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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Afghanistan National Army Cadets Intern with US Army Corps of Engineers

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Kabul, Afghanistan – The Afghanistan Engineer District (AED), US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), held a ceremony to mark the conclusion of a two week internship program hosting Afghan National Army (ANA) Cadets here Thursday. The cadets, all majoring in civil engineering, received certificates of appreciation that bordered on admiration.

The words of esteem for these cadets spoken by Colonel Miroslav P. Kurka, AED commander, echoed lightly in the AED meeting hall and resonated to the soul of the large audience of Corps employees present. The cadets worked and interacted with numerous corps employees during their two week internship. Everything about them showed enthusiasm, motivation, professional courtesy and respect.

The four cadets AED hosted are all third year students at the National Military Academy Afghanistan (NMAA), Kabul. The academy, with over 700 cadets, is modeled after the U.S. Military Academy, West Point. The concept of bringing this internship to the ANA was the brainchild of Major Richard Gash, a West Point Civil Engineer Professor, who worked at NMAA this summer developing future courses.

West Point Cadets participate in a similar internship program with USACE Districts in the U.S. “We have cadets from West Point every summer,” Nova L. Robbins, ANA Program Manager said. “We are going to turn it over to them someday, why not mentor them,” she continued.



Charley X. Qian, ANA Program Manager, points out design specifications to Cadets Taher and Mahammad.

Cadets spent half of their annual one month school break with AED learning many aspects of engineering, both in the office and in the field. Cadets that participated in this inaugural internship program were selected from amongst their peer group of eighteen attending NMAA. Selection was based on their academic performance in the class room and leadership potential. The selection committee applied extra effort to insure the group represents the multi-ethnic diversity of Afghanistan.

While in college each cadet is required to select from one military and one civilian discipline to study. "We had four choices – Civil Engineering, Computer Science, English and Law," said Cadet Shafiq Mohammad. Selection is competitive and this is highlighted in the intern's attitude, "We (Afghanistan) need many engineers and this (to me) is the top class at the academy, this is why I chose engineering," he continued.

The cadets were paired up in teams with each team spending a week working in the field or in the office environment and then switching for the second week. All the plans that were reviewed, sites visited and hands on exercises were designed around existing and future AED construction projects for the ANA.

The eight hour a day, six days a week schedule held the cadets to an aggressive venue that brought one on one sessions that, by design, challenged them to interact in every area. "The cadets had many questions and you (AED) answered them", said Colonel Hamdullah Yousfzai, NMAA Dean of Education, through a translator.

The office portion split the week equally between Programs and Project Management and Engineering. Hands-on practical exercises required them to prepare their own conceptual plan for an ANA Dining Facility expansion and upgrade. This was followed by participation in a review of their conceptual design, walking them through a typical architectural design review effort.

Getting the cadets to think about architecture from the customer's perspective was one of the challenges. "I tried to break it down to things they would understand, giving them military terms they can relate to", said Chester Nakamura, Architecture Team Leader. He continued, "You have an awesome responsibility designing things for people ... now they have something to relate to".

The cadets reviewed the technical proposals from contractors, project scopes of work, assisted in preparing the scope of work for a new contractor design/build ANA Dining Facility project and were introduced to the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) side of facility engineering. "I think the cadets now understand how properly maintained facilities supports their operational mission", Jeffery B. Wheeler, ANA O&M Program Manager said.

During the week in the field, the cadets visited multiple construction project sites with the AED engineers and construction representatives reviewing and comparing plans to the existing structures. This was part of the interactive learning exercises designed to stimulate thought and dialogue. On one of the projects the



Tom L. Anacker, Construction Representative, discusses issues with the Technologists Inc. staff while Cadet Mahammad listens.

cadets demonstrated great resolve by coming up with viable answers from a fresh perspective that signals Afghanistan has a promising future.

Col. Kurka was presented a framed memento by Lieutenant Colonel Scott R. Hamilton, Chief, NMAA Implementation Team and West Point Civil Engineer faculty member, on behalf of Major General Mohamad Sharif, Academy Commander, and himself. It read, "Presented in grateful appreciation ... This internship provided invaluable hands-on experience at local construction sites and AED headquarters that greatly enhanced classroom instruction and their engineering education".

The cadets met with William "Bill" Mullery, ANA Programs Manager, during part of the office sessions. "I was hesitant to get involved with this because I don't like to talk" Bill said. There is nothing wrong with Bill's ability to communicate. That became obvious as he read the note the cadets had placed at his desk. It read, "we want to thank you for what you have done and we will call you father".