. In the southern area of Kabul is Camp Morehead which is the home of the Afghanistan National Army’s elite commandos of the Afghan Special Operations Command. Nicknamed “Camp Commando” it’s the first installation that’s expected to be turned over to the Afghans to assume full responsibility for operations and maintenance.

“Based on the teamwork that we’ve established with the Afghan commando garrison as well as the other partners of the U.S. Army corps of Engineers, NATO Training Mission Afghanistan, the Regional Support Center and local Afghan workers we’re ahead of schedule. So it looks as if we can turn this over to the Afghans prior to July of next year,” said Camp Morehead Commander LTC Owen Ward.

Ward credits the commando’s Esprit De Corps attitude of Camp Morehead that

seems to trickle down to others who manage and maintain the installation. There’s a lot of work to be done before the Huly deadline, but Afghanistan Engineer District-North members are pushing the Afghans to learn vast amounts of information and apply it practically to keep the installation running smoothly when they take control.

“It is a lot of work and the Afghans are in the lead,” Ward said. “We’ve partnered with them, we’ve showed them all the plans, and we’ve talked about the occupation of the buildings and other important steps so they understand the sequence of taking over responsibility for this base. So whether it’s the dining facilities, the ammunition depots, the base security or actually occupying their battalion headquarters they are prepared for all of those missions and what it’s going to require for them to take full responsibility from the coalition.”

One critical item that AED-North is focusing on is long-term operations and



This skilled Afghan wall builder is one of between 500 to 650 workers who are providing for their families every day at Camp Morehead.

maintenance at Camp Morehead and for other facilities scattered throughout the country. There's a sizeable workforce that is gaining more hands-on experience, and the goal is to get the Afghans to start thinking

about the future of the installation, not just the day-to-day O&M.

"We really believe that with the local workforce of 500 to 650 workers that we have on site is gaining a technical expertise in a specific piece of the project. They'll be available later when the project's finished to come back and work on it, and that will be determined by the operational maintenance folks who will have this facility afterwards. We're definitely building capacity to take care of this site in the out years when the project's complete."

Optimism runs high at the installation, and the strong work ethic here is making Camp Morehead a good model for the rest of Afghanistan to follow. More importantly the Afghans have assumed an attitude of ownership of the installation which is leading to stability.

"Here in Logar Province that's a big boost to us from a force protection standpoint and for the local Afghans who live outside of the base who help us to protect it," said Ward. "It's considered very, very safe here because of the way we've partnered not only with Afghans and the commandos, but then also with all of the local leaders who we invite on to the base so that they understand what's going on here. It's helping them and it's helping their country for the future." 



Officer in Charge of the Kabul Area Office LTC Joe Danao, left, discusses construction progress with Timorashah, Mohammad Qaseem Fida and LCDR Joel Vanessen

A photograph of a woman and a man in military uniforms. The woman, Barb Benge, is on the left, smiling, wearing a tan camouflage uniform with 'BENGE' and 'USACE CIVILIAN' patches. The man, Phil Benge, is on the right, also smiling, wearing a similar uniform with 'USACE CIVILIAN' and 'US' patches. They are standing in front of a wooden structure with a large number '2' visible in the background.

A family affair

Story by | Paul Giblin

photos by | Joe Marek

Barb Benge and Phil Benge of Walla Walla, Wash., are among at least six family units within Afghanistan Engineer District-North's ranks.

KABUL, Afghanistan – Phil and Barb Benge have barely left each other's sides for the past 12 months while they've worked for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Qalaa House compound.

The husband and wife team from Walla Walla, Wash., live together in a small room at the Qalaa House compound, which is the Corps of Engineers' district headquarters in northern Afghanistan. Until recently, they served as chairman and chairwoman of the district's source selection boards, working at adjoining desks evaluating contract proposals.

They were practically inseparable until Phil changed job responsibilities earlier this month to become a project manager in the facilities management program, which gives him responsibility for the district's offices and living quarters.

They still spend nearly all of their off-work

hours together. They eat together. They shop at the bazaar together. They walk together for an hour nearly every night.

The family atmosphere abounds within the district. The Benges are just one of at least six family groups within the ranks of the Afghanistan Engineer District-North.

There's also the husband-and-wife teams of Bill Bolte and Dani Bolte, who also are from Walla Walla, and Brian Tracy and Irene Leyva-Tracy of Los Angeles; the father-and-son tandem of Richard Allen Newton of Warner Robins, Ga., and Richard Anthony Newton of Jacksonville, Fla.; and the brother-and-brother combo of Harry Pham and Alan Pham, both of Victorville, Calif.

There's another brother-and-brother duo – Joel Giblin of Las Cruces, N.M., and me, Paul Giblin, of Phoenix.

Col. Thomas Magness, the district commander, encourages the family plan

for staffing the district. He feels there're tangible benefits to having family members close by when home is so far away.

"Every single person who is deployed over here has a longing to be back home and to be with family. Those that are able to bring their families over here, I think that gives them that comfort, that confidence, that probably translates into what they're doing on the job," he said.

That's certainly true.

For the Benges, Phil, 60, and Barb, 58, had worked together within the Corps of Engineers for 30 years, but their jobs and family responsibilities frequently took them in different directions. When one flew out of state for an assignment or a conference, the other stayed home with their children.

"We could never go to the same places," Phil said. "We decided, OK, the kids are out of the house. This is an opportunity for us to stick together while we're working – and to travel together."

Both applied for positions in Afghanistan, and both were offered jobs, but not simultaneously. They declined their initial

offers, opting instead to wait until they received offers at the same time. Eventually, they received concurrent offers and accepted. They arrived in theater in December 2009.

Despite Phil's job change, they're still very much a family act. Barb said they have a strong relationship and have enjoyed the nearly 24/7 closeness. "We live in a very small room, about the size that would fit a car. It's very tight and cozy. He takes up most of the room," she joked.

"There could be different opinions," Phil countered.

They've used Afghanistan as a launching point for scheduled leaves to South Africa, and to Spain and Italy. They're planning an upcoming trip to Switzerland, France and Italy. The family deployment has worked so well, they've extended their year-long tour in Afghanistan by six months.

Afghanistan has turned into a second honeymoon for the Boltes. OK, maybe not exactly, but they're newlyweds and they're in Afghanistan together, too.

Dani had done a tour in Iraq a few years before they were married in June 2008, and



Bill Bolte and Dani Bolte of Walla Walla, Wash.



Brian Tracy and Irene Leyva-Tracy of Los Angeles.

they had discussed the idea of doing a tour in Afghanistan together. They committed when a manager in Walla Walla asked for volunteers.

“That was the final push,” Bill said. “We’re both adventuresome, young, dumb, with no kids. We wanted to see what was going on. A fairly typical story.”

They arrived in Afghanistan in September 2009. Bill, 32, serves as a cost engineer at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul. Dani, 30, initially worked as a project manager in the Afghanistan National Police program, before accepting a new job in November as a project manager in Kunduz.

“We came as a package deal,” Bill said. “We both started looking into jobs and we made it known that we were a package deal. We were fortunate that we were able to make that work.”

There are obvious advantages, he said. For example, identifying a battle buddy and a roommate were easy. They also have

been able to share the unique experiences of working in a combat zone. “Your spouse understands exactly what you’re going through, because they’re going through the same thing,” Bill said.

Scheduled leaves to exotic locales are another bonus, he said.

Brian Tracy, 53, and Irene Leyva-Tracy, 52, both longtime Corps of Engineers employees, made the move to Afghanistan within a month of one another. Brian came in June of this year; Irene followed a month later.

Brian serves as a program manager for water and infrastructure under the Joint Program Integration Office at the New Kabul Compound in downtown Kabul. Irene works as an office engineer in the Contract Administration Branch at the Corps of Engineer’s headquarters at Qalaa House.

Though they’re separated by less than a mile, the logistics involved in traveling in a militarized region keeps them apart most of the time. They see each other mainly when Brian has meetings at Qalaa House.

“Usually, he’ll call me and say, ‘I’m coming over today,’ and hopefully, he can get over for lunch, so we can have lunch together. Then he goes to his meetings,” Irene said.

Still, having a spouse in close proximity is better than the alternative, she said. In addition to their lunch dates at the dining facility, they speak by phone frequently. Since they’re in the same time zone, calls don’t require prior planning, as they did during the first month when Brian was in Afghanistan and Irene was in California.

Their children are grown and out of the house, so leaving for several months to go to Afghanistan was easier than it would have been earlier in their careers, Irene said. “We decided it was a good opportunity. The timing was right, so we took advantage of that,” she said.

For the Newtons, the son brought the father.

Richard Anthony Newton, the son, 37, did a six-month tour as a project manager for the Afghanistan National Police program

late last year and early this year. About midway through his first tour, he began lining up a second tour, and he mentioned the idea to his parents.

“It started as a joke at first with my mom telling my dad, ‘You should go over there and have some fun,’” the son said. Richard Allen Newton, the father, 62, seemed to be a natural fit. He’s a retired Air Force master sergeant who had since moved into a civilian position with the Air Force as an electronics engineer.

The twosome deployed at the same time, and both work in the Kabul Area Office, the elder as a construction representative and the younger as a resident engineer. They bunked together for three weeks, before being assigned separate rooms next door to each other in Solah House, a small compound where the area office is located.

The elder Newton said the mission has given him the opportunity to serve in a war zone, which didn’t occur during his 20 years of active duty with the Air Force.

“The biggest thing I found out is how much I love America, because I never realized what it was like being in a place like this; seeing the people and what they go through. It’s been a wake up for me,” he said.

The assignment also put a new twist on the father-son relationship, he said. The elder Newton said he frequently finds himself asking his son for advice, particularly concerning matters involving Corps of Engineers procedures and protocols. Plus, the two have been able to lean on each other during their months in Afghanistan, he said. “I wouldn’t trade anything about it. I’d do it again if the opportunity came,” the father said.

The Newtons work on different projects, but within close proximity to each other. The son said he too has experienced new depth in the relationship.

“I don’t know how to say it, but it’s a part of my dad that I’ve never seen before – working with him,” he said. He’s discovered that his father’s long-established reputation as a



Richard Anthony Newton of Jacksonville, Fla., and Richard Allen Newton of Warner Robins, Ga.



Harry Pham and Alan Pham of Victorville, Calif.

perfectionist is well deserved. “It makes me work harder, because I don’t want to look like a failure in front of him,” he said.

The younger Newton has already extended his six-month tour by a month. He’s considering staying in Afghanistan longer, but that decision will hinge largely on whether his father extends as well.

The Pham brothers, Harry, 38, and Alan, 42, are roommates and both work as project managers, Harry in the Afghanistan National Army program, and Alan in the Afghanistan National Police program.

Harry, a longtime Corps of Engineers employee who’s on his third tour in Afghanistan, served as the family recruiter. After his first tour in 2005 and 2006, he enticed both Alan and younger brother Kenny, 33, of Garden Grove, Calif., to consider positions in Afghanistan, completing a triple play of sorts.

Kenny works as a project manager in

Herat, which falls under the command of the Afghanistan Engineer District-South. Previously, Alan and Kenny worked as engineers in the private sector.

“They were looking for fast-paced type of work, because they expressed that they were bored with their jobs at home because they were slow. So I said, ‘Well, you know, we have a fast pace here. Why don’t you try it out and see if you like it?’”

They liked it alright. Both Alan and Kenny are on their second tours.

Harry said he knew he could trust his brothers to keep up the family’s good name within the Corps of Engineers. Plus, having his brothers around makes Afghanistan seem homier. “It’s just like when we were kids. We always lived together. It’s just like home,” he said.

For the Giblin brothers, Joel, 48, was the instigator. He is a longtime government employee who did a tour last year as a project manager with the Afghanistan National Police program. During a scheduled leave, he and I sat poolside as he told me about his adventures in Afghanistan. I was intrigued. He suggested I fill out an application for a public affairs position.

I’m 47 and had worked as a newspaper reporter and columnist for 25 years. I always felt that one of the best ways to defend American ideals – such as the freedoms of press, speech and assembly – was to use them. I did, and frequently enough, to the distress of unethical and unlawful government officials. (There’s a high-profile sheriff in Arizona who’s under several federal investigations, in part for topics I reported.)

I figured working for the Army in a war zone would provide the same type of fulfillment, but from a wildly different perspective. I was right on that count. Initially, my biggest concern was the possibility of somehow tarnishing Joel’s reputation within the government. I always had the option of switching back to the private sector, but his career is entrenched firmly in the government sector.

As it turned out, Joel’s tour in Afghanistan

ended before mine started late last year. Still, I worked hard as much for his sake as for my own. Six months later, Joel came back for a second tour, this time as a project manager with the Joint Program Integration Office.

He moved into my housing unit. By that time, I felt well established. I was pleased, in fact, when several people asked me if the new guy with the GIBLIN name strip on his uniform was my brother – rather than the other way around.

The most brotherly moment so far came in September when we both traveled aboard the same military airplane to Mazar-E Sharif for different purposes. My duffle bag traveled even further that day. It went to Kunduz, leaving me with nothing but the clothes on my back and the equipment in my pockets.

We eventually got to the bunkhouse at the German air base in Mazar-E Sharif. I sat on a bare bunk as Joel unpacked. He reached into his duffle bag and tossed me an extra sleeping bag and an extra towel. Even he couldn't explain why he brought the additional gear.

We often work out together in the gym,

and have breakfast together in the dining facility. It's worked out well. I've signed on for an additional year; Joel re-upped for another six months.

Magness said serving in Afghanistan for months or years at a time requires commitment by both individual employees and by their family members, whether their family members come with them to Afghanistan or stay back in the United States.

He welcomes multiple family members in the district and dismisses any charges of nepotism.

"I would let anybody charge whatever they want. To them I say, 'If your family member is qualified, we'll hire them too,' and oftentimes, we have," Magness said.

"If you look at the family combinations that we have over here, they are all qualified, quality people. I would certainly defend any charge against that – except for the Giblin brothers," he said.

Of course, he was joking about that last part.

I think. 🇺🇸



Paul Giblin of Phoenix and Joel Giblin of Las Cruces, N.M.

Parting shot

On Nov. 11, 2010, Lt. Col. Jon Chytka salutes during the Veterans Day flag ceremony held on the front porch of Qalaa House in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Photo by *Hank Heusinkveld*