

## *In Her Own Words: Building the ANA Army Base by Base*

I left Baltimore on December 1, 2003 to come to Afghanistan to offer any assistance I could to aid in the war against terrorism. I was fortunate that I didn't know anyone or have any relatives working in the World Trade Center, but nonetheless, like most Americans, I was outraged that something like that could happen in our Country. I'll never forget the day I left Bagram headed for my ultimate destination in Kabul. Nothing can prepare you for what is seen here. The



poverty, the destitution and the children begging in the streets brought tears to my eyes. They were so glad to see us, the children in particular.

As we were driving along the road, they would run with the vehicle giving us the thumbs up sign. As we entered Kabul, it was evident that war and fighting had happened in the city. Buildings were bombed out, windows and doors were shuttered and there were very few people on the streets. Most of the women I saw wore their burqas and walked very quickly with their heads bowed down. When we arrived in Kabul at our safe

house, I learned that I would be a project engineer at Pol-e-Charkhi, an Afghanistan National Army Base we were building.

Pol-e-Charkhi was overwhelming. It was a huge construction site. When I arrived, most of the buildings were in their infancy and with a lot of work ahead of us. The ANA were living in barracks that we had constructed and it seemed we couldn't get them built fast enough.

For the most part, I was the only woman on the site. The first time I arrived at a warehouse we were constructing, there were about 50 workers who formed a circle around me. I was a little scared at first because I didn't know what they were going to do. One of the workers spoke English and served as a translator for me. The workers were complaining about lack of safety equipment such as boots and gloves. They were literally walking around the construction site in sandals and sometimes bare feet. I told them I would take care of it immediately and they had their safety equipment the following day. Then their curiosity got the best of them and they wanted to know all about me. They thought it strange that a woman could be 36 years old, unmarried and have no children.

As the days and months progressed and Pol-e-Charkhi actually resembled a real military base, it was truly rewarding to see the looks of gratitude on the faces of the ANA Soldiers. We had given them things they had never seen before, such as running water, flushing toilets, a wastewater treatment plant and a water treatment plant. Their living conditions on the base were significantly better than their home conditions where sometimes whole families are crammed in the space of one room. I truly believe that

because of our high quality construction, more Afghans are volunteering to join the Army because living conditions are so good.

I've been here in Afghanistan for almost one year now and I'm amazed at the progress the Afghans have made in the face of adversity. Now there are literally hundreds of people walking the streets, conversing in small groups, riding their bikes

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and driving their cars. Business is picking up and shops are opening everywhere. Women are walking around wearing no burqas. It is truly incredible how much progress has occurred in the span of a year.

Now I'm in Herat constructing another ANA Military Base. It isn't quite like Kabul — there is less evidence of war here, business is booming and there are people everywhere.

We still get the thumbs up sign from both children and adults and we all feel very welcome. I like my job here and have signed on for another year, but I can't wait to get back home. It's been rewarding and I know when I get back, I will not take for granted the freedoms we have, our living conditions and just the general beauty of our country.