



# NEWS RELEASE

## U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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### Afghan power company linemen receive training, new equipment during debut training session

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan —Twelve Afghan electric company technicians will be better able to maintain power lines throughout southern Afghanistan after learning to safely operate electric utility trucks donated by the United States during a training course on Kandahar Airfield June 10-19.

The course, taught by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Distinct-South noncommissioned officers, introduced 12 technicians from Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Afghanistan's electric utility company:

- fundamentals of power line maintenance and safety and
- operations of two "Cherry Picker" boom trucks that allow linemen to reach the top of utility poles and auger trucks used to drill and emplace utility poles.

While the classroom training was important, getting outside and operating the trucks and erecting utility poles was the highlight of the course, said lineman Nasheed, who asked that only his first name be used, a 14-year DABS employee.

"This new equipment is going to make my job a lot easier and a lot safer," he said speaking through an interpreter. "We learned about safety for ourselves, for our friends and with the equipment."

During his years as a lineman, Nasheed said he had to use scaffolds and ladders to climb utility poles.

Safety was also the primary topic for Sgt. Gabriel Akonom, Company A, 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South, one of three USACE NCOs leading the course.

"Our mission was to train the DABS employees use the bucket truck equipment that we're signing over to them, making sure they were proficient with them so they could work safely and efficiently," he said. "The majority of them



An Afghan electrical technicians practice hand signals while a fellow student learns how to operate a truck-mounted auger system used to emplace utility poles during a 10-day class led by South District NCOs June 10-19. (USCAE photo by Dave Melancon)

expressed concerns about safety. That's because in the past, they did not have the equipment to do their work safely. They were climbing (utility poles) in their bare feet on ladders and scaffolds."

Akonom said his students' experience ran the gamut from more than 20 years as a lineman to almost none. Most had not worked with a bucket truck before. The students were a combination of linemen and drivers and supervisors from Kandahar City.

"This is the first time that we have seen and handled such nice equipment," added Abdulah, a 15-year lineman who asked that only his first name be used. "I enjoyed using drilling with the truck-mounted auger and erecting utility poles."



Sgt. Gabriel Akonom, 249th Prime Power Battalion, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South, shows an Afghan technician from Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Afghanistan's electric utility company, how to maneuver the work platform on one of the two "bucket trucks" donated to the utility by the United States. (USACE photo by Dave Melancon)

"All of the students were happy to be here, grateful for the instruction and very interested in learning about the equipment, especially the safety portions," Akonom said.

With only two interpreters for the class, there were some minor language barriers to overcome, he said. The NCOs plan to emphasize hand signals -- using more pictures and practice -- in later classes.

Akonom said the students told him that due to a backlog of work, they will be putting their training and the trucks to use as early as this week.

"I am very happy with how enthusiastic they were. We were skeptical going into the training about how much we could get across. They were attentive, interested in learning and they absorbed the information very well. I am happy the training went the way that it did and the students were as good as they were."

This was first class of its kind taught in Afghanistan, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Hopkins, South District prime power liaison officer. A second class, led by the same NCOs, will take place later this summer in Helmand province.

"The students are very attentive and quite interested in the class," said Hopkins, who deployed to Afghanistan from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. "They look forward to using this equipment instead of dangerous scaffolds and rickety ladders."

"All of the instructors felt very confident with sending the students out the gates with the trucks; confident they would perform the work correctly and confident that they would be doing it safely." Akonom said. "That's what makes me the most proud."

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