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Corps of Engineers, DynCorp finish second phase of Afghan army base

DARUNTA, Afghanistan – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and contracting firm DynCorp International Inc. marked the completion of a major phase of development Gamberi Garrison, a massive Afghan army base that's being built on the site of a former Al Qaeda training camp in northeastern Afghanistan on Sunday, Jan. 9.

Gamberi Garrison already is one of the largest Afghan army installations in the country. It's strategically located within view of the mountainous border with Pakistan, where fighters associated with the terrorist network operate.

Corps of Engineers and DynCorp unveiled a plaque in a plaza by a training building that dedicated the new facilities to the Afghan soldiers who live and work at the installation. The new facilities comprise the second of four major phases for the garrison, which is designed to accommodate as many as 12,000 Afghan soldiers when completed.

Phase II features more than 40 buildings and support facilities valued at \$41.3 million. The scope of work included barracks for 1,167 soldiers and officers, administration buildings, a helipad, a fire station, a medical clinic, a training center, a warehouse, ammunition storage facilities, a detention facility, toilet and shower buildings, a sports field, roads and more.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began turning over the facilities to Afghan forces on Nov. 15 as individual buildings were completed and passed final inspection. The process is expected to continue through Jan. 15.

Approximately 700 Afghan army soldiers moved into the barracks on Dec. 13 and 14. An additional 700 Afghan soldiers are expected to take up residence soon, said Roger Green, a resident engineer in the Jalalabad Area Office of the Corps of Engineers, which is overseeing the development. The soldiers outfitted the buildings with furniture and other equipment.

When complete, Gamberi Garrison will be Afghanistan's version of Fort Hood, said U.S. Army Col. Thomas Magness, the commander the Corps of Engineers' district in northern Afghanistan. Fort Hood, which is located in central Texas, is the largest military installation in the United States. Afghan army and getting them set up like this



Col. Thomas Magness (left) speaks to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel, contractors and guests during the dedication of Gamberi Garrison Phase II on Jan. 9. Photo by Paul Giblin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Gamberi Garrison is an important component of presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama's strategy to build the Afghan army into the primary force providing security in the country.

"If we don't get Afghan soldiers under these roofs, you're not going to have the security situation that you might hope for," Magness said. "They're not going to re-enlist; they're not going to join. They're going to go back home where they're warmer at their fireplaces than they are here."

The installation is a self-contained mini-city and will be used for several purposes by the Afghan army, which is in the process of taking over the lead role in the fight against insurgents. The garrison will serve as a permanent base for regular and commando units, and as a boot camp for new recruits. It also will have a regional army hospital.

Plans are in place to provide for even more Afghan forces at the compound near the Russian-built Darunta Dam. There are provisions to increase the garrison's power plant, well system, sewage facilities, roads and other infrastructure systems. "We built Gamberi to accommodate future expansion," Green said.

The existing facilities already get good marks from a 19-year-old Afghan soldier who uses the single name Riza. Water is plentiful, and the barracks, showers and other facilities are comfortable and clean, which he believes will boost recruitment and retention.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resident engineer Roger Green reveals a plaque dedicating Phase II to Afghan soldiers as Navy Cmdr. Mark Edelson, Army Col. Thomas Magness and DynCorp International Inc. vice president Michael Ulekowski (foreground, left to right) watch. Photo by Paul Giblin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“If you provide them the basics like that, a lot of young people will join the Afghan army,” Riza, who has lived in the garrison for a month, said through an interpreter.

DynCorp International Inc., which is based in Falls Church, Va., served as the prime contractor for Phase II. The firm and its subcontractors employed about 700 Afghans and 70 non-Afghans during the peak of construction.

The four main phases with prime contractors, completion dates and costs:

Phase I – DynCorp, September 2009, \$51 million.

Phase II – DynCorp, January 2011, \$41.3 million.

Phase III – BYA International, scheduled to be complete in July 2011, \$27 million.

Phase IV – Asian Atlas Construction & Engineering Network, scheduled to be complete in September 2011, \$18 million.



Gamberi Garrison is a mini-city complete with barracks, wells, a sewer system, athletic fields and more. Photo by Paul Giblin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition, a \$12 million training range is slated to be complete in March 2011, while a \$2.8 million building that will be used as an interim headquarters for the Afghan army's 201st Corps before being converted to other purposes, is set for completion in February 2011. Furthermore, a regional hospital, a floodwater diversion system, road upgrades and a bridge, among other projects, are in planning stages.

The first two phases of the project overcame significant challenges, said Peter Wilcox, DynCorp's director of construction for Afghanistan.

Insurgents attacked the site 12 times since construction began 2½ years ago, he said. The assaults ranged from rockets and mortars to small-arms fire from near-by hills. The attacks damaged structures, but did not result in serious injuries or loss of life. The frequency of attacks diminished after the first Afghan army soldiers moved in, Wilcox said.

Much of the construction work involved on-the-job training. After decades of war, most workers were inexperienced and unaccustomed to building to U.S. standards, particularly with modern materials such as electrical wiring and drywall. As a result, quality assurance representatives worked closely with the crews to ensure they understood and met U.S. requirements, Wilcox said.

"They don't have what I would call in the construction industry, the superintendents and the foremen with lifetimes of practical experience. Most of the engineers, even the ones we employ, are graduates with

three to five years of experience. They know the theory, but they haven't had a lot of practice of doing it," he said.

The opening of Phase II came at a time when the Corps of Engineers' district in northern Afghanistan is completing a project almost daily, Magness said. The Corps of Engineers is the primary organization building army bases, police stations, roads, airstrips and other infrastructure projects in Afghanistan to increase the country's stability and economy.

It has two districts in the country – Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul; and Afghanistan Engineer District-South, which is based in Kandahar.

"We've reached that tipping point where we're now starting to see stuff get done," Magness said. "Things that were planned a few months ago, a few years ago, now they're getting completed. Every single day, we're seeing another project – maybe not as big as this one – but certainly we're turning projects over every day."

Most of the Afghan soldiers who moved into the new accommodations previously were stationed in Kabul, where they were out of their proper battle positions, said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Mark Edelson, who serves as Afghan army program manager for the NATO Training Mission Afghanistan.

"It's dynamic. We're building an army at the same time we're building facilities at the same time we're fighting a war," he said. NATO forces are training new Afghan troops so fast the Afghan army needs housing equivalent to two Las Vegas-sized hotels every month to accommodate them, Edelson said.

It's important to note, Magness said, that the Corps of Engineers and its contractors are teaching Afghan soldiers how to maintain the new facilities, duties that range from technical jobs such as operating water pumps and electrical systems to routine tasks such as mopping concrete floors.

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