FREEDOM BUILDER

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2011

One on one

Col. Christopher W. Martin answers 20 questions about leadership.

Realignment

Maj. Gen. Kendall P. Cox explains the relaunch of the Transatlantic Division.

Numbers cruncher

Corps of Engineers brass banks on Devorah Waesch to keep the district's multi-billion-dollar budget straight.

Special delivery

The team that directed construction of a prison in Bagram is recognized as the best in the Corps of Engineers.

A fighting chance

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Taking stock

The Corps of Engineers launches a new program to provide hard-to-obtain building materials to construction contractors in Afghanistan.

Martin takes charge

Col. Christopher W. Martin takes command as out-going Col. Thomas H. Magness retires.

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Afghanistan Engineer District

FREEDOM BUILDER

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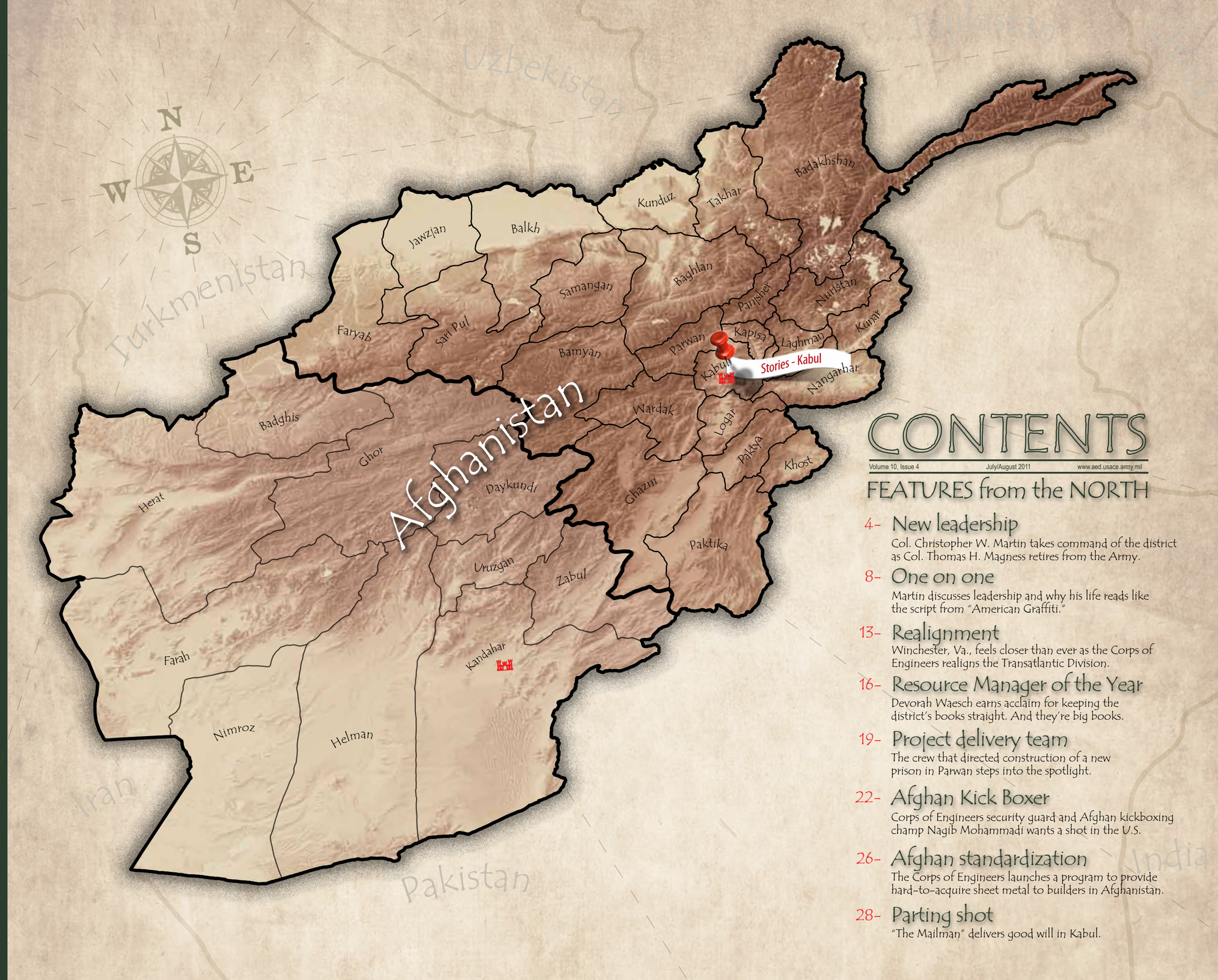
Cover Image:

Col. Christopher W. Martin (front right) passes the Corps of Engineers flag to Chief Master Sgt. Chad Brandau.

(Full story on pg. 4)

Photo by | *Paul Giblin*



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Command performance

Col. Christopher W.Martin takes command of the district as Col. Thomas Magness retires

Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Photo by | *J.D. Hardesty*

Col. Christopher W. Martin addresses Corps of Engineers employees at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul.

KABUL – Col. Christopher W. Martin took command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan in a ceremony steeped with military tradition at the unit's headquarters at the Qalaa House compound on July 10.

Martin, of Argyle, Texas, became the 10th commander of Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which was established in 2004. He succeeded Col. Thomas H. Magness, of Los Angeles, who had served as commander since July 8, 2010, a period of rapid growth in scope and mission for the district.

> "You were more than employees to me. You were teammates."

"It is an absolute honor and privilege today to accept command of this great organization," Martin told about 400 Corps of Engineers employees and U.S. and Afghan guests during the ceremony at the compound in downtown Kabul. "As an Army officer, there is nothing more challenging, rewarding and humbling than commanding in combat."

He credited Magness for leading a unit that completes construction projects at the pace of one a day, an accomplishment he called superb.

The district is comprised of 1,403 military personnel and civilians stationed in Kabul and across northern and eastern Afghanistan. The unit's primary mission is to bolster Afghanistan's infrastructure after three decades of conflict. The scope of work is varied – military bases, hydropower plants, electrical transmission lines, roads, prisons, police stations, government ministry buildings and more. Many projects are constructed in hostile regions of the country.

Brig. Gen. Mark W. Yenter, the presiding officer of the event, awarded Magness the Bronze Star Medal for exceptional meritorious achievement while serving as commander of the district.

During a speech that followed, Yenter recognized Magness for his passionate dedication to the mission and innovative thinking that allowed district personnel to finish projects faster than in years past. The results were breathtaking, he said. "No one in the Corps of Engineers is more aggressive in program management, in getting it right. He's got that can-do attitude. I've never seen him turn down a mission," he said.

Yenter noted that Magness directed an initiative that split individual projects among several contractors with different specialties. For example, one contractor would build exterior security walls for a project such as a police station, another company would construct the major components of the central structure, and a third firm would apply the finishing details. The specialization process kept projects from bogging down as they sometimes did in the past, Yenter said.

The general also credited Magness for establishing a protocol that ensured six critical conditions were met before construction started on any project. Among the criteria: security for laborers against insurgent forces, unobstructed access to sites, and reliable water sources.

The process produced safer and faster construction.

Yenter said Magness was equally ardent about the Afghan people. Magness oversaw the creation and implementation of several programs to teach engineering and construction skills to Afghans, whose educational and entrepreneurial opportunities had suffered during the Soviet occupation and Taliban rule.

"Col. Magness is a compassionate leader. He has a compassion for the folks that he works with," Yenter said.

Magness said his tour in Afghanistan was a transformational experience. When he arrived in the country a year earlier, he knew a great deal about the Corps of Engineers, but little about Afghanistan, its

Photo by | *Joe Marek*

Brig. Gen. Mark W. Yenter introduces Martin during the change of command ceremony.

Martin participates in the event on July 10.

people and the Corps of Engineers' mission in the country, he said.

During his tour, he gained a great deal of respect for both U.S. personnel and Afghans who are dedicated to rebuilding the country.

"If you look at what you have right here," Magness said as he gestured toward the crowd, "this is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine members of the military; U.S. civilians, some from USACE, many from other walks of life; contractors; and Afghans – all brought together for one purpose, to serve their country and to answer the higher purpose of finding a way to win this war and to gain a sustainable peace here in Afghanistan."

He touted the district's team of employees as dedicated professionals who have technical competence, aptitudes for hard work and personal courage to live and work in a war zone. "They do it for love of family, love of country, love of the Afghans, and love for each other. And I could not be prouder of each one of them," said Magness, who paused to collect his emotions a few times during his remarks.

The colonel used the event to thank personnel within the Corps of Engineers, other U.S. agencies, Afghan ministries and contracting companies who had served either alongside him or under him during his command. He thanked many by name, including personnel whose tours in Afghanistan had ended weeks or months earlier, and those whose tours in country extend weeks or months beyond his own.

With their help, the district's construction program grew from $1.1 billion when he arrived to more than $3 billion. Furthermore, Corps of Engineers personnel distributed new engineering textbooks to universities across the country, assisted in the creation of a professional organization for women engineers and construction professionals, and launched a program to erect solar-powered streetlights in Kabul, a city that doesn't have a reliable electric grid and went dark at night.

Magness thanked the military service members under his command for providing security that prevented the loss of life to Corps of Engineers employees who include engineers, architects, construction managers and accountants, among other professionals. The worst injuries among Corps of Engineers personnel during the past year, he said, were suffered on volleyball and basketball courts.

"It is an amazing team with an incredible track record," he said. "You were more than employees to me. You were teammates, co-investors in this mission. And most importantly, you were my friends."

Under sunny skies outside the namesake Qalaa House building, Magness and Martin followed longstanding Army tradition as they passed the unit's red-and-white flag to represent the transfer of authority from one commander to the other.

First, Chief Master Sgt. Chad Brandau, the senior enlisted service member in the unit, passed the flag to Magness, symbolizing his last act of allegiance to the outgoing commander. Then Magness passed the flag that bears the Corps of Engineers' castle logo to Yenter, signifying that the unit is never without senior leadership.

Next, Yenter passed it to Martin, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility for the unit and its members to the incoming commander. Finally, Martin completed the rite by passing the flag back to Brandau, showing his confidence in the senior enlisted service member, and allowing Brandau to demonstrate his first act of allegiance to him.

Later, Yenter noted that Magness initially refused to release the flag. "I don't know if you noticed it, but when they were passing the colors, he didn't give them up on the first tug, so I know he loves this unit," the general said. In fact, Magness rebuffed three tugs before relenting.

The five-member color guard represented the spectrum of the Corps of Engineers' ranks in Afghanistan. It was comprised of Army Staff Sgt. John Cotton, Marine Staff Sgt. Michael Diaz, Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Pistolich, civilian architect Jason Kubischta and Afghan Army Lt. Jamal Nasir Shsarifi.

The 1st Cavalry Division Band from Fort Hood, Texas, performed several patriotic and military selections, and Corps of Engineers bid package manager Gwendolyn Hannam sang a soulful rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Chaplain Maj. Ephraim Garcia gave the invocation.

Martin previously served as command engineer for Forces Command Headquarters at Fort McPherson, in Atlanta. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and the University of Illinois. He also has served in Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, California and Virginia in the United States, plus Germany, Bosnia, Italy and Iraq, among other locations.

Following the ceremony, he videotaped a message to Corps of Engineers employees who are stationed outside of the headquarters compound, and he met with staff to outline a schedule to visit several locations across northern Afghanistan.

Magness will retire from the Army, concluding a 26-year career. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and the University of Texas. Before arriving in Afghanistan, he served a three-year tour as the commander of the Los Angeles District of the Corps of Engineers. He has served in Texas and Michigan in the United States, and Germany, among other locations.

He said he plans to spend several months at home with his family in Los Angeles, then return to Afghanistan later this year with a private contracting firm to continue the mission to rebuild Afghanistan.

Col. Thomas H. Magness, Yenter and Martin (on porch, left to right) salute during the paying of the U.S. national anthem. More than 400 employees and guests attended the ceremony.

One on one

Story by | *Paul Giblin* Photo by | *Joe Marek*

Christopher W. Martin

20 questions (give or take) on command

KABUL – Many of Col. Christopher W. Martin's views on leadership were shaped during a combat tour in Iraq in the mid-2000s.

It was there he learned that good leaders aren't allotted the luxury of having bad days, regardless of the circumstances they face. The new commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan said he tries to live up to that credo every day.

During a wide-ranging 30-minute question-and-answer session in Martin's office at the Qalaa House building on July 10, he discussed his principles on leadership, his goals for the next year, and how his love of sports and family are forever blended.

Lastly, Martin revealed how an experience that could have been lifted from the movie "American Graffiti" shaped his life. Imagine Martin as Richard Dreyfuss' street-cruising character Curt – a luckier version of that guy.

And for the record: Martin previously served as commander of the Corps of Engineers' Fort Worth District, among other assignments in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. He earned a bachelor's degree in general science from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1983, and master's degree in civil engineering from the University of Illinois in 1991. He lives in Argyle, Texas, which is near Fort Worth.

Question: During the change of command ceremony, you said that there is nothing more challenging, rewarding and humbling that commanding in combat. Can you elaborate on that?

Answer: First of all, we need to make sure people understand that we are in combat here. Granted, we're not getting shot at. But what we do is so important to supporting our troops and Afghan troops, so that we can turn over security to them.

No one wants to go to war, but as an Army officer, it's what you train for. The relationships you forge with people when you're in combat are like nothing else. You know, I had kids in my battalion that got out of the Army after we got back, and I still stay in touch with them. I have a pretty good distro list. We just talk back and forth about different things.

You just forge some intense relationships based on the fact that you've all been shot at together, if nothing else. You learn who to rely on, who you can count on. Hopefully, you can give them some good leadership. That's the ultimate goal, just to make sure you're doing the right thing.

Q: We'll get to your thoughts on leadership shortly, but first, what are your initial impressions of Afghanistan?

A: It's a lot different than I expected. It's far more developed than I expected, driving through Kabul the first time and seeing all that engineering and construction equipment. A lot of the equipment was sitting in yards, but just the capacity that this country has to go out and do projects is much more than I expected.

I was also impressed with the quality of work of the Afghan construction companies that we have doing projects for us. I did not expect to see that and I was very pleasantly surprised at how good a job they're doing out there.

Q: What are your goals here in Afghanistan and with this district?

A: Good question.

I believe you work hard. I believe you play hard. I believe you have fun, even though you're in combat. Districts are about

execution. I believe we have to execute. I know we feel a lot of pressure to make sure we get contracts awarded on time and get things done. But the bottom line is we've got to build facilities and turn them over. That's what execution is. I just want to make sure that we're doing that at the right level, the appropriate level.

At the same time, I want to make sure that people have a sense of pride and accomplishment in what they're doing and enjoy what they're doing here. And feel like when they leave, that they made a significant mark on the situation here.

That's probably it, more than anything else. I just want to make sure that we're executing and that people really feel like they've contributed something important.

Q: What are the significant and unique challenges here in Afghanistan?

A: More than anything else, it's just the physical dispersion of all our project sites. Some of them are in some pretty bad territory out there. We've got to make sure that we're addressing the security issues properly.

At the same time, we have a lot of people here. We're all compressed in a very small compound. With the stress, a small compound and a lot of people, it can add even more to the stress. We've just got to figure out how we balance the stress with getting the job done, but still enjoy ourselves so that we're able to produce every day.

But the physical dispersion of our sites and the security are the things that worry me the most. That's something we've got to address here very quickly.

Q: Prior to your assignment here in Afghanistan, what was your career highlight?

A: I guess probably commanding the battalion in Iraq in 2004 and 2005. It was just an incredible experience to command troops in combat. We were engaged quite a bit in combat. It was a command and engineer battalion, but we fought as an infantry battalion. We were responsible for a large section of northwest Bagdad.

We had about 400 men in the battalion – three engineer companies, a tank platoon and a mechanized company. We were in northwest Bagdad in a placed called Gazalia – a very ugly place, a lot of bad guys.

Also, though, when I commanded the Fort Worth District. We had probably one of the most outstanding and exciting programs, short of being in theater. We built out Fort Bliss. We worked on the new hospital and we built out the new medical training facility at Fort Sam Houston. We also built the border fence on the Southwest border.

Q: Let's circle back to your thoughts on leadership. As you rose through the ranks in your career, what is the most important leadership trait that you carry with you?

A: I learned this when I went to Iraq. We went over there early and worked for Gen. Martin Dempsey, the current chief of staff of the Army and soon to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was the 1st Armored Division commander, and our brigade combat team went out there about three months before the 1st Cavalry.He had a saying that I've never forgotten: "Leaders cannot have a bad day."

You know, things don't always go well. Things aren't always right. But a leader just can't show that on his face and in his attitude, because that just affects people that he's in charge of. That's probably one of the most important lessons I've ever learned. Leaders cannot have a bad day.

Q: How do *never* have a bad day?

A: Sometimes it's hard. For example, I lost some kids in combat. It's hard not to have a bad day when that happens, but at the same time, you've got to know when you can express certain emotions and when you can't.

When everyone's sad or things are happening that are not good, your attitude and the way you approach it influences everybody underneath you, so you've just got to make sure that you're aware of that.

Q: That makes sense. Beyond that, as a leader, how do you instill the concepts of personal responsibility, accountability and initiative among people in your charge?

A: Army values apply to all of us. We are the *Army* Corps of Engineers, even though we're civilians. We'll get posters made of the Army Civilian Corps Creed and hang them around, because I think it's important that people have a sense of belonging to a unit.

This is the best unit in the Corps of Engineers. I tell everybody that all the time. And because of that, people have an inherent responsibility to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, so that we can continue to stay the best district in the Army Corps of Engineers.

Q: Wait a minute. Did you tell people at your last command the same thing? That they were the best unit in the Corps of Engineers?

A: Yes! And they were. But they're not now.

Q: I detect a certain pattern emerging here. Turning toward your personal life, what's your passion? What do you get excited about?

A: I love sports, all the Texas teams – the Cowboys, Rangers, Stars, Mavericks.

I've got two sons and a beautiful wife.

Q: Tell me a bit about your family.

A: One son's a surveyor in Texas. He and his wife gave us a beautiful granddaughter. My youngest son just graduated from West Point. He'll probably be over here in about April.

Q: What are your sons' names?

A: Well, my favorite baseball team is the Texas Rangers. My favorite ballplayer is Nolan Ryan. My sons are named Nolan and Ryan. I've actually met with Nolan Ryan with my youngest son and he's heard that same story.

My wife is Carolyn. She's from Georgia. This is hard for her, because she's at the house by herself. This is a hard deployment for her, harder than some of my previous ones have been. But she's supportive of what I'm doing here. She supports me in everything I do and I couldn't do it without her. We've been married 23 years.

Q: Where did you meet?

A: I was an engineer officer. I was leaving Germany after my first tour and was sent to the Engineer Officer Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. The first weekend there was Memorial Day weekend. Me and a couple of my buddies went down to Panama City Beach, Florida. We met there. I fell in love with her the day I met her. I told my buddies that I was going to marry her that day. Six months later we were married.

Q: Did you meet on the beach?

A: No. Actually, I was driving my Jeep back toward Fort Benning and she pulled up in a car beside me with a friend of hers. And we started talking. We met at a red light at Panama City Beach.

Q: Seriously? How did that work? Didn't the light change 30 seconds later?

A: There were a lot of lights on the strip at Panama City Beach.

Q: So you had a running conversation at red lights along the strip? How did you get her to give you her phone number?

A: Just my good looks and charm, I guess. I don't know.

Q: Whatever it was, it seemed to have worked. Aside from being the real-life version of Richard Dreyfuss' character in "American Graffiti," what else should people to know about you?

A: I'm an introvert. Don't expect me to carry a conversation. If you ask me questions, I'll answer them, but don't expect me to carry a conversation. My wife does that for me. I like talking to people, but I want to hear what you have to say. You don't necessarily have to hear what I have to say.

I'm a little bit abrupt at times. Sometimes that will rub people wrong. I apologize for that. That's just the way I am. Have you seen that cartoon with Dilbert and the doctor? Dilbert's mother takes him to the doctor and the doctor says, "Ma'am, I hate to tell you this, but your son has the knack. He's an engineer."

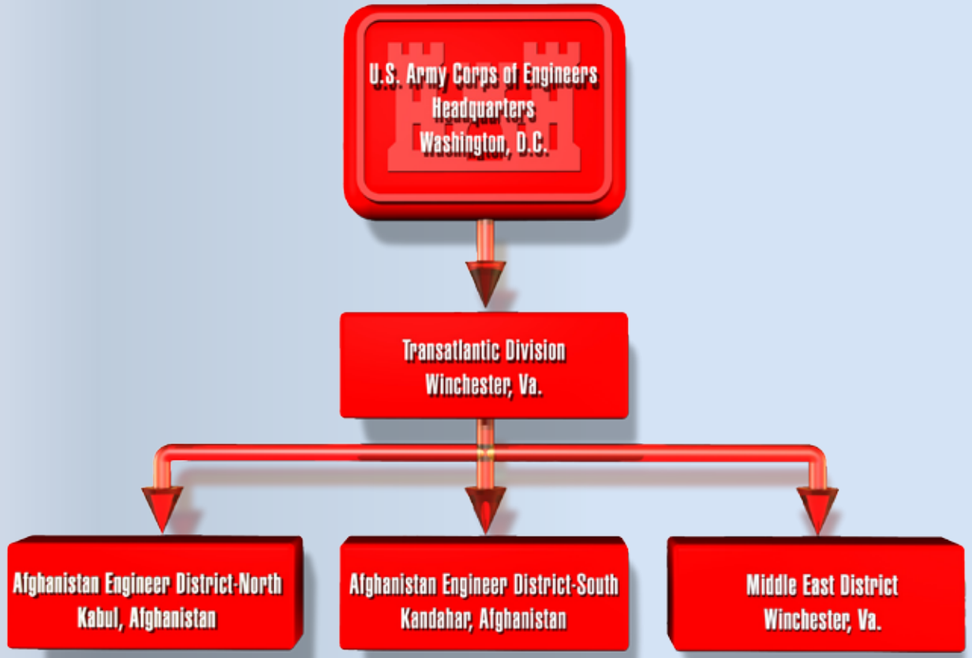
You know, my wife calls me an engineer all the time. That's probably the best way to describe me.

Q: I'll trust her good judgment on that. Well, that wraps it up. Thank you.

A: Alright. I appreciate it.

Photo by | *Paul Giblin*

Realignment



Story by | *Paul Giblin*

Graphic by | *Joe Marek*

Transatlantic Division reshapes as priorities shift

KABUL – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers realigned its overseas operations on Aug. 9 to reflect the shifting workloads in Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the Middle East and central Asia.

An important feature of the new configuration is that it will provide Corps of Engineers commanders in Afghanistan a more direct chain of communication to Corps of Engineers leaders in Washington, D.C., said Maj. Gen. Kendall P. Cox, a key figure in the reorganization.

The Transatlantic Division, which is based in Winchester, Va., now serves as the umbrella organization for three districts that oversee construction operations in the region. Cox serves as the commander of the division.

The trio of districts are the Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul; the Afghanistan Engineer District-South, which is based in Kandahar; and the Middle East District, which is based in Winchester.

The once bustling Gulf Region District in Iraq was downsized on June 1 to an area office and now reports through the Middle East District, which has oversight of area offices in 20 countries across the Middle East and central Asia.

The Transatlantic Division, like other

divisions within the Corps of Engineers, reports through the organization's headquarters in Washington, D.C. The division was established in 2009, but the focus was in Iraq, where Cox served as the on-site commander for 16 months. He has since relocated to Winchester.

The realignment reflects the evolution of the Corps of Engineers' priorities in the region, Cox said. The new arrangement is designed to bolster the Corps of Engineers' mission to help Afghanistan rebuild its infrastructure, which has been devastated by three decades of war. The Corps of Engineers is the primary organization building military bases, police stations, roads, airstrips and other infrastructure projects in Afghanistan to increase the country's stability and economy.

Previously, the two Corps of Engineers districts in Afghanistan used an indirect reporting chain that failed to keep pace with the increasing scope of work, Cox said.

"The actual programmatic management and oversight – the traditional division mission – were not really being done by anyone in theater. Hence, the two districts were having to do a lot of that by themselves by calling back to the United States," he said.

Before the change, the Corps of Engineers districts in Afghanistan reported through the Army's war-fighting command structure, rather than directly through the Corps of Engineers' command structure in a more traditional fashion.

Col. Christopher W. Martin, the commander of Afghanistan Engineer District-North, said he welcomed the new structure because it will ensure consistency among the two quickly expanding Corps of Engineers districts in Afghanistan. Until 2009, there was just one district in the country, but it split in 2009.

"We need a headquarters to help us get through this difficult period. It's going to be good for us. Ultimately, it's going to help us with execution, which is the bottom line," Martin said.

"When it was a single district, there was one set of rules. Now, just in order to regionalize and make sure we have the same combined effect and that we're delivering the same products to our customers, we need more oversight," he said.

The time difference between Afghanistan and the United States frustrated even the best efforts by personnel on different sides of the globe to communicate effectively, Cox said. To strengthen the ties between the districts in Afghanistan and the division in the United States, part of the division's operation will be based in Afghanistan, he said.

> "I want you out there executing construction oversight to ensure that we deliver projects every day."

Division personnel will focus on tasks such as hiring, and procuring contracting and engineering assistance from colleagues in the United States for projects in Afghanistan, which will allow district employees in theater to concentrate on primary duties to develop infrastructure, Cox said.

And with operations in both the United States and in Afghanistan, division personnel will be in business around the clock.

"It's my responsibility to take those burdens away from you, so that every one of you that is here today can worry about one thing – delivering projects," Cox told members of northern Afghanistan district during a town-hall style meeting in Kabul on Aug. 10.

"When you wake up in the morning, I want you to think about, 'Now, what am I going to do today? Deliver that project.' Not, 'Who's going to be the next person coming over here?' Not, 'How are we going to get the contracts that were sent back to the United States awarded?' I want you out there executing construction oversight to ensure that we deliver projects every day," he said.

Cox's first priority is evaluating the Corps of Engineers' operations throughout the Middle East and central Asia, he said. He's reviewed the best projects, so that he can articulate the successes to members of Congress and others back in the United States, and the most troubled projects, so that he can assist in resolving issues, he said.

A critical component will be meeting individual professionals from the Corps of Engineers, other U.S. government agencies and the private sector who have volunteered to work together under the Corps of Engineers' flag to rebuild the war-torn country, the general said.

"Getting out and seeing them and talking to them, I can find out what makes them tick. What's their passion? What do they need from me to help them do their jobs?" he said.

The best measure of success for the new Transatlantic Division realignment would be the need to rescope it in three or four years, Cox said.

"If we are doing what we're supposed to be doing, which is providing facilities and capabilities for a better quality of life and security for the Afghan national security forces and the Afghan people, then we are working ourselves out of a job, per say, in Afghanistan. But we're doing it the right way," Cox said.

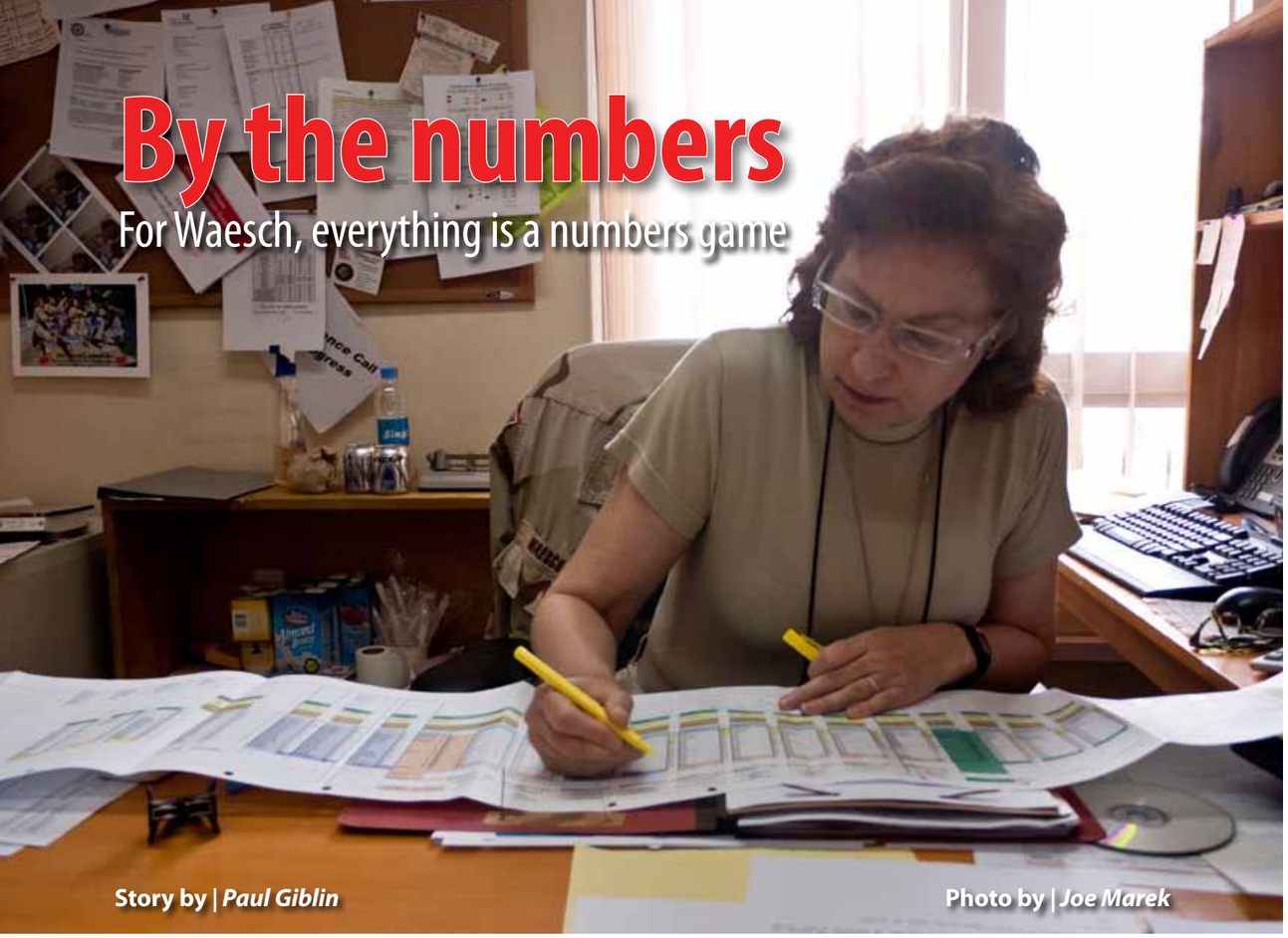
He expects, however, that the Transatlantic Division simply will morph during coming years to address the ever-changing needs in a highly strategic region of the world.

"The potential exists that in 2014 or 2015, our mission will be done in Afghanistan and we will close down the offices just like we're doing in Iraq," he said. "But I guarantee, if we deliver, we'll be someplace else in the world, because they need our capabilities."

Maj. Gen. Kendall P. Cox discusses the Transatlantic Division realignment during an all-staff meeting at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul on Aug. 11, while touring the district.

By the numbers

For Waesch, everything is a numbers game



Story by | *Paul Giblin* Photo by | *Joe Marek*

Devorah Waesch has been named U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resource manager of the year.

KABUL – Devorah Waesch, who finds tranquility in the structure and order of spreadsheets, was honored as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' resource manager of the year during an awards ceremony in New Orleans on Aug. 1.

She was selected for her oversight of the Afghanistan Engineer District-North's nearly $4 billion budget during fiscal 2010, a job that required her to account for every dime that passed through the district's various accounts.

Waesch, the chief of the Resource Management office, credited the recognition to two factors – the strong team of professionals within the district's Resource Management office; and her own longevity in crunching numbers at the district, division and national levels of the Corps of Engineers.

> "Money is not money. Money is emotions. Money is always emotions."

"Over here we have a lot of volatility, far more perhaps than you'd have in most districts in the United States. So for managing resources here, it helps to have someone a bit more senior. I don't know if that makes me the best resource manager, but it certainly makes me one of the oldest," she said.

"There's a lot of stuff that has happened during the course of this year that falls under the heading of You Can't Make This Stuff Up. But because I've had 31 years of experience, I've been able to roll with some of the punches a little calmer than somebody who hasn't had as many years of service," she said.

Among the episodes that fell into the You Can't Make This Stuff Up heading:

► Several months ago, top Washington officials, who were in discussions about the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, directed district officials to project the entire 2013 budget. Their deadline was 24 hours.

► Another time, top Washington officials required district officials to project the district's contracts valued in excess of $200,000 through 2016, and to classify them by their individual sources of funding. Their deadline was three hours.

"These are the sorts of things where somebody who hasn't been in the trenches for a long time will throw their hands up in the air and go, 'Ahh!'" Waesch said.

Waesch met both deadlines in large part because earlier she had developed an intricate, self-adjusting spreadsheet that she affectionately calls The Mother of All Spreadsheets. In paper form, it's about three feet wide and features dozens of columns and rows filled with hundreds of numbers.

One of the spreadsheet's key features is that it catalogs the district's entire budget by how much money is allocated to each office, and how the money translates into job positions, which allows for precision analyses. In the cases of large offices, funds are allocated to separate programs within the offices, providing even more precision.

The Mother of All Spreadsheets also accounts for separate funding sources.

For instance, funds dedicated to building Afghanistan National Police stations and Afghanistan National Army installations are different than funds dedicated to operating and maintaining the district's own office and residential complexes.

It catalogs labor costs associated with specific types of employees, plus it sorts by pre-construction costs, construction costs and post-construction costs, among other factors.

Waesch can manipulate the entire spreadsheet by adjusting any single criterion. She can make an adjustment either upward or downward to any individual funding or spending category, and immediately gauge the specific repercussions to every other category.

"We have it plugged in so that we can vary these rates," she said while sweeping her hand over the color-coded spreadsheet. "We can do 'What if?' drills and vary the rates, and it washes down these columns."

The Mother of All Spreadsheets has proven invaluable in matching potential workload projections with labor costs, which allows managers to make fact-based decisions concerning staffing, and whether and how much work to shift to other Corps of Engineers offices in the United States, she said.

Those types of analyses were far less detailed when she arrived at the district's headquarters at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul in late July 2010.

The district lacked a comprehensive system to measure and plot the full range of financial data simultaneously. She collaborated with other members of her team and together they developed the first version of The Mother of All Spreadsheets in October. They've expanded it several times since then.

"I think we've maxed out the extent that you can mentally contain on an Excel spreadsheet," said Waesch, who frequently

accessorizes her uniform with two pairs of eyeglasses hanging from cords around her neck.

Her next major task will be to write an owner's manual for the system before her tour in Afghanistan ends. The 15-year Corps of Engineers employee is scheduled to return to her position as chief of Resource Management at the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division headquarters in Cincinnati in October.

Jay Burcham, the district's chief of staff, said he appreciates Waesch's composed demeanor.

"It's not like, 'Oh, my goodness! Now we've got to go talk to the resource manager to figure out how we're going to get the money.' She's there, on the spot, trying to enable us and keep us straight," Burcham said. "She lowers the bureaucracy. You don't always find that in the resource management shop."

She said she finds serenity in numbers. "When I look at this," she said indicating The Mother of All Spreadsheets, "I get this kind of nice little hummy feeling all over me. Hummmmm. I really like it."

Her years of experience, which includes stints at the Pentagon and Capitol Hill, also have helped her develop an appreciation for what she calls the psychology of numbers.

Budgets often unveil decision-makers' inner thoughts, desires and personalities, she said. Military personnel and civilians alike shuffle money to demonstrate their self-perceived levels of power, compassion or wisdom, without full regard to the financial consequences of their decisions, she said. "Money is not money. Money is emotions. Money is always emotions," she said.

Waesch will be able to attend the awards ceremony on Aug. 1 because it coincides with her previously scheduled leave between taskers, when she'll be in the United States. She and her husband Guenther live in Cincinnati. They have three adult daughters, Susanne, Rebecca and Gabriela.

Waesch tracks district finances with a spreadsheet that she dubbed The Mother of All Spreadsheets.

THE A-TEAM

District team locks up award for prison work

Story by | *LaDonna Davis* Photo by | *Joe Marek*

Members of the award-winning project development team are recognized at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul on July 9. They are (from left): chief of engineering Mark Hoague of the Rock Island District in Illinois; program manager Gerry Boyle of the Corps of Engineers headquarters in Washington, D.C.; project manager Harry Pham of the Los Angeles District; chief of construction Bill Clarno of the Walla Walla District in Washington state; deputy chief of engineering Bill Mullery of the Sacramento District in California; and structural engineer Matt Toton of Seattle. In all, nearly 30 people comprised the team.

KABUL – The Detention Facility in Parwan has drawn attention from media outlets around the world, including ABC News, Armed Forces Network, The New York Times and The Washington Post, for its sophisticated design and strategic alignment with the goals and objectives to provide security for Afghanistan.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees who designed and oversaw construction of the prison were given their time to shine when the team was honored as the agency's project development team of the year during the 2011 Summer Leaders Conference in New Orleans on Aug. 1.

> "The team deserves this award because of all the hard work they've done."

The $43 million facility, which is named the Detention Facility in Parwan, is located in Parwan Province, several miles from Bagram Airfield.

Construction on the project began in June 2010 and was completed in May, an astonishing 11 months. The contractor was Ihsan Qudrat Construction Co./Prime Projects International Joint Venture.

The project's success is attributable to many factors, including urgency by the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force 435, which directs U.S. detention operations in Afghanistan, and by Washington officials to get the project complete on time and in budget, said Harry

Pham, who served as a project manager for the job.

But the indisputable most-important factor for success was teamwork, said Pham, deployed to Afghanistan from the Los Angeles District of the Corps of Engineers.

"We had support from the upper management and a good contractor in place, and the location was pretty much secure," Pham said. "But what made us really successful was that we had a good team that came together to make this a priority and did their parts to pull the project together and make it successful."

Project delivery teams feature architects, project and program managers, engineers, lawyers and construction representatives who work together to design and direct construction of Corps of Engineers' projects. The winning team was comprised of nearly 30 members who work, or worked, for the Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul.

The group was honored for overcoming obstacles including fast-paced design and construction schedules, complications of working in a war-zone environment and funding delays.

The emphasis of the detention facility is on the rehabilitation and release of detainees, according prison officials. The facility offers extensive medical care and classes in literacy and trades, such as farming, bread-making and tailoring. Detainees' families are allowed to visit and the facility includes a playground for their children. Afghan and U.S. authorities report that the recidivism rate of released detainees is less than 2 percent.

The sensitive nature of the project, along with its strategic role for housing captured insurgents and Taliban fighters, made it one of the most renowned construction projects in Afghanistan.

"It's a high-profile project, high visibility," Pham said. "It seems like everyone has an interest in seeing this project succeed, from D.C. to the minister of the local government in Afghanistan, and, of course, our district and headquarters."

The facility features three detention housing units that can hold as many as 950 low-risk and high-risk detainees. The high-tech facility has appropriate security measures needed to monitor detainees. The elements include catwalks, fencing, lighting and guard towers. Additionally, the facility features communication, electrical, sewer and drainage systems.

The facility meets Geneva Convention requirements and accommodates Afghan customs. For instance, many of the cells are 30-men holding units, allowing detainees to retain their traditional sense of community.

Completing a project of its size in less than a year was no small feat and a rarity for any organization in a war zone, Pham said. In comparison, a typical Afghanistan National Police or Afghanistan National Army facility can take a year or two to complete.

Meeting the challenges head on, while coming up with innovative solutions to problems, helped the team to finishe the project on budget, and to deliver two of three phases ahead of schedule, Pham said.

Aaron Rader, the on-site project engineer and contracting officer for the facility, credited the team's achievements to a great sense of partnership.

"We have a solid team here in Bagram, a quality contractor who was willing to work with us and put in the resources to finish the job on time, and great reach-back support in engineering and construction," Rader said. "Our district leadership supported us with overtime requests, and the customer has been willing to work with us and has been very understanding of any minor setbacks."

Setbacks, such as funding delays could have turned in to major problems, if it wasn't for the team's innovation and initiative, he said.

During the initial assessment of work, designers determined that the project would cost between $40 million to $50 million. With an initial obligation of only $30 million, team members had to come up with an innovative way to keep the project moving until more funding became available. They developed an incremental spending strategy and a phased delivery schedule that allowed work to begin on the majority of critical items, while additional funding for various options followed.

The strategy allowed the team to successfully award the entire project, both the base items and the optional items, for a total of $43 million. "We accomplished our mission to deliver a quality project on time and the end user was able to accept the facility with minimum deficiencies or delay," Pham said.

Maj. Jeffery Floyd, logistics officer for Task Force 435, agreed. "The work that the Corps did on this project is really outstanding," he said.

"When we had our final inspection, there were minimal deficiencies, which allowed us to start housing inmates immediately and start putting the facility to use. That has only happened on four facilities built here at Bagram, and three of them were the facilities built by the Corps of Engineers for the Detention Facility in Parwan," he said.

Having the team's work recognized during the awards ceremony added to the team's sense of accomplishment, Rader said. "I was surprised when I heard that we won the award, but it was validation of all the hard work that a lot of people put into this project to make it happen," he said.

Pham said he was proud to accept the honor. "The team deserves this award because of all the hard work they've done. And the contractor did a great job, too. It feels great," he said.

Photo by | U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Adam M. Stump

Afghan army Maj. Gen. Marjan Shuja (left) and Gen. Sher Mohammed Karimi (center) tour a housing unit at the prison during the official opening on Jan. 17.

A fighting chance

Corps of Engineers guard dreams of opportunity in U.S.

Story by | *LaDonna Davis* **Photos by | *Joe Marek***

KABUL – AAt the age of 7, Nagib Mohammadi would watch his older brother practice kickboxing in an Afghanistan gym; he knew then that kickboxing is what he wanted to do with his life.

By the time Mohammadi was 15, he started practicing kickboxing, and at 16 he won his first gold medal championship. "I never lose," Mohammadi says. And, so far, he's lived up to his hype.

Mohammadi doesn't make a living off of kickboxing; he works for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a personal security guard, serving side-by-side with U.S. military personnel to protect Afghanistan Engineer District-North employees from possible threats whenever they leave the district compound.

As part of his day job, Mohammadi carries an AK-47 rifle, a handgun and enough bullets to protect him and others against small arms fire. He wears fire-retardant clothes and a 30-pound bullet-proof vest whenever traveling outside the district compound.

Unlike his guard duties for which he uses man-made weapons for protection, in kickboxing he has no weapons, no bullets. "It is a sport for the mind and body," Mohamadi says.

The differences between Mohammadi's day

Afghan kickboxing champion and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers security guard Nagib Mohammadi dreams of competing in mixed martial arts competitions in the United States.

U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Travis Chadick (left) and Mohammadi prepare to transport Corps of Engineers civilians in an armored sports utility vehicle through the streets of Kabul on Aug. 11.

job and evening pastime don't stop there. The security guard says he does not kickbox to fight in the streets of Afghanistan; he kickboxes because he loves the sport and because it helps keep him in good mental and physical condition.

"In order to be a kickboxer, my mind and body must always be powerful," he says. "To be a security guard, I must always be powerful."

The 27-year-old Afghan practices kickboxing two hours a day, every day, with his teammates and trainer in an old underground gym named Farhangstan in the center of Kabul. The gym has no air conditioning, seven-foot-high ceilings, and the only natural light comes from two basement-sized windows. Yet, he never misses practice, not even during the holy month of Ramazan (Ramadan), during which Muslims fast for 30 days straight from sunup to sundown. During that time, which falls in August this year, Mohammadi only practices an hour a day on account of not being able to drink water.

Kickboxing is a popular sport in Afghanistan, mainly because young students can earn college scholarships, says Mohammadi. During matches, crowds can get as large as 200 people.

Mohammadi competes with a team of 10 other boys and men ranging in ages 16 to 27. He is the oldest in the group and fights in the 80 kilogram (176 pounds) weight class.

The sport is played by two competitors kicking and punching each other for points or until one knocks out the other. The match is divided into three rounds. The player with the most points at the end is named winner.

So far, Mohammadi has won 10 first-place medals competing in competitions all over Afghanistan and he was named the Afghanistan national kickboxing champion in 2005. This summer, his team competed out of the country for the first time, in Iran, against teams from 16 other countries. Mohammadi took second place in his weight class and his team took second place overall.

While Mohammadi says he doesn't have a favorite kick or move, he does know what one of his most dangerous moves is – the back-kick. Just as the name implies, the back-kick is a move in which a fighter swivels around until his back is facing his opponent and he throws a powerful kick.

The kick can be so powerful, in fact, that Mohammadi suffered broken ribs during a competition when an opponent performed the classic kickboxing move on him. "It is the only injury I've ever gotten since I've been fighting," the kickboxing champion says.

Mohammadi says that when competing, his goal is to never knock someone out. "I just want to score."

It is that mindset that makes Mohammadi so good at the sport, says his kickboxing trainer of five years, Harf Shirzad. "A good fighter has discipline," he says. "The important thing is behavior. If you have good behavior, you will be a good fighter. Nagib is one of my best students."

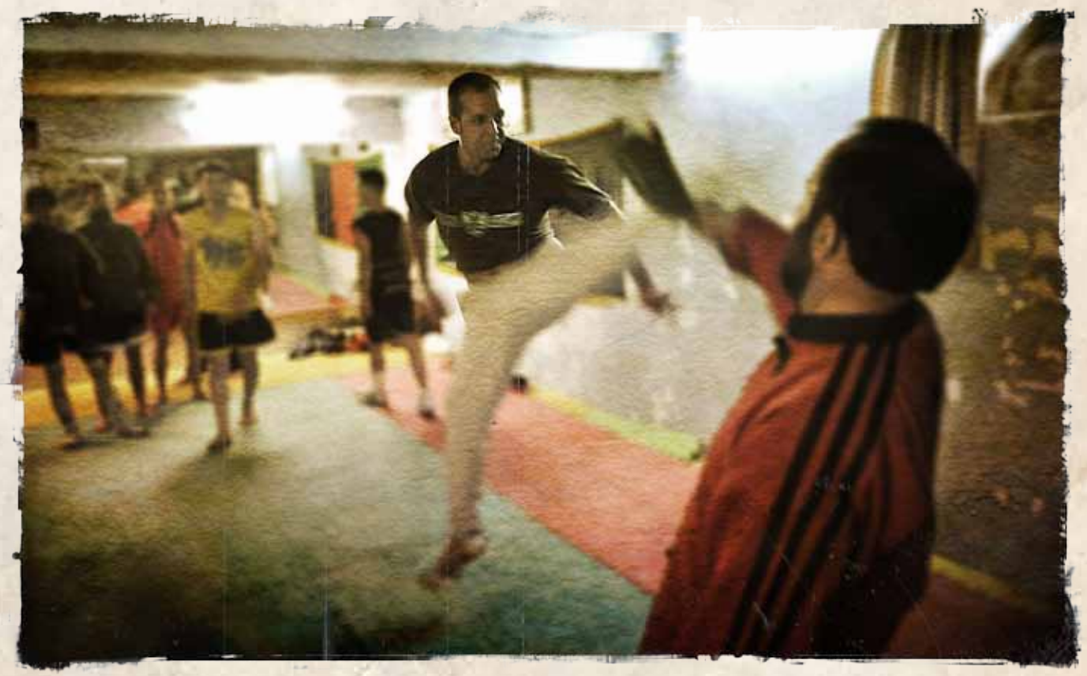
One of Mohammadi's teammates says what makes the fighter so good is that he works hard and is always looking for ways to improve. "We sometimes fight each other in practice, and we are always trying to come up with new moves and we share our ideas with each other," says Warse Wohedi. "Nagib is my teacher. I learn a lot from him. He is very talented and that's why he is the champion."

Mohammadi is currently working to get a visa in hopes to someday take his skills to the United States to compete on the Ultimate Fighting Championship circuit and earn a living doing what he loves. His big dream is to compete among other kickboxing champions on TV.

"I do not have a plan for how I will make it to the UFC, but I am working on my visa now," says Mohammadi. "Hopefully I will get it sometime in 2012."

Until then, Mohammadi plans to continue working for the Afghanistan Engineer District-North by day and competing in kickboxing matches for Afghanistan on his off time.

"I don't think about the money. I only think about the sport," he says. "I want to kickbox until I am at least 40. Is that old?" he asks with a laugh. "Nahh, I don't think so," he answers himself.



Mohammadi works out in a basement gym in downtown Kabul with trainer Harf Shirzad on Aug. 4.

Taking stock

Corps of Engineer provides hard-to-obtain materials to construction contractors.

Story and photos by | *Paul Giblin*

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers workers Ron Schroeder (left) Mickey Hegarty (center) and Autumn Rodden inspect coils of steel inside a shipping container at a Kabul storage yard on Aug. 15.

KABUL – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project management specialist Autumn Rodden and a team of colleagues squirreled around rolls of sheet metal in six large cargo containers at a heavily fortified and guarded storage yard on Aug. 15.

The truck-sized cargo containers were the latest of 89 that have been shipped from the United States since April as part of a new program by the Corps of Engineers to purchase and stockpile hard-to-acquire sheet metal.

The material a key component for arched-roof buildings, which are used for barracks, office buildings and storage facilities at Afghan military bases scattered across the northern portion of the country. The steel is used for the outer skin of the structures, which are suited to withstand the heat and blowing sand in Afghanistan.

The Corps of Engineers operations two districts in the country – Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul; and Afghanistan Engineer District-South, which is based in Kandahar. The southern district has rolled out a similar program.

Rodden, construction control representative Mickey Hegarty, and civil engineering technician Ron Schroeder, among others, counted and logged the rolls of steel at the Kabul storage yard and checked for any damage that might have occurred to the material during shipping.

"We found some crushed dunnage. That's about normal," Hegarty said, referring to the wooden support structures that are used to secure the rolls within the shipping containers. With possible exception to one roll of steel, the material arrived in the same condition it was when it left Pennsylvania weeks earlier.

That marked an important achievement. Each roll weighs approximately 3,500 pounds, which is about the same weight as a new Volkswagen Beetle. Overall, the Corps of Engineers expects to order $18 million worth of steel for construction in northern Afghanistan this fiscal year. The program in southern Afghanistan is somewhat smaller.

The agency is making the material available to Afghan construction companies that build structures at Afghanistan National Army bases. The emerging Afghan military force is essential for Afghanistan to provide its own security against the Taliban and other insurgents, allowing U.S. and other coalition forces to withdraw.

Before the Corps of Engineers launched the government-furnished materials program, contractors often spent several frustrating months obtaining high-quality steel from foreign suppliers and shipping it to Afghanistan, a land-locked country in southern Asia.

Using regional suppliers isn't a viable option, because there's more demand for the steel than manufacturers in Afghanistan and surrounding countries are able to produce, said Eric Eldridge, who served as the Corps of Engineers' program manager for the Afghan army and police construction programs until mid August, when he returned to the United States.

It made sense for the agency to take on the responsibility of providing steel, since it oversees construction at Afghan army bases, said Eldridge, who lives in Centreville, Va., and serves as the Fort Worth District's liaison to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency in Washington, D.C.

The Corps of Engineers orders the material through the Defense Logistics Agency, which purchases it from U.S. suppliers that ship it nearly 7,000 miles from metropolitan Philadelphia to Kabul, a passage that typically takes 90 to 100 days.

The steel is routed overseas to Turkey, Georgia, Pakistan or elsewhere in Asia or Europe, where eventually it's loaded onto trucks for the long haul into Afghanistan, a country that lacks a reliable rail system.

The material is used widely in Afghanistan. This year's orders represent just three projects; 24 projects are lined up for next year, said Rodden, whose home is in Monroeville, Pa., and who works as biologist in the Pittsburgh District back in the United States.

The government-furnished materials program is intended to overcome delays that are sometimes caused by backlogs at manufacturing plants, customs issues at international borders, and by terrorism and criminal activity along Afghanistan's roads, Eldridge said.

The sheet metal is shaped at the construction sites with devices called coil-bending machines or curved-roof forming machines. The width of a building can be altered by adjusting the arch, and the length can be modified by the number of panels that are seamed together.

The Corps of Engineers provides the steel to contractors in Afghanistan at no cost. A key feature to the program is that Corps of Engineers personnel keep a close accounting of the steel used by contractors to ensure that any excess is returned rather than resold.

Coiled steel is used in the construction of arched-roof buildings, which are also known as K-span buildings, at Afghanistan National Army bases, such as Gamberi Garrison in eastern Afghanistan.

Officials considered expanding the program to include other items, such as generators, transformers, doors and windows, but found that those items to be in ample supply in Afghanistan in recent months, Eldridge said.

Schroeder, a civil engineering technician during his tour in Afghanistan, serves in the same capacity at the Seattle District. He lives in Federal Way, Wash.

Parting shot

Public affairs special LaDonna Davis gets up close and personal with National Basketball Association Hall of Famer Karl Malone at Camp Eggers in Kabul on July 31. "The Mailman" and illusionist David Blaine interacted with Davis and thousands of others during a three-country USO tour.

Photo by | *Paul Giblin*