



# NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**BUILDING STRONG®**

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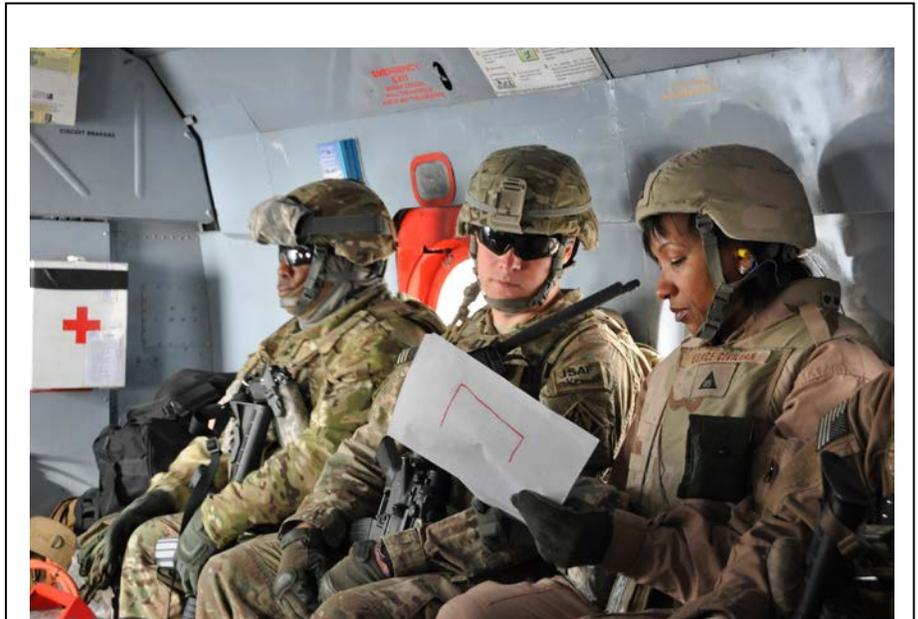
## **Building Afghanistan—the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at work**

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – How does the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers oversee construction in Afghanistan? Who decides the scope, design, location or budget of the projects? The answers to those questions are not simple, neither are the steps involved in bringing projects to completion.

Generally speaking, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a construction agent, meaning USACE does not determine construction needs or hire construction workers. Instead, the Corps of Engineers translates U.S. Government and Department of Defense requirements into feasible projects and awards construction contracts to contractors and builders that will satisfy the government's needs. In Afghanistan, the USACE mission goes a step further and supports U.S. government goals with construction solutions in a complex and dangerous contingency environment.

The Corps of Engineers builds projects in Afghanistan in three broad categories, said Army Col. Vincent Quarles, the Afghanistan Engineer District-South commander. “We have a military construction program, a water and infrastructure program and an Afghan National Security Force construction program. We also have an operations and maintenance program designed to train Afghans to operate and maintain the facilities we construct on their behalf,” he said.

In 2012 the South District, headquartered at Kandahar Airfield, oversaw the completion of about 72 contracts primarily in the ANSF and military construction categories, Quarles explained.



*Lori Gardner (right), the Afghanistan Engineer District-South Tarin Kowt Resident Office Engineer and Capt. Daniel Sunden, the resident office officer in charge, review site plans on a helicopter ride to a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project site in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Photo by Jasmine Chopra-Delgadillo)*

“That’s just part of the picture,” he continued. “In 2012 we also awarded 111 projects totaling \$1.28 billion and contractors completed about \$795 million worth of construction on enduring district projects. That’s a lot of construction work. We’ve awarded the contracts now we’re executing our program.”

## **Identifying the need**

While each category of construction—MILCON, ANSF or Water and Infrastructure—is unique, identifying the need generally follows a predictable path.

“The process for the Afghan National Security Force construction program starts with a Letter of Direction from CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan], under the direction of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan,” said South District’s Afghan National Security Forces Program Manager Larry Leahy. “CSTC-A sends the Corps of Engineers requirements which include types of facilities and infrastructure needed, building purposes and the specific location for the project.”

The South District commander, with input from engineers and project management, evaluates the request and determines the best solution. “We then prepare a rough order of magnitude budget and return the planning information to CSTC-A,” said Leahy who deployed from the USACE Southwest Division in Dallas.

CSTC-A reviews the Corps of Engineers proposal. If CSTC-A decides to proceed with the build then a representative contacts the Corps of Engineers which prompts the development of a scope of work. “Once we develop a scope of work, a South District project delivery team puts together a contract solicitation announcement which is advertised on the federal business opportunities website, fbo.gov,” Leahy explained.

Water and infrastructure projects are funded through the Commanders Emergency Response Program or the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund Program and go through a similar project design phase.

“When the Corps of Engineers is asked to build projects in this category either battle space owners or the Joint Program Integration Office in Kabul identifies the need and pays for construction,” said Quarles.

## **Contract award**

Contractors usually have 30 to 45 days to prepare proposals and bid on the Corps of Engineers projects but that depends on the complexity of the project. “The process is fairly well defined, but it is not always quick,” said Ed Boddie, a South District contracting officer.

Sometimes potential contractors have questions and other times they have to demonstrate their qualifications before they can compete for a contract.

“Generally speaking though, most of our contracts are advertised as ‘full and open,’ meaning any responsible contractor can bid,” Boddie explained.

The USACE mission also supports the Afghan First Program, a NATO program designed to contribute directly to the long-term stability, security, and economic development of Afghanistan. “When Afghan construction firms successfully compete for and win construction contracts, the Afghan First Program works,” Quarles explained.

“Right now at least 10 of our projects are being constructed with Afghan prime contractors,” said Boddie who deployed from the USACE Philadelphia District. “Further, most of the prime contractors hire Afghan sub-contractors so a large number of workers are Afghans.”

### **Construction begins**

“Once USACE awards a contract, the contractor has to prepare certain documents before we can authorize them to begin construction,” explained Boddie. “Those submittals include things like designs that meet Corps of Engineers specifications, site security plans and schedules.”

The time it takes to prepare those documents and get them approved varies depending on a project’s complexity but from contract award to when USACE issues a Notice to Proceed, between one and three months passes.

“Some projects are more challenging than others so before we authorize a contractor to start work, we try to ensure that they have everything they need to be successful,” said Leahy. For some projects, the government provides materials or uses standard building designs so that contractors can construct at a faster rate.

“Smaller contractors have less financial commitment up front, which ultimately helps them be more successful,” Leahy explained. USACE manages the construction by closely monitoring project schedules and requiring contractors to submit invoices for payment regularly.

“Each month we plan for and expect a certain amount of construction to be accomplished,” said Quarles. In the first three months of fiscal year 2013—October, November and December 2012, the South District received contractor invoices totaling about \$287.5 million but based on schedules expected \$221 million. “It is good news when we pay out more than we planned,” explained Quarles. “It means that more work was accomplished than we anticipated.”

### **Project turnover**

When a project is complete, customers or end users sign a receipt for the facilities and usually receive a set of keys, instruction manuals and a tour of the facilities in return. Sometimes a ribbon cutting ceremony is scheduled to memorialize the event.

“I am very proud of our district and the overall USACE efforts to provide quality facilities for all Afghans,” said Quarles. “When we attend ribbon cutting ceremonies and turn over facilities, Afghan National Army and Police generals affirm in their speeches that our buildings enable Afghan independence and self-governance. Coming back a few months later to see Afghans operating and maintaining the facilities we construct is doubly rewarding.”

Since its beginning in 2009, the Afghanistan Engineer District-South has completed 174 projects valued at \$1.2 billion. “Those totals represent a huge amount of work,” Quarles explained. “Thousands of Americans, Afghans and

people from all over the world have worked on USACE projects in Afghanistan. The facilities, whether large garrison-sized complexes or repaired power lines and switch yards, are a lasting legacy that we can all be proud of.”

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