



Afghanistan Engineer District North



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Army Corps of Engineers seeks new office in remote Meymaneh

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MAZAR-I SHARIF, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials are planning to open a new project office by early summer on a Norwegian army base in the north-central region of the country to meet the demand for new police stations in the area.

The new office in the city of Meymaneh will oversee construction of Afghanistan National Police stations and Afghanistan National Army complexes that are set to be built throughout Faryab Province, said Army Capt. Michael Beck, the officer in charge of the Corps' Mazar-i Sharif Resident Office. Faryab is a rural province along the border of Turkmenistan.

Construction is expected to start on five police stations and four army complexes in the province in 2010. Several projects are plotted along Afghanistan's major thoroughfare, Highway 1, which will allow relatively easy access for Corps personnel in the new office. However, others are slated to be built remote regions, some of which are only accessible via bone-jarring dirt roads.

Personnel stationed in the Corps of Engineers' office in Mazar-i Sharif currently oversee projects in the region, but because of the distance and terrain involved, road trips to the region require full-day or overnight hauls. Meymaneh is 202 miles



from Mazar-i Sharif. The only road between the cities is Highway 1, which also is known as the Ring Road. However, the two-lane strip of pavement also is used by donkey carts and pedestrians, slowing travel.

While Corps personnel travel in armored vehicles and are accompanied by armed guards, long trips pose security risks nonetheless, Beck said. Insurgents are active in the region.

"When we go down to that area, we are way out in the middle of nowhere, so our biggest concern was support if we needed it," he said. The top priorities are emergency medical evacuations and quick-response military back-up, if required, he said.



The new detachment should help resolve those issues. The four-person office is set to be built within a Norwegian army base called Provisional Reconstruction Team Meymaneh, which is centrally located within the cluster of planned developments. The office probably will come on-line in two phases, said Beck, who is leading negotiations with the Norwegians.

"That's our priority – get our people down there, work our way into the Norwegians' battle plans and everything," Beck said. "It might be an office of two people for a while, but at least we'll get in our foothold."

Beck has been developing the relationship since November.

Initially, discussions focused on the U.S. Corps of Engineers' mission in the region and its need to place personnel closer to construction sites. He explained to the Norwegians that the Corps is overseeing construction of police stations and other infrastructure projects designed to assist the emerging Afghanistan government become self-sufficient after decades of war.

The negotiations are coming together well, Beck said. "We have the wheels turning right now. We've already submitted all kinds of various land usage agreements. The Norwegians said, 'Come on down. You guys are good,'" he said.

The sides are continuing to work through the construction and the procurement processes. Meymaneh currently accommodates about 400 people – mostly Norwegians, Latvians and Macedonians.

Eventually, the Corps will occupy three converted shipping containers on the base. An existing shipping container that currently is being used for storage will be converted into office space. Two additional containers will be refurbished into a pair of two-person housing units.

Ideally, the Corps will staff the office with two project engineers and two construction representatives, though the specific staffers have yet to be identified, Beck said.

A key step is developing an Alignment, Movement and Security Plan, which is an agreement that partners Corps officials with foreign military forces that secure various regions of Afghanistan. In short, the foreign forces would provide security for the civilian Corps personnel in exchange for the opportunity to shoot photos of the region from the Corps' leased helicopter. The Corps already has similar agreements in place with other foreign forces in Afghanistan.

The Norwegians regularly roll out mobile observation teams to access conditions in their region.

"We've already done several missions with the Norwegians in which we embed or go out with them," Beck said. "The Latvians are actually the ones who drive us out and around. They are a top-notch infantry group. Their guys really know their stuff. They're very good at what they do," Beck said.