



DISTRICT TIDES

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Corps implodes Avtex Boiler House

By Jerry Rogers

One could feel the drumbeat of anticipation in the air Sept. 19, as more than 500 anxious community members gathered behind the former Avtex Administration Building on Kendrick Lane in Front Royal, Va.

Many had come to Virginia's largest Superfund cleanup site to see the massive eight-story, 120-foot tall Avtex Fibers boiler house reduced to rubble. Others, who for decades had worked at the Avtex plant, came to pay their last respects to a bygone era and to the historic former industrial complex that enabled them to provide a comfortable life for their families and educate their children.

All of them came to celebrate the rebirth of Avtex into Royal Phoenix.

Following a ceremony to honor the old Avtex community of Front Royal and herald the town's new Royal Phoenix redevelopment project, at exactly 3 p.m. personnel of Norfolk District gave the signal. Belching a great gray cloud as it tumbled into a huge pile of rubble, the largest remaining structure on the 440-acre EPA Superfund site proved no match for 150 pounds of carefully laid explosives.

The destruction of the Avtex boiler house marked a 5-year historic milestone in the Corps' mission to address

environmental contamination at the site, located along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River in the scenic foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The boiler house demolition ushers in the beginning of the site's redevelopment as Royal Phoenix, a 165-acre technology-oriented business park, 240-acre nature conservancy park, and 35-acre multi-field community soccer complex.

The Executive Director of the Front Royal-Warren County Economic Development Authority, Paul J. Carroll, explained that the redevelopment will focus on innovative technology and hospitality.

"Our plan shows that the site can accommodate nearly one million square feet of office and flexible technology buildings to support the innovative technologies in manufacturing," remarked Carroll. "Also, our plan calls for several tourism-related activities, such as an outdoor

recreation specialty retailer; a 200-room hotel and conference center; a culinary and wine institute; and even an artisan center and other educational venues."

The Royal Phoenix vision began to take root after Avtex Fibers was placed on the National Priorities List and declared an EPA Superfund site in 1986. Chicago-based FMC Corporation, which owned the industrial complex from 1963 to 1976, is performing overall site cleanup activities, under the



The Avtex Fibers boiler house is part of a massive three-building complex that includes the power house and compressor room. (Photo by Kent Balden)

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Commander's Corner

***Col. Yvonne J.
Prettyman-Beck***

Thanks for giving

Much has changed since our last edition of the *District Tides*. We have seen the U.S. Gulf Coast region devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and watched many of our fellow Americans lose their homes, their possessions and their livelihoods. However, in spite of this devastation we continue to witness a strong kindred spirit of giving triumph over tragedy, as so many across this nation and around the world reach out to help those in dire need. Again, I want to thank all of you for personally supporting this important Army Corps mission through a number of ways including, leading our efforts, volunteering and covering down on the extra workload here at home station due to personnel shortages. You are doing an absolute outstanding job at balancing all of these requirements and meeting the challenges we face today!

We're also very grateful for the safe return of our employees who were serving in Afghanistan: Major Chris Riemer, Nandy Perillo and Sherri Jeffries. Our number one USACE national priority remains support to the Global War on Terror. My personal thanks to all of our GWOT veterans and our dedicated

support team who continue to make a difference by supporting this vital global mission.

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is wrapping up and I would like to give a big thanks to our division key persons and Program Manager, Constance Baltimore and Margaret Bridgers. My personal thanks to all of you, for your consideration and if applicable, for the contributions you made in support of this key investment to our world. In an effort to support the competing demands and ensure those who sincerely want to give are provided that opportunity, we have extended the window for closure through December 15, 2005. Your thoughtfulness helps to improve the quality of life for people everywhere...especially during the holiday season.

Lastly, I would like to thank you again for your support during Lieutenant General Strock's recent visit. I am extremely proud and most times simply amazed at how we are able to accomplish so much and always so professionally well done, particularly when we work together as a team...all quite evident by the comments made by our Chief of Engineers during his time with us in October. The Chief looks forward to future visits with us soon.

The holiday season is upon us and everyone deserves a little extra time off to give thanks and celebrate with loved ones and friends. I wish you and your families a warm and safe holiday season. Remember life is priceless, be safe and enjoy it!

Essayons!

Colonel Yvonne J. Prettyman-Beck



Lt. Gen. Carl Strock with the Executive staff as he shows off his Norfolk District coat and hat that was given to him on his recent visit to the District. (Photo by Megan Nelson)



Brig. Gen. William T. Grisoli, North Atlantic Division Commander, conducts his first town hall at Norfolk District. (Photo by Jerry Rogers)

Avtex Boiler House Implosion

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supervision of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The last company that owned the site, Avtex Fibers Inc., went bankrupt after the plant closed in 1989.

In 2000, the Corps was given the mission to address environmental hazards, which are separate from the EPA Superfund site cleanup efforts, under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA). Corps congressional funding totaling \$23 million involved a four-phase non-CERCLA cleanup process: site management planning; asbestos abatement; buildings demolition; and debris removal and recycling.

Funding for the Corps cleanup mission was spearheaded by Senator John W. Warner (R-VA) and Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA-10th).

For 50 years, the Avtex site's boiler house provided all of the heat and power for the entire site, home of the largest facility ever built for the production of rayon fiber, also known as artificial silk. It generated enough electricity to power a city of 300,000 people, and consumed enough coal to heat 45,000 homes. The plant created materials which were vital for the Allies during World War II, especially rayon cord used to strengthen all types of tires. The factory operation once employed more than 3,000 people from the northern Shenandoah Valley, and later produced rayon used in apparel, home furnishings, carpeting – and even carbonizable rayon for NASA's Space Shuttle program.

"Nothing could have been done with this facility," said Norfolk District Project Manager Al Opstal. "It stood empty for 10 years before anyone ever attempted to start doing something. It was just a huge eyesore. People coming over the Skyline Drive would stop and look down over the small town of Front Royal, and they'd see this huge industrial complex that's not doing anything, that's decaying, full of asbestos. And now we're about to see it all gone, ready for new development. It's a very good feeling to have been able to contribute to that effort."

During its decontamination, demolition and cleanup mission, the Corps also partnered with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the Shenandoah Center for Heritage and the Environment. The Corps provided the agencies with

thorough photographic documentation of the historic buildings being removed, and supported the retrieval and preservation of historically significant items discovered during cleanup.

As a value-added benefit of that partnership, the Corps and the Shenandoah Center recovered over \$100,000 worth of reusable laboratory glassware which was donated to the Warren County Public Schools' science labs.

"The former Avtex Fibers operation is one of the largest and most significant Superfund sites now being readied for redevelopment," said Donald S. Welsh, Regional EPA administrator for the Mid-Atlantic states. "The reclamation of this site and the cooperation of the public and private sectors set the stage for a timely redevelopment that reflects the future in business opportunities, open green space and quality of life for Virginia, Warren County and Front Royal."

Front Royal Mayor James Eastham proudly summed up the feelings of his community: "When our town's biggest employer and taxpayer closed down in 1989, that devastating blow could have crushed our community spirit forever. But instead it united us. It strengthened our resolve. Over the past 16 years our community leaders, both town and county, have never wavered from this resolve. Our mission, our goal, has been to take this liability and turn it back into an asset."



Pictured left to right: EDA Executive Director Paul J. Carroll; Reverend Gary Heaton; Front Royal Mayor James M. Eastham; Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA-10th); Norfolk District Commander Col. Yvonne J. Prettyman-Beck; and EPA Region III Regional Administrator Donald S. Welsh. (Photo courtesy of Shenandoah Center for Heritage and the Environment)

To date the project delivery team has removed or recycled the following:

- 188 tractor-trailer loads of asbestos-contaminated materials;
- 16 drums of material containing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs);
- Six 55-gallon drums of waste containing Mercury;
- 550 truckloads of discarded building equipment, furnishings and other debris;
- 800 truckloads of steel and other metals disposed of as recycled material for melting and reuse;
- 200,000 cubic yards of crushed concrete, stone and brick for beneficial reuse on site (sub-base material for site roadways); and
- 17,800 gallons of recovered oil for recycle.

Portsmouth students exposed to GIS and the Corps

By Jason O'Neil

Students from the Virginia Research Academy of Science summer program in Portsmouth, Va., got a first-hand look at the many uses of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) during a recent visit to Norfolk District. Jason O'Neil and Jason Cash of the Geospatial Services Section hosted the students for several hours in July.

During their visit, the students got an up-close look at the Corps' mission and how GIS is used to carry it out. GIS supports the Corps through mapping, cartographic products, spatial and 3-D analysis, data management and internet mapping services. O'Neil and Cash expressed to the students that one of the strengths of the Geospatial Services Section is in the various scientific and technological backgrounds of district team members, which include civil engineering, geography, geology, natural resources, computer science and computer programming.

Dan Lewandowski, the student's teacher and Secondary Science Specialist for Portsmouth Public Schools, had this to

say about the visit: "You made very clear to the students the varied careers that are open and continue to develop for individuals trained in GIS. We appreciate the time you gave us to explain the functions of the Army Corps."



Jason O'Neil, GIS, (right) poses for a picture with students during their visit to Norfolk District (Photo by Jason Cash)

Portsmouth Public Schools recently implemented the pilot GIS program in partnership with James Madison University's Geographic Science Program. The program is in support of Gov. Mark Warner's Senior Year Plus initiative to transform the senior year of high school, offering new options for students to get a jump on their college careers or achieve an industry certification. The program will allow Portsmouth high school

students the opportunity to receive dual high school and college credit for taking GIS courses. Portsmouth is one of four school districts selected to participate in the program.

Mr. Lewandowski is planning to bring at least two more groups of Portsmouth high school students to visit with the Geospatial Services Section this fall for hands-on experience using GIS.

CPAC Corner from Paula Bradshaw

The Federal Employees Health Benefits Open Season will run from November 14 through December 12, with changes effective January 8, 2006. During this open season, you will be assessing your current coverage and premium rates in order to determine which plan/option will best meet your needs for the upcoming year. It is also a time when significant plan changes occur; new plans join or leave the program, changes in service areas, etc., some of which will prompt your action. There are no plans leaving or changing their service area in which Norfolk District employees are enrolled.

Although open seasons for the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) have been eliminated, significant activity is soon expected, as

you will no longer be limited to percentage maximums. All eligible employees under both the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System will be able to contribute up to the Internal Revenue System maximum for 2006 — \$15,000. With contributions now at the IRS maximum, fewer employees are expected to take advantage of the "catch-up" for 2006; a prerequisite for the catch-up contributions is for the employee to be making the maximum employee contribution. The 2006 IRS limit for "catch-up" contributions is \$5,000.

Please remember to make all benefit changes through the Army Benefits Center at www.abc.army.mil.

Norfolk helps alleviate workload in Europe

By Patrick Bloodgood

It used to be that when districts in the North Atlantic Division were tasked with a major undertaking and didn't have the resources at hand they would go to a consultant, or contract the work out without checking with other districts to see if help was available. That way of business is becoming a thing of the past. With the help of file transfer protocol (FTP) servers, e-mail and other communication devices, plus a directive to look around the division for assistance, more and more projects are jumping district boundaries and becoming a regional undertaking.

"The old processes where the chiefs of engineering or chiefs of design in NAD would rarely speak to one another are gone, now we meet regularly to discuss capabilities and workload," said Pete Reilly, Norfolk District Engineering Branch chief.

As the Corps transitions to make itself more relevant in today's environment, so must each district change the way they do business with one another. "We do a lot more sharing of resources among the Division," Reilly said.

Armed with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Norfolk and Europe Districts, NAO has been allowed to help pick up the overflow of work that was piling on engineers at Europe District; conversely, when the need presents itself, Europe District will do the same for Norfolk. Three projects to date have been worked on between the two districts using the MOU; two Army housing projects at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany have recently been completed and a third is nearing completion in Weisbaden, Germany.

The two Patch Barracks Whole Neighborhood Renewal projects involved renovating 189 dwelling units in 17 apartment buildings that were originally built shortly after World War II, vastly improving the quality of life for service personnel and their families stationed in Germany. Before the first line was even drawn, the Norfolk team of Kim Agyemang, Mark Hayes,

John Regan and Bo Taran spent three months in Germany working closely with their counterparts at Europe District learning the ins and outs of German design codes, designs and compliances. A critical stateside team member, Anita Bradshaw, managed the teams electronic drawing files and helped prepare the site development drawings.

Currently, Norfolk District is expanding its team back up capabilities with its European design technical base by assigning new team members to the Europe team with Ryan Nagel, Walt Trinkala and Dan Sarino being the most recent.

"It was excellent just being assigned to work along with senior people over there, it helped out, we learned a lot," commented team leader Bo Taran. The Patch Barracks projects went so well they came in under budget, ahead of schedule and one of the projects has been nominated for consideration as the Europe District Project Delivery Team of the Year Award.

Using what engineers like to call "virtual engineering", the team from Norfolk was able to assist Europe District with planning and

conceptualizing of the three housing projects from their workstations here stateside; a process that would not have been done as efficiently had it not been for FTP servers.

"It would be hard to do, you could do it by making disks and sending it via express mail, but it's much easier with FTP, it's almost instantaneous," said Taran. When all the final plans were in place the team in Europe printed the plans off the server and gave them straight to the contractors.

The entire process went so well that according to Pete Reilly, "Invisible... the process was invisible to the German contractor, they never knew the design was completed in Norfolk, Virginia."

"They just knew that the Corps did it and to them the Corps is Europe District," Taran said.

According to Reilly that is exactly how it was supposed to be: "As far as the customer knew it was the Army Corps of Engineers, not Norfolk District or Europe District, and that is how we like it."



Patch Barracks Family Housing on the day of the ribbon cutting (Photos courtesy of Europe District)



A future resident gets a tour of the inside of the renovated housing.

Safety Corner from Oscar Harts

Prevention of slips, trips and falls

Why is the prevention of slips, trips and falls important?

Thousands of disabling injuries and deaths occur each year as a result of slips, trips and falls. They account for 70 percent of Norfolk District's lost time accidents over the last six years. The results are economical losses, production losses and more importantly, it results in pain and suffering. In most cases, falls are preventable. What we all need to understand is: how falls happen; identification of trouble areas; and elimination or reducing hazards of falling.

How do falls happen?

The majority of falls occur on level surfaces resulting from slips and trips. *Slips* happen where there is little friction or traction between your footwear and the walking surface. Common causes of slips are:

- Wet or oily surfaces
- Spills
- Weather hazards
- Loose/unanchored rugs or mats
- Flooring or other walking surfaces that do not have the same degree of traction in all areas (ex. Carpet to tile)

Trips occur when your foot collides (strikes/hits) an object causing you to lose balance and eventually fall. Common causes of trips are:

- Obstructed view
- Poor lighting- Clutter in your way
- Wrinkled carpeting

- Uncovered cables
- Bottom drawers not being closed
- Uneven walking surfaces.

How do we prevent falls due to slips and trips?

Both slips and trips result from some kind of unintended or unexpected change in the contact between the feet/leg and working surface. Housekeeping, quality of walking surfaces, selection of proper footwear and appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing falls. Good house keeping is the first and the most important level of preventing slips, trips and falls. It includes:

- Cleaning all spills immediately
- Marking spills and wet areas
- Mopping or sweeping debris from the floor
- Removing obstacles from walkways and keeping them free of clutter
- Securing (tacking/taping) mats, rugs and carpet that does not lay flat
- Always closing file cabinets or storage drawers
- Covering extension cords that cross walkways
- Keeping work areas and walkways well lit

Prevention of falls should also focus on selecting proper footwear for conditions we face daily. An anti-skid sole with properly fitting footwear increases comfort and prevents fatigue, which in-turn improves your chances of not becoming a victim of Slips, Trips and Falls. Remember Safety is everybody's responsibility, that includes YOU!

Tales from Afghanistan--Sherri Jefferies

In March, I had the amazing opportunity to redeploy back to the Afghanistan Engineer District (AED) headquarters located in Kabul, Afghanistan. This was my second tour in Afghanistan, after having been back from my first tour for only seven months. My primary position was with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) working adjacent to the compound location of the U.S. Embassy. I served six months and returned stateside on September 7.

Our working days were approximately 12 hours long and often in arduous conditions, but extremely fulfilling. Time goes by very quickly when you are only focused on your mission at hand. From May through July, I worked two positions, maintaining my job as the Office Manager for the Infrastructure, Engineering and Energy Office at USAID, while simultaneously working as the Executive Secretary for the Commander of Afghanistan



Sherri Jefferies with Afghan school children in Kabul, Afghanistan. (Photos courtesy of Sherri Jefferies)

Engineer District (AED). The District was in preparation for an upcoming change of command, and during this timeframe I was heavily engaged in work at both locations, which was challenging and demanding, but fun.

The second tour for me was better than the first in so many ways. For starters, Corps personnel now live in a new and improved safe house, Qalaa House, which is known to be the best living accommodations in Kabul. I was able to experience more cultural events this year, attending an Afghan wedding reception and visiting the

local Kabul Zoo. I was able to drive our designated government vehicles through the streets of Kabul where there are only a scarce few traffic lights or stop signs and laws and rules are not well enforced, even with traffic police standing in the intersection. It was a thrill to drive as fast as you want.

See Sherri Jefferies, Page 7

Sherri Jefferies

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I was very blessed to make so many new friends and acquaintances this year. The Corps is very well represented at AED, with a plethora of Districts in the states and overseas sending volunteers. It was a good group of folks, constantly ever-changing. The military officers and enlisted take pride in being very cautious of our well-being and I always felt safe and protected. The bonds that you form with each other are very strong. There isn't anything you wouldn't do for your buddy – making sure people are taken care of and nursed back to health when they are sick, or having a pal to go shopping with on Fridays. As friends, we learned to read each other quickly, knowing when you're upset or in a bad mood or how to cheer you up when you are sad or lonely or miss your family and home.

We deployed to a war zone together, and there was always a chance that somebody wouldn't make it back to our safe house at the end of the day. I typically never dwelled on negative thoughts, but always knew that they existed. You enjoy a special bond with your friends that not many others can relate to or share in. We all went to a third world country and lived, worked, ate, cleaned and shopped with these people day in and day out for six months to a year. The closeness is natural because of your situation and surroundings. I consider each of them special and important friends in my life.

One other highlight of my tour was getting to know our Corps leaders, from the Chief of Engineers to the Commander and Deputy Commander, on a personal level as well as professionally.

Despite what the typical news media may be broadcasting, the Afghan people really love Americans. They like our clothing, hair and our gestures and mannerisms. They enjoy hearing about our families back home in the U.S. and what we do for fun. They always are respectful and sweet, often asking about our health and our families. They are generous, kind and giving people. It's genuine and heartwarming. They are also some of the hardest working men and women I've ever known.

Everything is hard in Afghanistan, a lesson we all learned quickly. Afghan people do not complain about this and just accept that to be their life. They have never seen an amusement park or a mall and frankly, would most likely be intimidated by them. To them, life is simple. They also love one another very intensely. They like to hug and embrace each other on the street, often kissing each other in their greetings. Their day to day actions in the face of adversity is enough to humble even the proudest of people. I was very touched by them and their ability to adapt to things so easily; especially to their seemingly difficult lifestyle as compared to the American spoils we are so used to here.

The children are especially precious. They are so cute. They peddle gum and candy, rubber or wooden snakes, maps of Afghanistan and cell phone cards. They are persistent in their individual endeavors to get you to buy something. Even the youngest kids speak perfect English. They fondly refer to you as "sir" even if you are female, and courageously address the military by their rank. They love to yell after you and follow you around or boldly tug on your clothes. They offer to carry your

packages for a dollar or ask you for items of your clothes, jewelry, candy or gum. The Afghan women are also very special. My female Afghan friends cried and presented me with gifts when my tour was over. I still keep in touch; they are special friends to me.

Security in Kabul for the Army Corps was very reliable. We have contracted local national guards for our safe house. Convoys are the primary means of transportation and integrity is stressed. Travel is dependent upon mission critical necessity. We seldom just go somewhere for non-official business, because that increases chances for potential danger for us. I always felt safe and never felt as if I was in any type of danger.

I would welcome another opportunity to serve again in Afghanistan. I enjoyed it immensely and had a wonderful experience that has enriched my life with many blessings. Many new friends, knowledge of a different culture, humbling feelings of being truly thankful for what you have in your life right now, great work experiences and, most importantly, the pride that comes from knowing that you were able to serve your country in a time of war as a volunteer and without a gun or a uniform and make a difference to a culture of people who truly deserve a lot more than they have.



Sherri Jefferies with the many friends she made while deployed in Kabul.

Tales from Afghanistan--Maj. Chris Riemer

A pessimist would point out that at the height of the summer in Kandahar, Afghanistan, the temperature routinely exceeded 130 degrees in the sun. There are no trees for shade and the fine powdery "moon dust" coats everything. The jobsite usually smells for reasons that need not be explained. With a big smile, the optimist states, "Yes, it is 130, but it's a DRY heat." The 8 percent relative humidity actually makes it more tolerable than the sticky heat common to Norfolk.

The pessimist wishes they had never come, complains about how everything is substandard compared to home, and pines for a quick return to the comfort of friends and family. The optimist cherishes the challenge of the mission and develops a greater appreciation for both the American standard of living, and the simplicity of Afghan life. They are proud to be part of a team delivering projects that are directly impacting the lives of Afghanistan's citizenry and the overall success of the coalition mission.

I'm an optimist who just returned from a six-month-deployment as the Area Engineer for the USACE Afghanistan Engineer District office at Kandahar Airfield in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Kandahar was an outstanding duty assignment because it offered the opportunity to manage not only projects in support of coalition forces at Kandahar Airfield, but also the construction of off-base installations for the Afghan National Army (ANA). On the airfield, the projects focused on critical life-support-systems such as a modular housing area for 4500 people with accompanying water distribution and sewage collection utilities, as well as missions that had more direct operational impacts. The phased rehabilitation of the 10,500-foot-long airfield is a long term effort that is replacing the existing, failing runway with a surface capable of supporting both military aircraft and large commercial aircraft – all the while maintaining the full operational capability of the airfield. The Corps was also charged with managing the construction and placement of precast concrete barriers and bunkers

designed to provide protection for coalition personnel throughout the base.

Outside of Kandahar Airfield, the team's efforts focused on the construction of installations for the ANA in both Kandahar and Qalat. Each base is approximately 1.3 square kilometers and contained over 80 buildings. These included barrack complexes, centralized toilet and shower buildings, a large dining facility, motor pools, maintenance facilities, warehouses,

headquarters buildings, a training building, bachelors officer's quarters and all of the facilities and utility systems required to power and service these structures.

The typical base supports five battalions of soldiers – three infantry battalions, one combat support battalion, and one combat service support battalion. In addition to the facilities previously mentioned, a 50-bed hospital was also being built at each of the Regional Corps Headquarters Installations (Kandahar, Herat, Mazar E-Sharif and Gardez) under separate contracts. At their peaks, these large job sites would employ 2,000 workers – approximately 75 percent of

whom were Afghans.

The AED is a great team with a diverse group of Corps employees. At the Kandahar Area Office, team members who performed Quality Assurance Representative (QAR) duties came from all corners of the organization. In addition to those who performed Project Engineer and Quality Assurance tasks at their home district, our team included a crane operator from the Seattle District, a real estate specialist from the Sacramento District, a power plant supervisor from the Walla Walla District and a lock operator from the Vicksburg District. Each of these individuals served as QARs with distinction and proved that success is more a matter of attitude than aptitude. They enthusiastically applied themselves to learning the standards, improving their weaknesses and enforcing the specifications,

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Mike Farmer (Nashville District), Bill Stratton (Walla Wall District) and Maj. Chris Riemer checking construction progress in the power plant. The designer required six 1- megawatt Caterpillar Generators. These items were purchased by the contractor from a dealer in Pakistan and typically took six months or more to have delivered to the site. (Photos courtesy of Maj. Chris Riemer)

Maj. Chris Riemer

drawings and contracts. Their energy and dedication were critical elements in the overall success of the projects.

The team also included a local national engineer who was contracted by the AED and also served as a translator. His understanding and explanation of the cultural issues affecting the projects made him an invaluable asset to the organization.

At the airfield, the runway team consisted of a geologist from the Sacramento District and two contracted employees from Michael Baker, Jr. Inc. Add three military officers to this motley crew and you have a team that is capable, with the support of the AED headquarters, of performing direct supervision, administration and quality assurance duties for construction contracts totaling over \$150 million.



Capt. Dustin Harris (Los Angeles District) and Maj. Riemer meet with deminers who cleared the approach lighting area for the Kandahar Runway. After more than 20 years of war, Afghanistan has millions of land mines spread throughout the countryside. All construction sites had to be cleared to a depth of one meter before any work could begin.

I'm an optimist, but I'm not delusional and there is absolutely no denying that the construction environment in Afghanistan is riddled with unique challenges that are exponentially greater than those encountered at a typical stateside job site. There were often multiple languages spoken by the workforce at each job site and the ever present danger of unexploded ordnance.

Afghanistan's remote location and lack of an industrial base caused almost all materials long lead times. The immature transportation and communication systems made the shipment and tracking of supplies a maddening exercise. Materials were often damaged in shipment and would have to be reordered. Contractors would require constant assistance in order to meet the installation's force protection requirements. The



The dining facility and two Infantry Battalion Complexes (IBC's) at the Kandahar ANA site. Each IBC consists of eight barracks, one battalion headquarters building, one battalion storage building, and one centralized toilet and shower building.

environment itself is austere and wears on both man and machine. The contractors, just like the Corps, would be challenged to attract and retain qualified personnel to manage their work.

Installation layouts and building floor plans had to be designed to account for cultural issues about which most westerners are completely ignorant. It was a constant battle to enforce job site safety practices that are considered routine in the United States. The list goes on and on, but almost all of these challenges could be either managed or overcome through constant communications with stakeholders, detailed planning and thorough execution.

In the end, these challenges helped make the sense of achievement that much greater when milestones were reached. I'll always remember signing over the first barracks buildings to the ANA, the first placement of runway concrete, the first flushing of the toilet, the lift station discharging into Lake Kandahar for the first time and the absolute delight of the Afghan soldiers who finally had their ceiling fans installed. The team constantly pushed forward, enforced the standards and continued steady progress on all projects.

Of course there were low points during the deployment, but the memories now are overwhelmingly positive. Almost all of the team members shared a contagiously positive attitude and many actually extended their original four-month tours to six months. During farewells, there was a common theme to almost everyone's parting remarks: they were thankful for the opportunity to come to Afghanistan, they were proud to have served their country and they felt that they had made a contribution to an important mission. Many are even looking forward to returning after spending a few months back in the United States.

Tales from Afghanistan--Nandy Perillo



Nandy outside a brick kiln in Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy of Nandy Perillo)

We have all heard that the Corps' reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan continue at an impressive phase, and despite working hard in sometimes precarious conditions, we are helping Afghans rebuild their country and reclaim their future. USACE employees are assisting with the construction of roads, schools, hospitals, military facilities, police stations, border crossings, waste water treatment plants, electrical systems and other infrastructure most Americans take for granted. The AED represents a broad spectrum of USACE employees. AED, for example, boasts Civilian employees from all eight USACE divisions and 29 of 41 districts. From December 12, 2004 -July 20, 2005, I worked in the reconstruction of the Afghan National Army hospital, military academy and other military facilities.

I deployed over a dozen times on a U.S. Navy carrier in my 22-plus years of naval service but this deployment was the most rewarding for me.

The hardest thing about this deployment was the pre-deployment because of not knowing what to expect and the uncertainty of what's ahead. You hear good news and bad news from the press, you hear good stories from people who come back from deployment, but until you've gone through it your mind plays tricks on you. Now that it's over, it was a piece of cake.

From this deployment, I brought home lots of memories. Afghans are tenacious and very hard working people. They make do with very little things and they are very resourceful. They are very good at building stone walls and digging pits. At my project site, they built this very beautiful granite retaining wall that I called "The Wall of Afghanistan." It was not even in the scope of work! They also dig pits 15-meters-deep with just a pick and a bucket tied to a string.

The children work hard too. They start working at a very early age. I watched a kuchi (nomad) herding the flocks of

sheep, staying the whole day under the heat of the sun in 111 degrees Fahrenheit heat. He was no older than eight years old and kept pace with his bigger sister.

Driving around Kabul reminds me of Manila in my home country of the Philippines, except Afghan drivers coming from the opposite direction, on undivided or divided roads, will take your lane. They'll keep flashing their high beam headlights to either warn you they are coming, or simply tell you to get out of their way. I never did figure it out, so I got out of their way most of the time.

Two other memories both involve knowledge and the lack thereof on my part. One is the good experience I had at the rifle range, qualifying the M-16 as a sharp shooter and famfire (familiarization firing) with AK-47.

The other was during a delivery of goods to a refugee camp. My task was to give out candy to the kids. As the goods distribution got out of control, we were directed to mount and make a fast exit. I was one of the first drivers to drive away and others followed. Since we had plenty of candy left over and the children were running by my car, we dumped it onto the road for them to pick up. When we got back to the Qalaa house (the Afghanistan Engineer District Headquarters) for the debriefing, I found out why the rest of the cars didn't



Maj. Chris Riemer, Nandy Perillo and Sherri Jefferies at the Afghanistan Engineer District offices in Kabul, Afghanistan (Photo courtesy of Sherri Jefferies)

follow me — they didn't want to run over the kids! I told my wife about this episode and she laughed. What I call lack of knowledge, she called "stupidity."

I had a great time in Afghanistan and hope to go back someday to see the results of our reconstruction and the effects it has on the Afghan people.

Norfolk District assists in hurricane recovery

Norfolk District has deployed 46 employees to the Gulf Coast area to aid in the relief from the many hurricanes that devastated the area this season. A few employees who have returned shared some of their experiences while deployed. All photos courtesy of Norfolk District employees.



Al Gates getting ready to show those blue roofs who's the boss.

The Baton Rouge, LA RFO sent me to Lake Charles, La., Blue Roof Team. I then became team leader for 12 other members. We covered an area from the Texas border to Lafayette, La., to the Gulf Coast and to Deridder, La.,. We completed 10,000 blue roofs in 21 days, most in Calcasieu Parrish and the other surrounding parishes. The people were glad to see some help from the federal government. They were happy to see some action taking place. I had a great rapport with people and was glad to serve the people of Louisiana.

—Al Gates, Logistics



I was in the Baton Rouge, La., Recovery Field Office (RFO) as the Ice Team Mission Manager from October 5-October 20 coordinating the delivery of ice to impacted areas of Louisiana. I was then at the FEMA National Recovery Coordination Center (NRCC) in Washington, DC, October 21-November 4 as the Ice Action Officer, providing advice and coordinating the overall national ice missions for areas impacted by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. The amount of destruction in the parishes around New Orleans was unbelievable and I will never forget the sight, smell and taste. I was amazed to hear the stories from residents of how fast the water rose and that people kept axes in their attics in case they were ever trapped.

—Greggory Williams, Design Section



I was deployed for Hurricane Katrina, as an Emergency Management Specialist for the Mississippi Valley Division. Katrina hit on Aug. 29 and I deployed immediately afterward on Aug. 31 - Sep. 30. My job was to provide support to the Mississippi Valley Division Emergency Operations Center with FEMA mission assignments, funding, personnel tracking, management of ENGLINK taskers and coordination of EOC activities with the two MVD Lead Districts (Memphis & Vicksburg Districts). It was a very rewarding experience to observe what a Corps Emergency Manager and his Division-level Crisis Management Team is responsible for at the Division level, from plugging levees with giant sandbags lifted by helicopters to negotiating and awarding billion-dollar contracts for debris cleanup, roofing, temporary housing, etc.

—Jan VanHouten, Emergency Management Office

Hurricane recovery

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Norfolk District's Tier I Ice Planning and Response Team hard at work in Baton Rouge, La.

I was deployed to Baton Rouge, La., for 23 days beginning on 5 October and served as the Action Officer on the Norfolk District's Tier I Ice Planning and Response Team (PRT). Responsibilities while working at the Joint Field Office included coordinating with other Corps PRT action officers such as water and logistics, meeting with FEMA logistics personnel, working with the National Guard and contacting ice truck drivers. It was great to see another aspect of the Corps and I met some wonderful folks.

Many of the hotels in the Baton Rouge and Port Allen area were filled with individuals that had been displaced from their homes due to Katrina and Rita. These individuals had their pets with them and as many belongings as they could fit in their vehicles. When I left in the morning and returned in the evening after a long day I would see these individuals. Seeing the struggles they were going through gave me the 'mental boost' to keep going.

—Jason Cash, Geospatial Services



I was in the St. Bernard Parish located near New Orleans, La., I was part of the Critical Facility Mission; my job was to oversee the quality of construction of a clinical facility for the St. Bernard Parish. It was an eye-opening experience to see first-hand the amount of devastation the state of Louisiana has gone through and to see the resiliency that these people have to come back and rebuild all over again is amazing. It feels good to see that there are people here that care and are willing to lend a helping hand to those that are in need, and that I was a part of that.

—Jon Reyes, Langley Field Office



Lois Wilkins in Baton Rouge, La., with the Sacramento District Debris Team.

I was working in the Recovery Field Office in Baton Rouge, La., for the Sacramento District Debris Team. Our office was responsible for debris cleanup in South New Orleans Parish, St. Bernard Parish and Plaquemines Parish. I worked with many people from the New Orleans District who lost everything they had, yet, in spite of their loss, they continued to work hard and keep a positive attitude. They were also thankful for all the hard work the other members of the Corps family are doing there.

I had the opportunity to fly over parts of New Orleans, St. Bernard Parrish and Plaquemines Parrish in a helicopter. It was a great experience. It was interesting to meet other Corps employees from districts in the central part of the country and learn about the work that the Corps does on the Mississippi River. I never knew the Corps had a Quarter Boat. It was a great experience staying on the boat and talking with the folks that work on it.

—Lois Wilkins, Office of Counsel

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Hurricane recovery

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Nandy Perillo checks out some of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina.

I was deployed to Baton Rouge, La., on a housing PRT. We were responsible for setting up temporary housing trailers from start to finish for evacuees. I deployed again after just returning from seven months in Afghanistan, because I wanted to help out the people stricken by the hurricane. If it had been here, we'd want help.

—Nandy Perillo, Engineering Branch, Civil Section



I was deployed on September 1 to FEMA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. There, I worked for 30 days straight as an Ice Mission Action Officer (AO) and Subject Matter Expert (SME). My duties included coordinating with FEMA, various other Federal Agencies, Corps HQ, SAD, Charleston District, contractors and other Ice Teams deployed to Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas. Well over 2,000 truckloads of ice were distributed to the people who needed it most. I was truly proud and humbled by the dedication of the Ice Team members who deployed from around the country to make a difference in the lives of those impacted.

—Steve Powell, Design Section



I will never look at refrigerators the same again. In New Orleans, refrigerators were a visual barometer of the amount of population return. It was strange to drive onto a street and see hundreds of refrigerators lining the road in an area where many people had returned (It was equally bizarre to see hundreds of refrigerator boxes lining the street the following week.) In addition, it was stark to go into low-income or predominantly rental areas and see no refrigerators; the people had not come back and may not for quite a while. Many people had shown their good humor by painting graffiti on their refrigerators such as "Mr. Stinky", "Bad Voodoo Inside", "Free to Good Home" and "Tom Benson Inside – Do Not Open".

Insider tip: Do not disturb the sleeping evil inside the discarded refrigerator – avoid moving it until it is picked up. If you have to discard a refrigerator – tape completely around it. If you just tape the doors together, the gases will build up and blows open the doors. Meat that has transmuted into jelly and beyond is an odor to avoid."

—Raymond Williams, Navigation Support and Survey



Project Updates

Archeological Findings at NOAA



A grave stain from the Wallops Island site where contractors discovered human bones while excavating a trench. (Photo courtesy of Tim Thompson)

On June 22, 2005 workers for Rocky Hill Construction discovered human bones in a pipe trench they were excavating at the NOAA Wallops NESDIS facility. The project was being managed by the Norfolk District for NOAA. District Archaeologist Tim Thompson responded to the scene and after a brief investigation by the Accomack County Medical Examiner, stabilized and removed the human remains. The grave

had been badly disturbed by the pipe excavation, but a small portion of a coffin stain was identified indicating that the grave was from the historic period, probably the 19th century. The bones are being examined by a forensic anthropologist at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Thompson subsequently monitored the grading of an adjacent parking lot where two shell pits were found and excavated containing pottery and other artifacts from the late prehistoric period. A quick response by in-house expertise allowed the construction work to proceed after only a brief interruption.

Craney Island Eastward Expansion

On September 6, Norfolk District released the draft conclusions and recommendations of the Craney Island Eastward Expansion Feasibility Study, which identifies an eastward port expansion as the recommended plan.

The unique dual-purpose project would provide some additional dredge material placement capacity at the existing Craney Island Dredge Material Management Area and, when filled, will provide an area for construction of a planned fourth marine terminal.

The 45-day public review and comment period closed in mid-November. The next step in the process is submission of the report to higher headquarters for review.



Conceptual drawing of the Virginia Port Authority's proposed Craney Island Marine Terminal. (Graphic Courtesy of the Virginia Port Authority)

Happy Retirement!!

Farewell to our recent and upcoming Retirees. You will all be greatly missed.

Russell Underwood

Ken Bailey

Harold Wheeler

Vashon Jackson

Cheryl Williams

Joseph Blackburn

Williams Prillaman

Thomas Woodward

Diana Bailey





New 911 system in Chesapeake thanks to District employee

Bill Jones, who works at the Great Bridge Locks, was featured on WAVY-TV news for his efforts in changing the 911 system in Chesapeake. In 2004, Jones' grandson had a seizure and the 911 dispatcher could not provide them any medical assistance beyond sending an ambulance. This prompted Jones' mission to change Chesapeake's 911 system. Today each dispatcher has electronic and manual tools to walk a caller through an emergency situation.

Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Awards Corporations

Deputy Chief of P3MD, Jorge Nadal, was nominated in 2004 and 2005 for the Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Awards Corporations (HENAAC). This award is dedicated to recognizing excellence in engineering to promote the value and contributions of Hispanics.

Norfolk District Associate in the Executive Leadership Development Program

Donna Carrier-Tal, Office of Counsel, was selected as the Norfolk District Associate in the FY06 Executive Leadership Development Program. Each of the six NAD Districts and the Division are only allowed one representative per year. Congratulations!

Honor Graduate from Defense Information School

Nancy Allen, Public Affairs, attended the Public Affairs Officer Qualification Course at Defense Information School, Fort Meade, Md. from 23 May – 27 July, 2005. She was one of

11 students to graduate with honors, scoring above 90 percent in five functional areas, including Fundamentals of Public Affairs; Public Affairs Writing; Media Relations; and Speechwriting and Public Speaking. The class was comprised of 37 Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Public Affairs Officers and 11 Army and Air Force civilians.

District employees rock at the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon

Norfolk District was amply represented at the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon at the Virginia Beach oceanfront over Labor Day weekend. Among the more than 20,000 runners were John Adams of P3MD, Lt. Col. David Pedersen of Exec Staff, and Robin Williams and Norm Malbon, both from TSD. Matt Nelson, husband of Megan Nelson in PAO, also ran.

Gathright Dam Project Team makes rescue

While performing a reservoir inspection as part of the semi-annual dam safety inspection, the Gathright Dam Project Team came across a family stranded on their boat at the upper reaches of the lake. Bill Simple, civil engineer technician, was able to direct them to tie off the stranded boat and tow it back to



Gathright Dam Project Team tow a family back to shore after being stranded on their boat. (Photo courtesy of Ray Dridge)

Fortney Branch boat ramp where they had put in with the help of Leonard Jones of the GeoEnvironmental Section. Once back at the ramp Tim Flanagan, Mark Knick and Willie Ramos, all members of the Gathright Dam project, helped the family load their boat onto a trailer.

If the Corps was not around for the rescue, this boat may have been stranded on the lake for a long time.

Around the District

Continued from Page 15

National Hispanic Heritage Month

September was National Hispanic Heritage Month and EEO provided the District with an informative lecture from Professor Brian Brown. As a child he moved to Spain with his family and fell in love with its history and culture. He spoke to the district primarily about the development of Latin America, and the current culture and economy. Brown ended his presentation by saying he is one of the lucky people who enjoys his job and that was clearly true based on his passion for the subject.

Best on the Waterfront



Col. Prettyman-Beck throws out the first pitch at the Tides baseball game. (Photo courtesy of Col. Prettyman-Beck.)

On August 22, Col. Prettyman-Beck accepted the “Best on the Waterfront” award on behalf of the Norfolk District. APM Terminals and Norfolk Tides presented the award to the District for our dedication and service to the people of Hampton Roads.

Prospect Course Instructor

Nora Iseli was selected in 2005 by USACE as a Prospect Course Instructor in Regulatory IIA sessions, teaching Endangered Species Act coordination. Norfolk District Regulatory Branch now boasts six team members currently serving as Prospect Course instructors.

Small Business Program

Norfolk District had a record-breaking year in awards to small businesses. The overall 56 percent to small business as well as the \$135 million total small business dollar figure are the largest the District has awarded. It is particularly noteworthy that approximately \$30 million in projects were awarded to small businesses in head-to-head competition with large businesses. Those awarded contracts included a \$13 million contract at Langley Air Force Base and a \$12 million contract for the Department of Environmental Protection in New York. Norfolk’s four percent (\$9 million) of contracts awarded to Service Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses put the District in a group of three to hit and exceed the statutory three percent goal.

Halloween Costume Contest

First Place: Zorro, Robert Pretlow, P3MD Civil Branch



Second Place: Cry Baby, Ann Denny, Real Estate



Third Place: Wicked Witch, Denise Huffstickler, Real Estate

Butterfly, Wendy Metcalf, Architectural Section

Cleopatra, Deborah Painter, Planning Branch

Gourmet Jelly Beans, Karen Brown, Architectural Section



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