FREEDOM BUILDER

January/February 2012

Next phase

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' duties shift to reflect changing conditions in Afghanistan

Fly-by mission

The Air Force's top enlisted member drops in on fellow Airmen in Afghanistan

Dream job

Deployed personnel in prime spots to achieve Dr. Martin Luther King's dream, admiral says

Special delivery

Corps of Engineers deliver winter clothes to needy orphans in Kabul

Building bridges

Corps of Engineers personnel assist with three bridges in Pol-e Khomri, a city in northern Afghanistan that's vital to the country's highway network

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Afghanistan Engineer District

FREEDOM BUILDER

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The mission of Freedom Builder is to support the Commander's Internal Communication Program for the Afghanistan Engineer District-North. 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-North.

The Freedom Builder Magazine is available online at
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Cover image:

U.S. and Hungarian military personnel consult with a construction manager at the Gaji Bridge near Pol-e Khomri in northern Afghanistan.

(Full story on pg. 6)

Photo by | ***Joe Marek***

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Plans call for fewer projects, fewer offices

KABUL-The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' scope of work in Afghanistan is going through a significant shift this year that reflects the changing conditions in the war and reconstruction effort.

The driving factor is that U.S. and coalition troops are projected to move into support roles as Afghan troops take over the lead roles in fighting insurgents and keeping peace in the country, said Col. Christopher W. Martin, commander of the Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan.

"We're really trying to make sure that we're all working on the same sheet of music and that and everyone's going toward the same goal, which is execution of projects in order to facilitate the transition," Martin said on Jan. 6.

The specific numbers are always subject to change, but projectious call for the United States to draw down its number of troops in the theater by 10,000 this year and by an additional 23,000 in 2013. In order for the transition to be successful, coalition and Afghan officials alike are relying on the Corps of Engineers to complete both Afghanistan National Army and Afghanistan National Police facilities that are under construction, he said.

The numbers tell the story. Consider four trends since the Corps of Engineers' district in Afghanistan split into north and south districts in 2009.

In just the north district, the amount of work awarded for Afghan army facilities peaked in fiscal 2011 and is headed downward again. Meanwhile, the amount of work to build Afghan police facilities is on a sharp upward climb. Construction for U.S. and coalition facilities has been on a slight downward trend, and overall spending on operations and maintenance has increased.

For Afghan army facilities, there were 15 projects for a combined value of $250.4 million in 2010. That climbed to 60 facilities for a combined $995.8 million in 2011, then dropped to 33 projects for a combined value of $737.6 million this year.

For Afghan police facilities, the figures have gone from 37 projects for $131 million in 2010, to 78 projects for $365 million in 2011, to 114 projects for $737.6 million this fiscal year.

This year will mark the final big year for awards for Afghan army and police facilities, Maj. Gen. Kendall P. Cox told district personnel during a recent town hall meeting.

"Who knows what we call this year? It's the year of *awardecution,*" said Cox, who serves as commander of the Corps of Engineers' Transatlantic Division. "That's not actually in any dictionary. You won't find that in the English language. *Awardecution*."

Next year, the focus will be on execution – building projects – but there will be far fewer contract awards.

Martin said, "There may be some outliers in '13 or so, but as a major program, '12 will be the last year for awards. Throughout the last couple of years, the easy ones were done first, so now we have the situations where we have the harder ones."

The harder ones generally are the sites with difficult terrain for building, a lack of water or spikes in insurgent activity.

Similarly, the slate of work awarded for U.S. and coalition forces is expected to drop significantly and perhaps entirely in 2013. Any remaining military construction likely will be at Bagram Airfield, a large multi-national base that's envisioned as an enduring compound.

As the scope of work shrinks, so will the Corps of Engineers' operations in Afghanistan. Plans are being discussed to reunite both districts – Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul, and Afghanistan Engineer District-South, which is based in Kandahar – in summer 2013.

Furthermore, the district headquarters likely will move from the Qalaa House compound in Kabul to Bagram in 2013. The airfield's military infrastructure will provide security that will be impossible to maintain as the Corps of Engineers sheds military personnel in conjunction with overall troop reductions in Afghanistan, Martin said.

Area and resident offices scattered throughout country also will consolidate, just as the Shank and Salerno offices merged last year.

"As we draw down in troops, it makes sense for us to consolidate," Martin said. "What you want in each of the area offices, or resident offices, is at least one Soldier, whether it's an officer or a non-commissioned officer, just to help engage with the battle space owner."

With the requirement to trim troops, it will be more difficult to staff those positions, the colonel said. Furthermore, by reducing the number of offices, the district will realize some savings in spending.

The pace and particulars of future mergers are dependent upon the workloads in those regions of the country, but options are being evaluated, Martin said.

"Theoretically, the Jalalabad operations could be merged with Shank or Bagram or something. There are different scenarios that we're looking at and we'll continue to assess them," he said.

That decision likely will be made in the summer.

Martin said he's comfortable with the slate of changes.

"Everywhere you go, there's always some sort of transition going on. Just acknowledge that it's happening, realize that it's not the end of the world, figure out if there's any risk involved and how to mitigate it. I think we've done a very good job with that," he said.

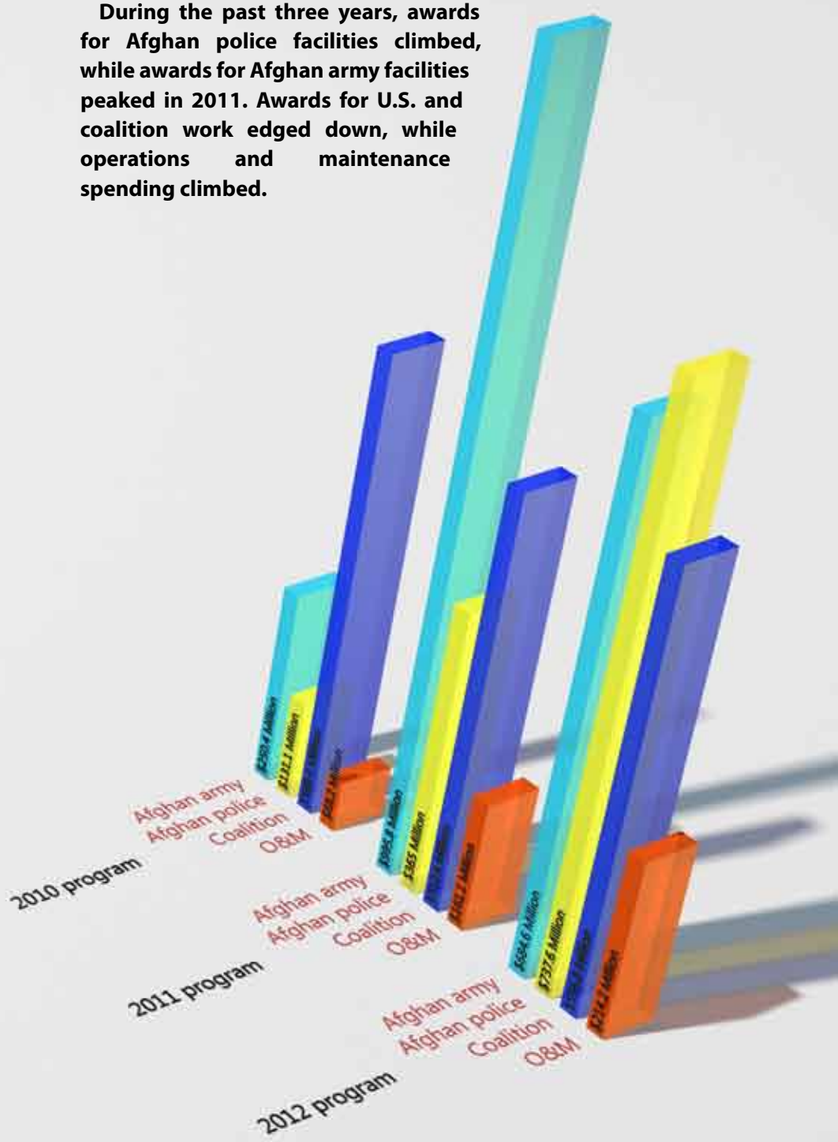
Story by | *Paul Giblin* Photo by | *Mark Rankin*

Col. Christopher W. Martin is leading the district through a series of changes.

Change in pace

The number of contracts awards made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan is expected to drop significantly after this year.

During the past three years, awards for Afghan police facilities climbed, while awards for Afghan army facilities peaked in 2011. Awards for U.S. and coalition work edged down, while operations and maintenance spending climbed.



Source | *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers* Graphic by | *Joe Marek*

Building bridges

Corps of Engineers lend expertise to link divided city

Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Photo by | *Joe Marek*

← Air Force Master Sgt. David Gaugh (right, leading) and Army Spc. Andrew Snyder (right, trailing), who are members of the U.S. Civil Affairs team in Pol-e Khomri, pass an Afghan woman and child on the Textile Bridge, which is also known as the Swinging Bridge, on Jan. 25.

➔ Workers suspend the walkway of the Gaji Bridge near Pol-e Khomri on Feb. 25.

Photo by | *Abduljan Jasud, Arib Kapisa Construction Co.*

POL-E KHOMRI, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel are working closely with Hungarian and coalition forces to build and refurbish three bridges in Afghanistan's seventh largest city, which is a lively trading mecca in the north-central region of the country.

The work in Pol-e Khomri, the capitol city of Baghlan Province, is part of the international effort to rebuild Afghanistan, a country ravaged by three decades of war.

Pol-e Khomri is a city of about 94,000 residents nestled along the banks of the Kunduz River. However, the river and its tributaries divide the city. The existing bridges are inadequate, so pedestrian and vehicular traffic is crimped on both sides, limiting access to markets, employment centers, medical facilities and major roads.

The bridge projects are intended to improve access and bolster commerce for residents, while building confidence among residents toward the Afghan government, said Hungarian army Col. Romulusz Ruszin, the coalition commander in the province.

Pol-e Khomri lies midway between Kabul and the major northern cities of Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz, and along supply routes from both Pakistan to the east and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north.

The bridges:

► The Gaji Bridge, a new pedestrian bridge that will link villages on the outskirts of Pol-e Khomri. The $145,000 construction project is underway.

► The Kaparaq Bridges, a pair of existing vehicular bridges over a channel in the heart of Pol-e Khomri. A $65,300 renovation is in progress.

► The Textile Bridge, an existing pedestrian bridge that's also located in the city center near a textile factory. Plans are being developed to convert the narrow bridge into a wider vehicular bridge.

The projects require coordination among several entities, including the Hungarian and U.S. militaries and the Afghan and German governments.

The Hungarian army is responsible for security and development throughout the province. The Hungarians command Camp Pannonia, an international base that houses approximately 300 coalition soldiers and civilians within the city of Pol-e Khomri.

The base is primarily staffed by Hungarians, though Montenegrins, Croatians, Americans, Germans and occasionally other coalition troops are stationed there as well.

The U.S. military finances much of the development in the region through the Commander's Emergency Response Program, which provides funds to develop and repair civil infrastructure projects. U.S. military personnel stationed at Camp Pannonia comprise a civil affairs team who act as intermediaries among the different entities.

The Afghan government plays a role in identifying projects and providing some design guidelines, while the German government is involved with refurbishing a 1930s-era hydroelectric dam upriver from the Textile Bridge.

Afghan companies handle the construction work and Corps of Engineers personnel assist as technical consultants on the projects.

Much of the Corps of Engineers' work is handled by Bill Neimes, an engineer

Engineer Matt Toton, the manager of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' provisional reconstruction team program in northern Afghanistan, studies the vertical supports of one of the Kaparaq Bridges in Pol-e Khomri on Jan. 25.

assigned to the Corps of Engineers' Provisional Reconstruction Team program, which places experts in the field. Neimes is stationed at Mazar-e Sharif and travels to construction sites overseen by provisional reconstruction teams across the northern portion of the country.

Ruszin, the Hungarian commander, said he welcomes the United States' funding and the Corps of Engineers' involvement in the projects, because the bridges provide two distinct benefits to Baghlan Province.

"One of them is the security, because we have the bridges, we can use them for any type of military vehicle," he said in English.

"The other reason is that a bridge is a link, so that Pol-e Khamri can join the main circulation of the economy of Afghanistan. This area was basically blocked – blocked by the Taliban, blocked by the limited road conditions," he said.

Pol-e Khomri is located along Highway 1, a two-lane strip of pavement that eventually will loop the country. The highway is vital to commerce because the country has limited railroad and air services.

The Gaji Bridge

The Gaji Bridge is three miles north of Pol-e Khmori and will span a river that swells with the spring runoff. The river separates the villages of Katakhlie to the north and Yoghory to the south.

Currently, villagers pay a toll to cross the river in a flat-bottom boat that's pulled by hand along a cable connected to each bank. The nearest bridge of any kind is miles away.

The new bridge will ease travel for people throughout the region, Neimes said. "Rather than going by toll boat, they will be able to travel anytime they want via the footbridge," he said.

Another important benefit is that the new bridge will provide police swift access to both sides of the river, said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. David Gaugh, who serves as a manager for the Commander's Emergency Response Program at the Hungarian base.

Arib Kapisa Construction Co., which is based in the village of Kapisa, began work in October 2011 and is expected to be complete by late February or early March.

The bridge features a pair of 30-foot tall concrete towers anchored into stone masonry foundations. A 75-yard-long walkway is being constructed with wood, held by steel cables suspended from the towers. When finished, the bridge will be about three feet wide, which will be broad enough to accommodate pedestrians, motorcycles and farm animals such as goats, sheep and cattle.

The main foundations and towers were complete when Neimes and Matt Toton, the Corps of Engineers' provisional reconstruction team program manager, inspected the project on Jan. 25. They were accompanied by members of the U.S. civil affairs team and several well-armed Hungarian soldiers who provided transportation and security.

> "This is Hungary's top priority, but they need technical expertise."

The design for the bridge was provided by the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which has developed standard designs for a variety of infrastructure projects. "The contractor doesn't have to do any design work. It's a certain length and a certain height," Neimes said.

The visit underscored the need for civil affairs team members to interact with villagers. Some villagers who had gathered to watch the construction said they're afraid the bridge's concrete and stone foundations will redirect the river, potentially washing out their villages and causing nearby mountains to move.

In Afghanistan, just 28.1 percent of the population is literate, according to statistics compiled by the CIA. The civil affairs team members and engineers patiently explained to the villagers that the bridge couldn't possibly cause the destruction they feared.

The potential for erosion near the north foundation was a more realistic worry.

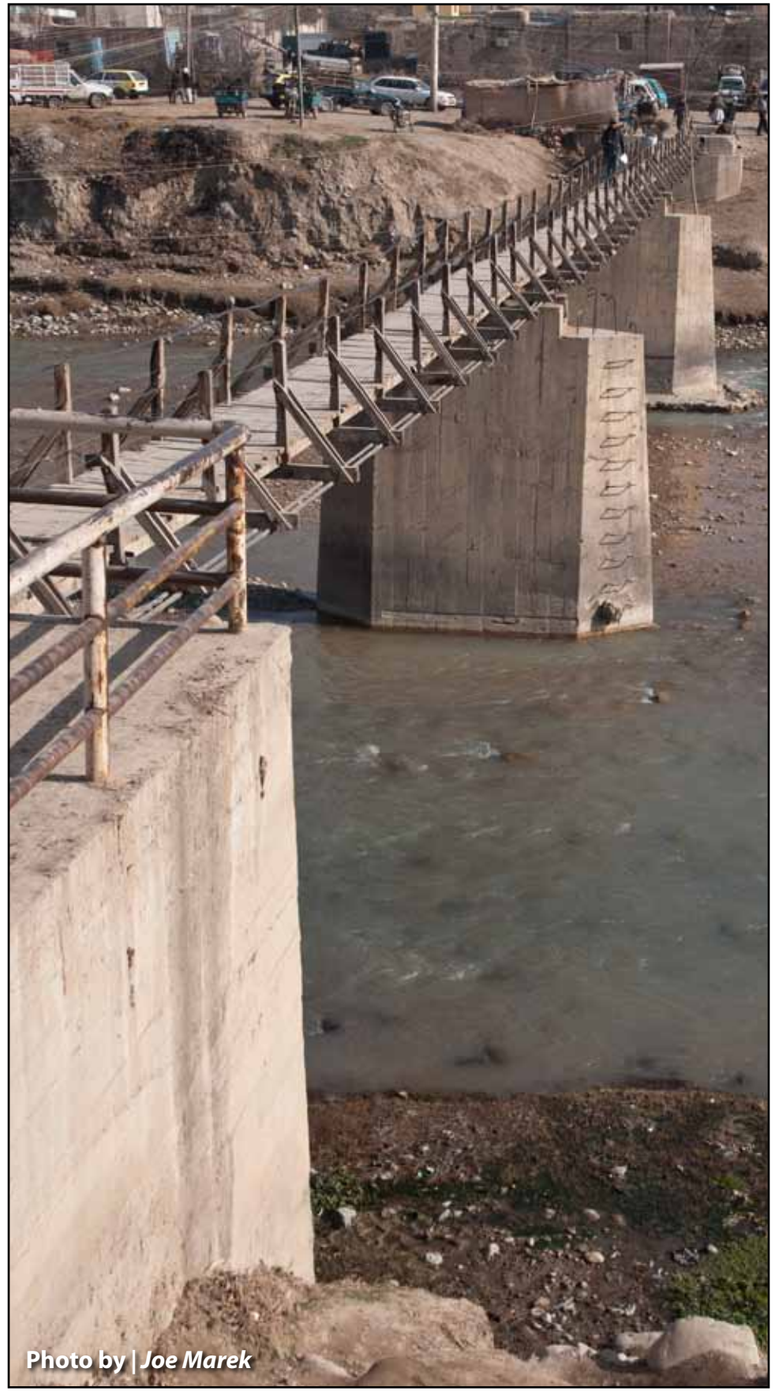
Following their inspection, Toton and Neimes determined that the river's normal seasonal surge potentially could reach the bridge's foundation on the north bank. They recommended construction of stone-filled gabion walls along the north bank near the foundation to reduce the risk.

The Kaparaq Bridges

The following day, the Corps of Engineers personnel inspected the side-by-side Kaparaq Bridges.

The vehicular bridges are vital to transportation in the region, because they're part of Highway 1, which doubles as the main thoroughfare through Pol-e Khumri. "It's the main transportation route for trucks and vehicles," Neimes said.

The bridges span a 40-foot wide channel that's lined on both sides by houses constructed of stone, bricks and mud. Water stains on the houses indicate that during the



Corps of Engineers personnel are devising plans to convert the 80-yard-long Textile Bridge into a two-lane vehicular bridge.

spring, water rushes through the channel at a depth that exceeds the height of some front doors.

The bottom of the channel was covered in black sludge, presumably caused by household waste.

The bridges' history is uncertain.

They appear fairly new, but they're unfinished. There are no railings to prevent vehicles or pedestrians from drifting over the edges. The bridges are made of reinforced concrete, but rebar sticks out from the top and bottom horizontal spans and from four vertical supports at each bridge.

There are other issues: utility cables are slung through the steel rods, the ground adjacent to the bridges is crumbling, and water and litter collect in a depression between the bridges.

City officials were afraid the bridges were failing and asked U.S. civil affairs officers to replace them. They, in turn, asked Neimes to inspect the bridges to determine whether they were structurally sound.

Neimes verified that the bridges were holding. He noted that there were no tension cracks, which would be evident if the bridges were under stress.

"My assessment was that the bridges weren't that bad, but the approach roads were failing," he said. "There was a big gap. The bridges needed some stiffening, but they didn't look like they were failing. But over time they could have failed."

He recommended several measures to improve the bridges and to make them safer. He suggested reinforcing the vertical supports, building railings, removing the exposed rebar, building stone retaining walls to prevent the approach roads from crumbling, and filling the depression between the bridges.

Toton forwarded Neimes' recommendations to structural engineers at the Corps of Engineers' district headquarters in Kabul, and they in turn detailed the plans.

The renovations will cost about $135,000 less than the projected cost of replacing the bridges altogether. Furthermore, by repairing the bridges rather than replacing them, the road has remained open during the renovation.

Saber Ghori Construction Co., which is based in Pol-e Khomri, began the job in mid-January and is scheduled to be complete by May.

By Jan. 26, workers had cleared the sludge from the depression between the bridges and had laid rebar for a concrete slab to fill the depression.

The Textile Bridge

The proposed work at the Textile Bridge is associated with a planned renovation by the German government of a German-built dam in the center of the city. The 1930s-era dam across the Kunduz River is used to provide hydropower, but two of the four turbines at the dam no longer work.

Engineer Bill Neimes reviews construction at the Kaparaq Bridges in Pol-e Khomri while local Afghan children scamper around the construction site watching him.

The Germans plan to make extensive renovations, which will close the dam and a two-lane road across it, for as long as a year. The dam road, which is on the southern end of the narrow city, is one of just two vehicular bridges in Pol-e Khrami. The other is on the city's far northern edge, miles away.

The Hungarians and U.S. civil affairs personnel asked Corps of Engineers personnel to explore the idea of converting the Textile Bridge, a footbridge near the center of the city, into a vehicular bridge. The engineers determined that the idea is feasible.

The main bridge is 80 yards long, with concrete abutments at both ends and two concrete piers between. The abutments and piers are comprised of reinforced concrete. All of the structures are free of cracks or other signs of stress, Neimes said.

The walkway is a different matter.

The path is made of planks of wood suspended by steel cables. There are gaps between the planks wide enough for a foot or hoof to slip through. The bridge also is known as the swinging bridge, because it swings widely as people, motorcycles and cattle cross.

The main bridge links a pair of two-lane roads that form an "L" at the textile factory's main gate on the west side, and a strip of dusty land that's used for a large bazaar where livestock is sold on the east side.

About a quarter mile down a dirt road is a crude vehicular bridge that crosses a canal. It's made of steel trusses with a surface of crumbling asphalt and dirt. It's 27 yards across.

Together, the bridges provide access for most of the 400 people who work at the factory, but live on the east side of the river and canal, according to the civilian affairs officers.

The Textile Bridge's history also is obscure.

The consensus among residents who met the engineers at the site is that the original footbridge was built by the factory's owners in the 1940s or 1950s. However, that bridge collapsed sometime during the Russian occupation, which was from 1979 through 1989. The collapse caused several deaths, but the exact count varied from 15 to 120, according to assorted versions of the story told by locals.

Russian forces, the residents said, built the current concrete structures. The size of the piers clearly indicate that they built it to support more than foot traffic, Neimes said. The piers are 17 feet wide, far wider than the footbridge.

Neimes and Toton determined that converting the main bridge into a two-lane vehicular bridge is possible, but the project would require renovating the crumbling roads by the factory's main gate and widening the abutments leading to the bridge at both ends.

Furthermore, they determined the best option for the smaller bridge across the canal would be to abandon the existing bridge, largely because it would snarl traffic with two 90-degree angle turns to navigate the quarter-mile distance between the bridges.

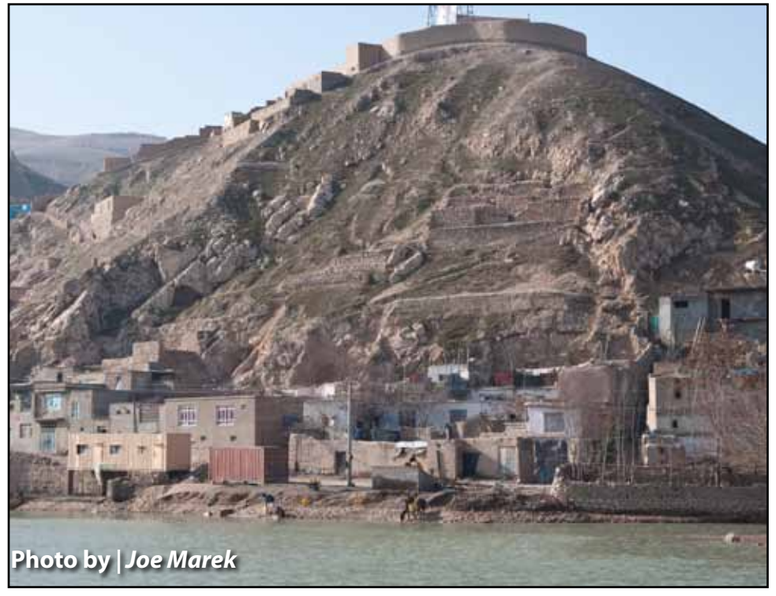
A better option would be to construct a new bridge that would cross the canal without the quarter-mile detour. Afghan officials have agreed to the plan and said they'll deal with residents who own shops where a new road will have to be paved leading to the bridge on the east bank.

"This is Hungary's top priority, but they need technical expertise," Toton said.

Neimes said he'll work with other engineers at the Corps of Engineers' headquarters in Kabul to draw up a statement of work, which is the first step to putting the project out for bid. The package will outline the steps required to convert the footbridge into a vehicular bridge.

"They've already got the supports in, so that's the big portion there," he said. "If we push it, we could probably get it done in six months."

And that would meet the Hungarians' deadline to have the new bridge in place before the dam road is closed, keeping Pol-e Khomri as an important part of the country's transportation network.



Pol-e Khomri is the seventh largest city in Afghanistan, but it's divided by the Kunduz River. There are just two vehicular bridges across the river, and one is scheduled to be closed for renovations at a dam.

Rock solid

Bridges, roads and walls favored in Baghlan Province

POL-E KHOMRI, Afghanistan – Building bridges is just part of the reconstruction effort for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its partners in Baghlan Province.

The slate of projects features bridges, roads, schools, retaining walls, solar-powered streetlights and more, said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. David Gaugh, who serves as the Commanders Emergency Response Program manager at Camp Pannonia, a Hungarian-led compound.

The program is designed to build civilian infrastructure projects across Afghanistan in an effort to bolster the country's economic conditions and to diminish the influence of insurgents and drug barons. In Baghlan Province, the U.S. military's Commanders Emergency Response Program funds projects directed by the Hungarian army, which oversees security and development in the region.

The approach is having visible results.

Seven projects with a combined value of $994,000 were completed between August 2011 and January 2012. Six projects with a combined value of $817,000 are under construction. At least 10 projects with a combined value of $2.4 million are planned.

An important aspect of the program is spreading the projects evenly across the province, said Hungarian Army Col. Romulusz Ruszin, who commands security and reconstruction efforts in the region.

"I'm sure that the people who are living in Baghlan Province have to feel that ISAF is here in support of them," he said using an acronym for International Security Assistance Force, the official moniker for coalition troops in Afghanistan.

The Hungarians have focused on schools and roads, Ruszin said.

The Corps of Engineers assists by providing engineers through the provisional reconstruction team program. Engineers like Bill Neimes provide expertise before and during construction, Gaugh said.

"Could we get by without an engineer? Yes, but they'll come by and say, 'Did you ask the contractor to perform a concrete strength test?'" he said. That type of quality control is vital in a country in which construction techniques are not standardized and education lags.

For instance, on Jan. 25, Neimes called together the construction manager and several laborers who were building a stone and concrete foundation for the Gaji Bridge near Pol-e Khomri. The laborers were placing softball-sized rocks into the formwork as required by their U.S.-funded contact, but the laborers weren't being selective enough in their selection of rocks.

Neimes told them that craggy, angular rocks create stronger foundations than smooth, round rocks. To illustrate the point, he tried to rub two rough rocks against one another; the rocks caught. Then he rubbed two smooth rocks against one another; they slid past each other.

"Most of the contractors don't know engineering," Neimes said afterward. "They're just local Afghans trying to make a living."

Selecting projects to fund through the military's Commanders Emergency Response Program is an exercise in measuring benefits, said U.S. Army Maj. Mike Creedon, who serves as a company commander for the 451st Civil Affairs Battalion in Mazar-e Sharif.

The 451st operates as a clearinghouse to evaluate small development proposals from across northern Afghanistan. "There're a lot of villages and there's a lot of need, but there's only so much funding," he said.

Projects that are most likely to be approved are those with support from the Afghan government and little need for maintenance, he said.

Building schools without a commitment by the cash-strapped Afghan government to provide teachers, books or maintenance service makes little sense, he said. "It falls into disrepair very quickly," Creedon said.

Even seemingly simple projects like drilling wells require detailed evaluations, in part because Afghans are by nature clannish and often segregate themselves along ethnic or cultural lines.

Providing a new well can create more problems than it solves, Creedon said. If coalition forces drill a well in one village, residents in surrounding villages may take offense at the perceived slight, particularly if the new well lowers the water table for the others.

Hydroelectric plants present their own sets of challenges. Building plants is fairly easy, but maintaining the mechanical equipment and devising systems to meter usage and collect payments from customers is far more difficult, he said.

In contrast, projects such as roads, bridges, retaining walls and river embankments require far less maintenance. Those types of projects also benefit several clans simultaneously, Creedon said. Those also happen to be exactly the type of projects the Hungarian army and Corps of Engineers personnel are focusing on.

In fact, eight of the next 10 projects that are scheduled to be built using Commanders Emergency Response Program funding in Baghlan Province fall into that category. The slate features four bridges, three road projects and a wall at a school.

The only outliers are a solar-powered streetlights project and a small government building.

Among the projects funding through the Commanders Emergency Response Program was the Hemmat Kheyl River Diversion Dam, near the village of Hemmat Kheyl in Baghlan Province. The $81,000 project was completed in December 2011.

Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Photo by | *Saber Ghori Construction Co.*

Measuring up

Assessment tool helps PRT members determine project needs

Story by | *J.D. Hardesty* Photos by | *Courtesy of PRT Team*

Daniel Johnston, an Afghanistan Engineer District-North project engineer embedded with the Provincial Reconstruction Team Branch conducts a drainage evaluation using a SWEAT-MT assessment after flooding in Wardak Province as a fellow team member stands guard.

KABUL – An Afghanistan Engineer District-North Provincial Reconstruction Team member invented an assessment matrix to resolve construction design, cultural and security related issues challenging the ability to provide for many villages' most basic human needs.

The matrix is a true force multiplier for the 32 provincial reconstruction teams providing engineering expertise across northern Afghanistan.

Each team has a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representative embedded alongside military personnel to address reconstruction missions for more than 180 projects totaling more than $176 million.

Daniel Johnston, a district project engineer laboring side-by-side with military counterparts created the SWEAT-MT assessment matrix in an effort to streamline and help traverse through the maze of obstacles and hurdles inherent in determine project needs.

The SWEAT-MT assessment matrix is a relatively new tool that provides on-the-spot guidance to PRT members when engineers are not available to help them identify the projects that will have the greatest impact on communities.

The matrix, a spreadsheet of sorts, breaks down available sewer, water, electric, academics, trash, medical and transportation infrastructure to determine each community's highest project need.

With four district provisional reconstruction team members covering three northern provinces that includes a population of 1.5 million and 14,000 square miles, the team doesn't have the ability to visually review all potential projects.

The SWEAT-MT is a tool being used by military personnel to engage local Afghan leaders to assess available utility, transportation, healthcare and education needs. Findings are reported to battalion commanders to request assistance by the Corps of Engineers to address the highest needs.

The Corps of Engineers PRT members provide engineering expertise to the NATO-led efforts in three military sectors within the northern part of the country -- Regional Command-East, Regional Command-North and Regional Command-Capital. They work with coalition partners such as Swedish-Norwegian, Turkish, Czech, Polish and New Zealander military members.

Limited manpower restricts the PRT members from reviewing all sites requested by the district governors, village elders, and all of the other potential beneficiaries.

Johnston said that is why an assessment matrix like SWEAT-MT was developed. "It streamlines the process and accounts for the interdependencies between factors demonstrating need," he said.

"For instance, a village of substantial population without a health care facility, in which an obvious need is present, is only a viable project if other assessed SWEAT-MT criteria such as access to transportation, water and electricity are deemed capable of supporting it," he said.

Fielding the assessment tool across the battlefield improves employment opportunities for locals and heightens military commanders' efficiencies in local counterinsurgency strategy operations.

Currently, the provisional reconstruction team program has more than 100 projects totaling $200 million in on-going construction.

Matt Toton, who heads the district's PRT program, is always looking for more efficient ways for the Corps of Engineers to get technical expertise into villages. The SWEAT-MT allows efficient assessments while limited the exposure of unarmed civilians in sometimes dangerous areas.

Embedding engineers within the teams brings great value because their engineering expertise speeds up projects, Toton said. "Projects would still go forward without them being embedded, but we are able to provide good guidance, project review and better, high quality construction," he said.

While PRT members work in war zones, they typically stay behind the scenes. Yet they're not far removed from combat operations. They hear about threats and occasionally see the deadly consequences of roadside bombs and other fighting.

Fly-by mission

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force visits Airmen at Qalaa House

Story and photos by | *Mark Rankin*

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Roy (right) talks with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel Msgt Rufus Peace, Sgt. Alvin Till, CMSgt Chad Brandau and CMSgt Alfred Herring at the Qalaa House Compound.

KABUL – The Air Force's top noncommissioned officer highlighted the role of family members to deployed personnel during a tour of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' headquarters in northern Afghanistan on Feb. 1.

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Roy emphasized to the Airmen and other service members that he is well aware of their service and commitment to the military's efforts Afghanistan. "Your work is appreciated. And I want you to pass that on to your families, for their sacrifice and what they bring to the fight," he said.

The visit marked Roy's first trip to the Qalaa House compound. He toured the facility with Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Chad Brandau, the senior enlisted advisor within Afghanistan Engineer District-North.

> "It's a great morale booster for Airmen who have never had the opportunity to meet and talk with hims."

Roy met with Airmen serving as force protection members who provide security for civilian employees; other Airmen serving as engineers who help build and repair critical infrastructure such as roads and Afghan police and military installations; and still others serving in additional capacities. Overall, Air Force members comprise more than a quarter of the military personnel assigned to the unit.

Roy stopped in several offices and discussed a variety of topics, including the Corps of Engineers' mission, the reduction of U.S. military forces within the country, joint operations and challenges Airmen face while deployed.

He recognized the contributions of Air Force engineers and the difficult work they do. "One of my first focus areas is joint coalition operations, and this is the tip of the spear," he said.

Since being appointed chief master sergeant of the Air Force in June 2009, Roy has reviewed operations in Afghanistan numerous times. He's found that Airmen serving within the Corps of Engineers and elsewhere within the theater are vital to developing Afghanistan's national security forces.

"Believe me, all the folks in the Pentagon and the chief of staff see what you're doing and we thank you for being Airmen and contributing to U.S. security," Roy said. "Airmen are important to the fight, and you are making us look good. Your families are just as important, and the Air Force leadership appreciates all they do."

Throughout the day, he returned again and again to the theme of the importance of families. "Talk to me about your families," he coaxed Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors. They told him about their loved ones at homes and their hopes for the future.

"I ask about your families, because that is why you are here," Roy said. "You're here because you want them to have a better life, to have freedom and opportunities."

Concerning the future of the Air Force, he said, "Our nation is facing some tough economic challenges at home. We are going to have to make some changes; we need you to help us to make those changes."

Roy encouraged Airmen to look for ways to cut waste and to improve Air Force operations.

Brandau said he was thankful that Roy included the Qalaa House compound in his itinerary. "We're glad to have him here," Brandau said. "It's a great morale booster for Airmen who have never had the opportunity to meet and talk with him."

As the Air Force's senior non-commissioned officer, Roy serves as an advocate for enlisted personnel at the national level. He serves as the personal adviser to the chief of staff and the secretary of the Air Force on issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale and utilization the enlisted force. He is the 16th person to serve in the position.

Chief Master Sgt. James A. Roy presents Master Sgt. Roger Schwartz a coin for his service during his visit.

Achieving the dream

Deployed employees in Afghanistan attain King's dream, admiral says

Story and photos by | *Mark Rankin*

Navy Rear Adm. James W. Crawford III, talks with U.S. Army Corps employees Michelle Arter (left) and Raelene Hampton after he spoke at a luncheon to observe the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday Jan. 16.

KABUL – U.S. Navy Rear Adm. James W. Crawford III told an audience of 85 military service members and civilian employees that they have a special opportunity to fulfill the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of equality for all Americans.

Their opportunity comes through service to the country and to their fellow Americans, he said during a Martin Luther King Jr. Day event at Camp Eggers Jan. 16.

"I wouldn't be standing here if it was not for Dr. King," said Crawford, who serves as the commander of legal affairs for NATO forces in Afghanistan. "He realized that service is the great equalizer among us all – and left us with his dream. There is a reason they call us service members. Military members especially, epitomize that dream by your service and what you are doing."

About 10 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees stationed at Qalaa House compound within the Green Zone attended the program at Eggers.

> "He gave us something we can really use."

Crawford reminded them and others in the crowd that King encouraged people of all races to serve humanity through selfless service. "This dream is not just limited to some Americans, but all," he said.

He told the audience that King's speeches and quotes are used as examples of motivation around the world. He said the civil rights leader's vision of equality, brotherhood, freedom and justice for all Americans provides the necessities for anyone to be successful in life. "Many of you have forgotten, but perhaps by posing this question, you will remember: What is the dream and how are you using it daily?"

He challenged those in the audience to take a few steps forward to achieve their own dreams. In an emotionally charged conclusion, the admiral said, "While we are not there yet, we are on our way. It's because of people like you, we'll get there."

King would be pleased to see U.S. service members of all races working side by side in Afghanistan in service to fellow Americans half a world away, the admiral said. "I know he is smiling and looking down on all of you."

Corps of Engineers supervisory contract specialist Jodelle Ferguson, who attended the program and sang with the Eggers gospel choir, said she was inspired by Crawford's explanation of why King's message remains relevant 48 years after his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington.

"He didn't just use quotations from just his 'I Have a Dream' speech like most speakers do. He took the message from the speech and brought it to us on a personal level, so that we can implement it within our own lives," she said. "He gave us something we can really use."

The choir's gospel numbers also reached her, Ferguson said.

Corps of Engineers precontract technician Evelyn Williams, who also sang with the choir, said she was motivated by Crawford's challenge to audience members to personally act to achieve King's dream and to speak out for their own beliefs.

The event was intended to increase service members and civilian employees' awareness of King's contributions to American history and to the civil rights movement, organizers said.

Army Capt. Keisha Spaulding, who is assigned to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan headquarters in Kabul, sang the national anthem. The Eggers choir performed "You've Been So Faithful" and "We're Gonna Make It."

King served as the chief spokesman for nonviolent activism during the 1960s civil rights movement, which protested racial discrimination in federal and state laws. He was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed legislation creating Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1983.

U.S. Navy Rear Adm. James W. Crawford III, told an audience of 85 military service members and civilian employees that they have a special opportunity to fulfill Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of equality for all Americans.

Army Capt. Keisha Spaulding (left) who is assigned to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan headquarters in Kabul, belt out a song with the Camp Eggers choir during a King Day event at Camp Eggers on Jan. 16.

Special delivery

Orphans help carry loads of donated winter clothes into the facility.

Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Photos by | *Joe Marek*

Corps of Engineers workers collect and distribute winter clothes to Kabul orphans

KABUL – Eight U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees distributed two dozen boxes of donated jackets, hats, gloves and other winter clothes to a large orphanage on Jan. 14, a day when heavy snow fell and the temperature reached 32 degrees in the Afghan capital.

The delivery, which was made using armored vehicles, was the first of several planned deliveries in a program the employees have dubbed Operation Warmth.

A group of civilian and military employees launched the program in November at the first sign of winter weather, said Raelene Hampton, the chairwoman of the volunteer group within the Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan.

The employees solicited donations from co-workers, family members, church groups, school groups and other charitable organizations from their hometowns across the United States and Europe, said Hampton, who also serves as chairwoman of the clothing drive. The donations included hand-made knitted caps, newly purchased jackets, as well as new clothes donated by several U.S. retailers, including Kmart, Old Navy and Target, she said.

The group also collected toys, socks, shoes, blankets and other goods. The group, which is based at the Afghanistan Engineer District-North headquarters compound in Kabul, separated and bundled the donations according to the intended recipients' genders and ages. In all, they collected about 100 boxes of goods.

Eight Corps of Engineers employees traveled with a well-armed security team and a translator to make the deliveries at Tahya-e-Maskan Orphanage, which is west of the city center.

The employees: Nesar Ahmad Asdaq, a senior program manager for administration and customs; Air Force Maj. Mike Brannon, who serves as deputy for training and transition for Afghan forces within the Operations and Maintenance Division; Eunice Ford, who's the chief of project management for Operations and Maintenance; Hampton, who serves as an equal employment opportunity specialist; Marissa Smith, a program analyst; Jack Sztuk, who's the facility manager; Nicholette Yerkes, an administration support specialist; and Army Lt. Col. Terri Wise, who's the district's senior intelligence officer.

They met with Ahaj Sayeed Abdullah Hashimi, the general director of government-run orphanages for Afghanistan's Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled. Hashimi is a well-known government reformer and an advocate for improving the country's orphanages.

His biggest challenge is overcoming corruption that is embedded at nearly every level of government in Afghanistan, according to a profile that appeared in The New York Times on Dec. 31, 2011. He's noted for making unannounced inspections at orphanages around the country and removing – or at least trying to remove – corrupt administrators.

Hashimi thanked the Corps of Engineers employees for the contributions, and said he hoped their visit would bring more awareness to Afghan orphans, many of whom lost parents during long wars against insurgent and Soviet forces.

"I know that in the last decade, your government has supported Afghanistan," he told the group through an interpreter. "We are seeing development in Afghanistan. I hope there is more attention on the orphans, because we don't see much."

The Afghan government oversees 35 orphanages throughout the country, he said. Combined, they house and educate 8,600 boys and girls up to 18 years old. Foreign support, particularly from the United States, has helped him improve both the buildings and the quality of instruction at the facilities, he said.

> "Many orphans leave the facilities prepared to pursue college degrees in teaching and engineering."

At Tahya-e-Maskan, which houses 500 children, students take classes in subjects including English, Turkish, math and computers, plus several trades such as tailoring, carpentry, auto mechanics and electronics.

Many orphans leave the facilities prepared to pursue college degrees in teaching and engineering, Hashimi said. Some have since returned to become teachers at the orphanages. Other orphans leave at 18 to pursue careers.

The Corps of Engineers employees visited two classes that were in session – English and math. They met both the instructors and students, and spoke with them in English. Brannon, who speaks Dari, also spoke with the administrators, instructors and children

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employee Raelene Hampton greets students while in an English class on Jan. 14.

in their native language.

The classrooms were crowded, but well equipped with school desks and dry-erase boards. The classrooms were well lit, clean and well maintained. However, they were cold. As snow fell outdoors, the children wore jackets and hats indoors.

They wore just socks on their feet, and a few were barefoot, because they leave their muddy shoes and boots in a semicircle outside the building's main entrance. Inside, the walls were decorated with laminated posters of President George Washington, slain Afghan national hero Ahmad Massoud, and reproductions of classic paintings from around the world.

Hashimi also showed the Corps of Engineers employees the children's living quarters, which as the director pointed out, need new doors and windows that close tightly, new flooring, and new heating and air conditioning systems.

The lobby and stairways in the buildings were wintery cold, but the sleeping rooms were warm. Each room is equipped with a wood-burning stove with an exhaust pipe that mostly channels thick black smoke outdoors. The rooms have ceiling fans for cooling during summer months.

The Corps of Engineers personnel looked over rooms equipped with metal bunk beds and cabinets. The rooms accommodate 12 students each. The beds were made and the rooms were neat and clean.

Hashimi outlined other needs: A new building is needed for an on-site clinic that currently is housed in a building that should be used for vocational instruction; artificial turf is needed to replace the much used natural grass athletic field, which is alternately dusty or muddy, depending on the season; and additional beds, furniture and linens are needed for the dormitories.

Afterward, Ford said he was moved by the experience. "You really see the need for additional assistance," he said.

Smith said she was heartened to make a positive impact on the children, even it was just a small impact.

"When I went into the bedrooms, I choked up. It was so poor and so simple, but it was clean. It was so empty, just the basics – mattresses, sheets, blankets," she said. "But the poverty compared to our kids in the States, it was really hard for me. And I've seen poverty in Nicaragua, because I grew up there."

Hampton said the group of volunteers hopes to expand Operation Warmth to women's prisons. In Afghanistan, young children frequently serve sentences with their mothers, because men typically don't raise children.

Most of the Corps of Engineers personnel are on temporary assignments from their home districts or bases. Ford and Sztuk are from the Jacksonville District in Florida; Smith and Yerkes are from the Portland District in Oregon; and Hampton is from the Europe District in Wiesbaden, Germany. Brannon's home base is Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio; and Wise's home base is Fort George G. Meade near Odenton, Md. Asdaq is Afghan and lives in Kabul.

Major Mike Brannon speaks in Dari to a group of orphans while dropping off donations on Jan. 14.

Parting shot

Photo by | ***Joe Marek***

Kabul – Early morning light shimmers on the snow-covered hometown signpost near the Qalaa House building on Jan. 15, a day when the outside temperature only reached 41 degrees.

Meanwhile, in hometowns elsewhere, it was 64 degrees and sunny 7,583 miles away in Jacksonville, Fla.; a chilly 40 degrees 2,736 miles away in Wiesbaden, Germany; and an even colder 34 degrees 6,884 miles off in Baltimore.