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Whirlwind of operations centers on single joint engineer command

(Right) Command Sgt. Maj. Andrew C. Krom, 411th Engineer Brigade, Joint Task Force Empire command sergeant major, posts the colors of the 411th En. Bde. during a transfer of authority ceremony with the 22nd Naval Construction Regiment at Kandahar Air Field, July 31. The event marked the consolidation of engineer operations under a single brigade command covering the entire Combined Joint Operations Area – Afghanistan.

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Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Derek M. Smith

General Knowledge

From the desk of the Commanding General, JTF Empire

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of Joint Task Force Empire,

On July 31, we officially became the single, joint engineer brigade in theater. We are also the only engineer brigade (or equivalent) within our Armed Forces that is engaged in combat operations. There are engineer units conducting missions in every corner of Afghanistan. These are not just Army units, as a fight this big needs our full spectrum, including Air Force and Navy. I am proud of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 11, which has been engaged in multiple troops-in-contact and small arms fire engagements on a daily basis for the last week. They live their motto every day, "We build, We fight." I can honestly brag on every formation within the Empire team. Together we are accomplishing engineering missions focused on Afghan National Army engineer development, combat missions involving route clearance and freedom of movement, construction missions focusing on not only force protection and infrastructure builds for base closures, but working with our Afghan partners to improve the infrastructure for the Afghan people.

We have accomplished much, but have much more to do. The summer is not even half over and neither is this fighting season in Afghanistan. Several of our brothers have given the ultimate sacrifice for our mission. It is important to keep in mind that in everything we do, the enemy is out there. They will not rest, and we can't rest, not until our mission is complete. Stay focused. Our actions and decisions will have life-changing effects, not just for us, but for our families, friends and the peoples of both the United States and Afghanistan.

It is important that we document our success as well as our failures in the proper fashion for other units to study, learn from and improve. As units begin the relief-in-place process, document how you affected the battle. What did

you do right? What can we improve on? There are units currently preparing to enter the fight. What do they need to know that you did not? What have you learned that should be incorporated into training before units come to Afghanistan? What do they need to know to be successful? What we do here will have ramifications for years to come, not only here in Afghanistan, but in the creation of tactics, techniques and procedures, standard operating procedures and equipment utilization at home stations. Pass on what you have learned.

Finally, I want to thank the 22nd Naval Construction Regiment for leading the fight in the South. Their preparation and organization helped make the transition to a single engineer brigade smooth and virtually seamless. They shared their knowledge with the 411th and it is because of their efforts, and the efforts of the 980th Engineer Battalion and NMCB 11, that will bring combat multipliers to the fight and ensure that our mission is a success.

Thank you for all you do every day. You are making a difference in this fight!

Essayons!

DAVID L. WEEKS

Brigadier General, USA
Commander

Joint Task Force EMPIRE and
411TH Engineer Brigade
Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan



The Empire Report

Joint Task Force Empire - 411th Engineer Brigade
Public Affairs Office



Commanding General
Brig. Gen. David L. Weeks



Command Sergeant Major
Command Sgt. Maj. Andrew C. Krom

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These are not the droids we're looking for . . .

Contributing Units

841st Engineer Battalion, Task Force Hurricane
7th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Red Devils
578th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Mad Dog
223rd Engineer Battalion, Task Force Knight
507th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Warhammer
980th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Lone Star
11th Naval Mobile Construction Battalion
49th Mine Dog Detachment

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Whirlwind of operations centers on single joint engineer command

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Derek M. Smith
Joint Task Force Empire Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – Engineer operations in Afghanistan solidified under a single joint engineer command as the U.S. Army 411th Engineer Brigade, Joint Task Force Empire, assumed authority of engineer operations across three regional commands from the 22nd Naval Construction Regiment, Task Force Stethem, during a ceremony at Kandahar Air Field, July 31.

The historic event not only signalled the end of a six-month deployment of the Seabees of the 22nd NCR, the final such regiment to deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom; it also consolidated engineer operations under a single brigade command covering the entire Combined Joint Operations Area – Afghanistan.

The consolidation is in conjunction with efforts to reduce American forces in Afghanistan as NATO continues to transition control of operations to Afghan National Security Forces. This is the first time since the beginning of OEF that engineer assets fell under a single command element. The progression from multiple regionally-based engineer elements has progressed to this historic point through the continued development of the ANSF as they look forward to taking full responsibility for the nation's security.

"The enduring impact of these operations tangibly enabled three

regional commands across Afghanistan to execute their counter-insurgency missions and directly contributed to accomplishing strategic objectives." said U.S. Navy Capt. Kathryn A. Donovan, 22nd NCR commodore.

The 411th En. Bde., a Reserve brigade out of New Windsor, N.Y., began the daunting mission of command and control of engineer operations across the CJOA-A June 4, when it officially transferred authority of operations from the 18th En. Bde. It is currently the only engineer brigade of any U.S. service deployed to a combat environment. With the assumption of responsibilities from TF Stethem, the service

members of JTF Empire became the first engineer brigade to maintain command and control across the entire country.

"As we assume these responsibilities, we intend to not only maintain their momentum, but seek to carry the torch a little bit farther," proclaimed Brig. Gen. David L. Weeks, 411th En. Bde. JTF Empire commanding general. "We intend to operate along three established lines of effort; combat effects, construction effects and the development and professionalization of ANSF engineer forces with a particular focus on Afghan National Army engineers. We are supporting their efforts as they take the lead moving steadily toward independent engi-

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Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Derek M. Smith

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. David L. Weeks, Joint Task Force Empire commanding general (left), U.S. Army Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, commanding general of International Security Assistance Force Joint Command (center), and U.S. Navy Capt. Kathryn A. Donovan, 22nd Naval Construction Regiment commodore, discuss operations before the transfer of authority ceremony at Kandahar Air Field, July 31.

GRUFFLY SPEAKING

Straight Talk from the Command Sergeant Major, JTF Empire

Greetings,

First, I would like to welcome Spec. Estes back to the Brigade Headquarters at Bagram after her recovery at FT Bliss, and welcome all of our fellow Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen who have joined the JTF Empire team within the past 30 days.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize and congratulate the following Soldiers on their well-deserved promotions: Sgt. Majors, Sgt. Jiman and Staff Sgt. Martin.

Staff Sgt. Jados and I have visited the following locations to check on our Soldiers' progress across our area of responsibility. We have traveled to MES, Spann, and Kunduz in the north; KAF, and Walton and Sakari Karez in the south to conduct battlefield circulations. Our service members are doing a fantastic job in their operations and we couldn't be more pleased with their

efforts.

We have also had the honor to ride along and walk with the SAPPERS from Route Clearance Patrol 75 of the 420th Engineer Battalion and the Afghan National Army from the 2/209th Corps.

We appreciate all of your hard work.

I ask at this time we all take a second to remember all our Brothers and Sisters-in-arms who have given the ultimate sacrifice like Spc. Perez, Spc. Taylor, Cpl. Hicks, Sgt. 1st Class Estle, Pfc. Belmontes and Spc. McClain.

Thank you all for what you do.

CSM Andrew Krom



Staff Sgt. James Evans, JTF Empire personal security detail to the commanding general, was so proud of his new Hawaiian shirt, he decided to proclaim "Hawaiian Shirt Day" in the command headquarters. Command Sgt. Maj. Krom made a proclamation of his own: "You wear that shirt in here, and I'll make you eat it."

True to his word, upon finding out Evans modeled his new shirt for the camera, the JTF Empire command sergeant major set up a fabric-packed meal. Evans diligently complied.

Editor's note: No shirts or noncommissioned officers were harmed in the making of this publication . . . with the exception of those who actually had to see this Hawaiian shirt.




From the editor:

We thank you for taking the time to read this month's edition of The Empire Report.

We are constantly looking to improve this publication and value your feedback. Please feel free to contact us with your questions, submissions, comments, concerns or letters to the editor. Is there something you want to see more of? Let us know.

Please note that all submissions and letters to the editor are subject to review and publication.

Please note this is an interactive publication. Look for this symbol: 

This signals an active link to the resource for further information.

We aim to make this publication both informative and entertaining. We hope you enjoy. On behalf of the service members of JTF Empire, thank you for all your support.

You contact the editor at:
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578th Engineer Battalion “Task Force Mad Dog” leaves its mark on Afghanistan



By Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SHARANA, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Taylor stood huddled with other Soldiers in his platoon on the flight line, trying to make himself as small as possible while icy wind from the Chinook’s dual rotary blades blasted over him. It was the middle of the night on Nov. 28, 2011; the beginning of the coldest winter Afghanistan had seen in the last 15 years.

Four hours earlier, Soldiers from the 1022nd Vertical Construction Company didn’t know they would be going anywhere, let alone moving out in the middle of the night to a small Combat Outpost most of them never heard of. The entire company packed and got ready to move, and now stood shivering on a flight line in freezing temperatures. Helicopters hovered and landed, barely visible in the darkness. The crew chief for the bird closest to them waved, signaling them to board the aircraft. “Operation Devil Hammer” had begun.

“All I could think was ‘Where are we going? What is the security? What are the living conditions going to be like?’” Taylor recalled. “This is what I had always thought the Army would be like, but more time to plan would have been nice.”

In Afghanistan, Regional Command East supports the Afghan government by maintaining stability and freedom of movement along the border with Pakistan. Maintaining critical supply routes and preventing the influx of insurgents from the Pashtu mountains dominate operations on the eastern-most boundaries. On the western side of RC-East is Afghanistan’s Highway 1, aka “The Ring Road.” Built during the Soviet occupation, the Ring Road traverses the entire country in a



photos courtesy of Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs

(Top) U.S. Army Spc. Kyle Griffith, 842nd Horizontal Construction Company, fills barricades at Combat Outpost Giro. Giro was so isolated from the rest of the project sites it had to be resupplied by helicopter. (Above) U.S. Army 1st Lt. Manuel Ariza, 721st Engineer Company, contemplates how to remove old Soviet infrastructure from the proposed helicopter landing zone at Combat Outpost Waghez.

circular fashion connecting most of Afghanistan’s major cities. The stretch of Highway 1 within RC-East links Kabul to Kandahar, key terrain for the sustenance and prosperity of the country as a whole. In a landlocked nation with no ports and few functioning airfields, control of the road network equals control of the country. Coalition Forces know this, the insurgents know this. The battle along Highway 1 speaks for itself.



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neer operations.”

“The mission is clear,” continued Weeks, a resident of East Carroll Parish, La. “Joint Task Force Empire is committed to the prosperity of the people of Afghanistan and we will support (ISAF Joint Command’s) efforts to ensure a strong, self-reliant Afghanistan for future generations.”

The whirlwind of operations gripped the 411th engineers from day one and will not yield any time soon said Lt. Col. Matthew S. Warne, JTF Empire operations officer.

“Within our first 30 days, we started our (relief in place) process with the 22 NCR to take all the construction effects from the south, southwest and west,” explained Warne, a resident of Valhalla, N.Y. “In the next three months, 5 of our battalions are rotating out. In addition, we have companies underneath them ripping out, plus a regional command is ripping out.”

These numerous unit replacements while maintaining engineer operations is difficult enough according to Warne. Yet, this single command is not only maintaining these opera-

tions, but continuing to build for future operations, all during the height of the fighting season in theater.

“We’ve got a lot of work to do the next 2 and half months, so we’re postured for our next campaign plan.”

JTF Empire is responsible for all theater engineering support to IJC while working with regional commands, providing all theater tactical construction and assured mobility. It also continues its efforts for Afghan National Army engineer development, training and mentoring Afghan engineers who are assuming the responsibility to provide safety and security to their beloved country.

The schedule can be hectic. The task can be daunting. Though, with command and control over units throughout the entire CJOA-A, The Empire engineers are placed in a position to better utilize its assets.

“The challenge is synchronizing engineer effects throughout the CJOA-A,” explained Warne. “That goes hand-in-hand with how the RCs do business and how the command relationships are a little bit different. We have the ability to influence how certain enablers or equipment sets are being utilized in theater. We have the ability to field

the newest equipment, redistribute equipment and personnel based on the needs and overall view of the entire CJOA-A.”


Engineer units from all U.S. services serve in operations for JTF Empire. The collaboration goes well beyond the individual units as Navy and Air Force personnel work at brigade and IJC levels to further the understanding and coordination with all services. This joint structure enhances JTF Empire’s capabilities as it works with regional commands.

“We totally embedded ourselves into the RCs and showed them we are a customer service organization. We enable them to conduct their missions through combat support and service support.”

Warne said he looks to the rest of the 411th’s mission with optimism and confidence.

“I’m most proud of our professionalism and expertise of our units and the ability for our staff to orchestrate (operations) on a daily basis,” said Warne. “That’s a true credit to the engineer regiment on how engineers get things done. It really is a team effort. That gives us a sense of pride that every day we’re taking care of the war fighter.”

Warne said JTF Empire knows what lies ahead, but to remember that “what will be” is always based on “what was.”

“We’ve had a very intense two months here,” said Warne, considering the last few months. “We have to remember our fallen heroes and why our job is so important which help support the guys on the ground every day, working with the ANSF and Coalition Forces to make this a better place.” 



Brig. Gen. David L. Weeks, Joint Task Force Empire commanding general (left), surveys the Ghormach river crossing in northern Afghanistan with Lt. Col. William “Clete” Schaper, 841st En. Battalion commander, during a recent battlefield circulation. “We will support IJC’s efforts to ensure a strong, self-reliant Afghanistan for future generations,” said Weeks.

Photo by U.S. Army Maj. John A. Coppola, Joint Task Force Empire Public Affairs



EMPIRE MEDICAL

Preserving Joint Task Force Empire's greatest weapon

Army, Air Force, and Navy Tobacco Policy Continues



Military tobacco policies have been strengthened to reduce the high rate of tobacco use by service members, improve health and boost readiness. Success means uprooting a longstanding tobacco-tolerant culture.

Strong policies supply guidance about the negative impact of tobacco use and the best approach to prevention and treatment. Extending the trend of stronger policies, the military issued new rules about tobacco use on installations. Military treatment facilities were directed to become completely tobacco-free. On all military installations, DTA rules were updated with minimum distances from building entrances, walkways, parking lots, and playgrounds. Tobacco use is banned in all workplaces, recreation facilities, and lodging. It also is barred during basic training and in other education and training programs.

New policy revisions include actions to reduce tobacco use, including cessation support and clinical encounter activities.

The latest tobacco policy follows a move by the Secretary of the Navy to raise tobacco prices and increase cessation services and education in the Navy and Marine Corps. These policy changes mark a sharper focus on tobacco use and its harmful effects and reflect the deep roots and complex nature of tobacco use.

For tobacco users who want to quit, the military is making smoking cessation materials available to all personnel at no cost. Many U.S. military personnel have access to medications and other tobacco cessation services through their MTF.

The call for an education campaign including formal training as part of military's recruit training creates a focus on prevention. It targets tobacco's roots in military culture as well as the high rate of use among 18- to 25-year-old military members, many of whom start using tobacco after they enter the service.

This addresses tobacco's harmful effects, not just in the future, but now in the form of downtime, health

care expenses, and reduced readiness.

It's no secret tobacco use can lead to serious health problems like heart disease, lung disease, and several forms of cancer. Smokeless tobacco use can cause gum disease, tooth decay, and cancer of the mouth.

Tobacco use can impact fitness, performance and mission readiness now. Smoking is linked to lower scores in running, pushups and sit-ups. Smokers usually have smaller fitness gains than non-smokers and see less improvement when they train hard. Smokers have more accidents in training or on duty and miss work more often.

Smoking narrows your airways and slows down the air moving through your lungs. This resistance can triple within just seconds of inhaling! It also lowers your blood's ability to carry oxygen and blood vessels' ability to expand. A smoker's heart has to work harder to make up for the lower levels of oxygen reaching muscles.

If that's not enough to make you think about quitting, consider those around you; breathing second-hand smoke before or during an event weakens an athlete's results.

Smokeless tobacco is no less dangerous. It still has nicotine which causes your veins to narrow. Narrow veins supply less oxygen to the heart so it has to pump faster to get as much as it needs.

Tobacco's effects go beyond strength and stamina. Smoking can limit your eyesight in low light. Smokers' vision adjusts more slowly to darkness and they don't see as well at night.

When faced with a mission, times when military personnel cannot smoke are also a concern. While the nicotine in tobacco can boost alertness, nicotine withdrawal actually slows reaction time and lessens your ability to think quickly and clearly. Smokeless tobacco use also causes nicotine highs and lows that impact performance. When you can't chew, you may become short-tempered, restless, react less quickly, and find it harder to stay focused.

Keep your team at its best by quitting tobacco. See your local medical facility for more information.

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Mad Dogs

In order to silence the insurgent network along Highway 1 for good, an additional brigade from the Global Reaction Force was being brought in to attack the insurgent networks. Enter the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. Known as “Task Force Devil,” the 1st BCT was scheduled to arrive in theater as the final snows of winter were melting. Their mission: run wild along Highway 1 throughout the fighting season, attacking the insurgent networks. Before this could be accomplished, they would need a home.

National Guardsmen from the 578th Engineer Battalion, TF Mad Dog, were in country less than two weeks when this mission materialized. Originally from Manhattan Beach, California, the 578th Eng. Bn. commanded two construction companies, four route clearance companies, and one forward support company. They were given the daunting task of constructing five combat outposts and expanding three forward operating bases simultaneously. This was to be the largest single construction effort in regional history. TF Devil needed its bases operational when it hit the ground. TF Mad Dog had to execute in the dead of winter, with supply routes closing and aerial operations diminishing. Operation Devil Hammer, preparing the region for an additional Brigade Combat Team, could not fail.

Initially, TF Mad Dog had two construction companies. The 1022nd Vertical Construction Company from the Louisiana National Guard consisted of carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. The 842nd Horizontal Construction Company from

the South Dakota National Guard consisted of equipment operators for all varieties of construction equipment. The sheer magnitude of Operation Devil Hammer required engineer units from all over Afghanistan.

Before the mission was complete, TF Mad Dog would have tactical control of the 236th Vertical Construction Company from the Texas National Guard, the 661st Horizontal Construction Company from the Illinois National Guard, the 577th Expeditionary Prime Beef Squadron Air Force construction organization and two Tactical Infrastructure Construction Teams from the 22nd Naval Construction Regiment. The Navy TICTs were comprised of Soldiers from the 668th Vertical Construction Company from the Army Reserves out of New York and the 721st Engineer Company from the Army Reserves out of Texas. During the height of the mission, TF Mad Dog was the largest

single engineer battalion task force in Afghanistan.

“Having control of organizations from three separate branches of service was challenging,” said U.S. Army Maj. Christopher Angle, TF Mad Dog operations officer. “I found it ironic that the Army is moving away from multi-purpose construction companies, which have both vertical and horizontal construction assets, in favor of single function engineer companies. During this mission, we had to break up single function companies and spread them out over each job site in order to complete the projects.”

TF Mad Dog’s greatest asset during the mission was the experience and knowledge of National Guard and Reserve Soldiers. Many of the Soldiers have civilian experience in their trades, making them invaluable in the construction process.

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Russell Fenton, a construction officer for TF Mad



photos courtesy of Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs

This guard tower was Prefabricated at Forward Operating Base Sharana and imported to a separate combat outpost. Within hours of arriving, it was functional. (Inset) From left to right: U.S. Army Lt. Col. Richard Rabe, Task Force Mad Dog commander, 1st Lt. Russell Fenton, Staff Sgt. David Soto, and Sgt. Aaron Leimeister of Task Force Mad Dog review plans for an ammunition supply point at Forward Operating Base Warrior.

Dog, oversaw construction operations.

"My experience as a construction project manager for the Disneyland Resort helped prepare me for this challenge," Fenton commented. "Having a civil engineering license gave me the tools needed to manage and influence the design process for the entire operation."

In order to reduce the time on site, vertical construction Soldiers worked around the clock on larger bases prefabricating wooden structures to be emplaced on a project site. Prefabricating guard towers, footers, and trusses saved a great deal of time compared to constructing everything in the austere conditions of a remote base.

Troop construction in Afghanistan is more challenging than the building in the U.S. There are limited materials and equipment available.

Soil conditions must be taken into account. Limited compaction assets, freezing, thawing, and unstable soil



photo courtesy of Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs
Soldiers from the 236th Vertical Construction Company construct trusses at Forward Operating Base Warrior.

conditions require stronger building foundations constructed from wood that is largely imported.

By building bases simultaneously, TF Mad Dog quickly shared lessons learned across the battlefield.

"Engineers quickly became 'Solutioneers' by adapting to the lack of construction materials, adverse weather, and time restraints," com-

mented U.S. Army Capt. Austin Bird, 236th VCC commander.

"The battle space owner played a crucial role during the construction process," stated U.S. Army 1st Lt. Scott Connor, with the 842nd HCC. "By having the customer on ground with the engineers, many concerns were alleviated during the build. The maneuver commanders have a vision, and it is up to the engineers to ensure their intent is met and projects are completed on time."

Preparing for these missions required a detailed analysis of weather, terrain, and enemy activity from the TF Mad Dog Intelligence Section.

"Going into some of these missions, we had no idea what the terrain was going to look like," commented U.S. Army 1st Lt. Kristoffer Bachmann, Forward Support Company executive officer. "If we come across a sharp turn or steep hill it can slow the convoy speed or even cause a complete halt."

Members of the FSC would often sit with the task force Intelligence Section to learn what kind of improvised explosive devices were used in the area prior to executing a



photo courtesy of Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs
U.S. Army 1st Lt. Scott Connor orients the International Security Assistance Force Joint Commander Lt. Gen. Curtis Scapparotti, to the construction project at Forward Operating Base Arian. Arian was the largest single project of the entire operation.

mission. This would help them determine the most effective type of counter-IED asset to incorporate.

One challenge faced was that as engineers, they received a lower priority for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets than their infantry counterparts. U.S. Army 1st Lt. James Wolf, the task force assistant intelligence officer, worked overtime to identify reconnaissance assets that could be leveraged in support of missions. Battalion intelligence analysts picked through intelligence reports with information gathered from the local population to get a better understanding of the insurgent presence in the area. These skill sets made a huge impact when TF Mad Dog was given the mission of expanding a small, out-of-the-way combat outpost called Giro.

“We burned some midnight oil doing research for this one,” Wolf recalled. “No one had travelled this road in months and we believed the enemy had a lot of equipment in the area. We were preparing to move a bunch of supplies in support of the construction project. It probably looked like a Black Friday sale to the insurgents in the area.”

One of the immediate decisions made was to integrate the Afghan National Army engineers to support the massive construction projects. TF Mad Dog realized from the beginning that this was a tremendous opportunity for training and partnering with the ANA.

“When we were tasked with this build, I was initially worried about how we were going to maintain our partnership efforts,” explained U.S. Army Capt. Joe Lee, TF Mad Dog ANA coordinator. “Then we realized that this was a perfect training opportunity to co-locate an Afghan

engineer unit at a priority build site.”

Once the ANA engineer platoon arrived at the build site with their heavy construction equipment, they immediately partnered with TF Mad Dog construction units and got to work. Prior to this construction mission, the ANA engineers had limited experience on their equipment. They quickly became proficient at operating their equipment and contributed significantly to the build.

As the winter snows finally melted and the sound of bull dozers faded into the distance, the 1st BCT, 82nd Airborne Div., arrived in theater. They quickly spread out into the numerous bases that TF Mad Dog had constructed and brought the fight to the enemy. Their operations have included airborne insertions, combat patrols and huge finds of enemy weapons and bomb-making materials. The enemy emplacement of IEDs along Ring Route has significantly decreased. Afghanistan’s precious Highway 1 remains intact, supporting the economy and logistical needs of the nation.

All of the construction units that surged together under TF Mad Dog returned to their respective units. Operation Devil Hammer might be over, but the role of the engineers providing support to the Battle Space Owners continues.

“Task Force Mad Dog heroically built numerous bases for Task Force Devil in the high-altitude, sub-zero winter,” U.S. Army Maj. Stephen Peterson, operations officer for the Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st BCT, stated. “Like true Sap-




photo courtesy of Task Force Mad Dog Public Affairs
U.S. Army Sgt. Robert Castro and Sgt. Jose Sanchez from the Forward Support Company, 578th Engineer Battalion inspect Afghan engineer equipment before loading it onto a truck for transport.

pers, they found solutions to frozen ground and material shortages. They displayed true grit and courage in an area with no U.S. forces and limited coalition forces. They set the conditions for the 1-82 to immediately eliminate the Taliban influence in an area of strategic level of importance, and stayed on to support us with tactical construction missions throughout our efforts.”

The success of Operation Devil Hammer has significantly degraded the insurgent forces ability to operate in the region.

“Operation Devil Hammer put the enemy on their heels, denied them terrain for offensive operations, and it forced them from an offensive stance to a defensive one,” stated Capt. Robert Couture, Task Force Mad Dog intelligence officer.

The fighting is still long from over, but Task Force Mad Dog, consisting of reserve forces from across the United States, has left their mark on the battlefield. 

Task Force Hurricane constructs future retrograde facility



Photo by U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Brittany N. Ramos, Task Force Hurricane Public Affairs

By U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Brittany N. Ramos
Task Force Hurricane Public Affairs

BALKH PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN- Logistical lines of communication are being established to facilitate the removal of thousands of troops and billions of dollars worth of equipment from Afghanistan as the impending 2014 withdrawal deadline approaches. Due to the empirical unreliability of currently established portals in and out of the country through Pakistan, an 880-acre plot has been allocated to serve as an alternative egress staging area as the future U.S. withdrawal hub is currently under construction in Regional Command-North.

This massive, high profile construction project is currently being managed by Task Force Hurricane, a conglomeration of Engineer units

Soldiers from the 497th Engineer Battalion currently assigned to Task Force Hurricane, use dozers and scrapers to prepare a stable foundation on which to build future U.S. Army retrograde area, Camp John Pratt, August 12.


led by the 841st Engineer Battalion out of Miami, Fl.

“In the past five months, we have moved and emplaced over 450,000 cubic yards of earth, which would fill the empire state building approximately four and a half times,” explained Maj. Albert Lehmann, Task Force Hurricane construction effects officer who manages the project.

Members of 2nd Platoon, 497th Engineer Company, currently a detachment serving under the 505th Engineer Battalion as a part of the task force, work day after day operating scrapers, motor graders and bulldozers at remaining hard at work to complete this massive proj-

ect in preparation for the upcoming name dedication ceremony scheduled to take place August 14.

This new, U.S.-operated staging area, co-located in Mazar-e Sharif with the International Security Assistance Force’s Camp Marmal, will officially be named after fallen Chief Warrant Officer John C. Pratt in a ceremony that will honor and memorialize his years of service and the ultimate sacrifice he made in the line of duty.

“We are honored to be working on a project that will be named after someone we served alongside,” said Sgt. 1st Class Tony Collins, onsite noncommissioned officer-in-charge. 



Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) is the Federal law that establishes rights and responsibilities for members of the National Guard and Reserve and their civilian employers. USERRA affects employment, reemployment, employment benefits and retention in employment, when employees serve or have served in the uniformed services.

ESGR and USERRA:

ESGR informs and educates service members and their civilian employers regarding their rights and responsibilities governed by USERRA. ESGR does not have statutory authority to enforce, but serves as a neutral, free resource to employers and service members.

ESGR's trained ombudsmen provide mediation of issues relating to compliance with USERRA.

Statutory Authority: Congress provided the statutory authority for investigating alleged violations of USERRA to the U.S. Department of Labor. If DOL finds that an employer has likely violated USERRA and is unable to secure voluntary compliance, DOL may refer the case to the U.S. Department of Justice for legal action against the employer.

Employers:

The law applies to all public and private employers in the United States to include federal, state, and local governments, regardless of size. Providing that the service member meets all criteria, USERRA requires employers to provide the following:

- Allow employees to participate in military service
- Prompt reinstatement back into job following military service
- Accumulation of seniority, including pension plan benefits
- Reinstatement of health insurance
- Training or retraining of job skills, including accommodations for disabled
- Protection against discrimination

Service members:

In general, if the employee is absent from a position

of civilian employment by reason of service in the uniformed services, he or she is eligible for reemployment under USERRA by meeting the following criteria:

- Allow employees to participate in military service
- Prompt reinstatement back into job following military service
- Accumulation of seniority, including pension plan benefits
- Reinstatement of health insurance
- Training or retraining of job skills, including accommodations for disabled
- Protection against discrimination
- The employer had advance notice of the employee's service
- The employee returns to work in accordance with USERRA guidelines
- The employee has not been separated from service with a disqualifying discharge or under other than honorable conditions

USERRA Questions?

ESGR's national customer service center is operational from 8 am to 8 pm Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday to provide answers to USERRA questions or refer cases to a trained ombudsman.

To be eligible for protection under USERRA, the service member must report back to work or

apply for reemployment within the following guidelines:

-1-30 days of service Report next scheduled work day *

31-180 days of service Apply within 14 days following completion of service.

181+ days of service Apply within 90 days following completion of service.

* After 8 hours rest plus normal travel time from military training site to place of civilian employment.

Call 1-800-336-4590, option 1.

Access an ESGR USERRA Assistance Request Form located on www.esgr.mil.

Or send questions via email to USERRA@osd.mil.



182nd Soldiers conduct route clearance

By U.S. Army SPC Michael G. Demers
182nd Engineer Company (Sapper) Public Affairs

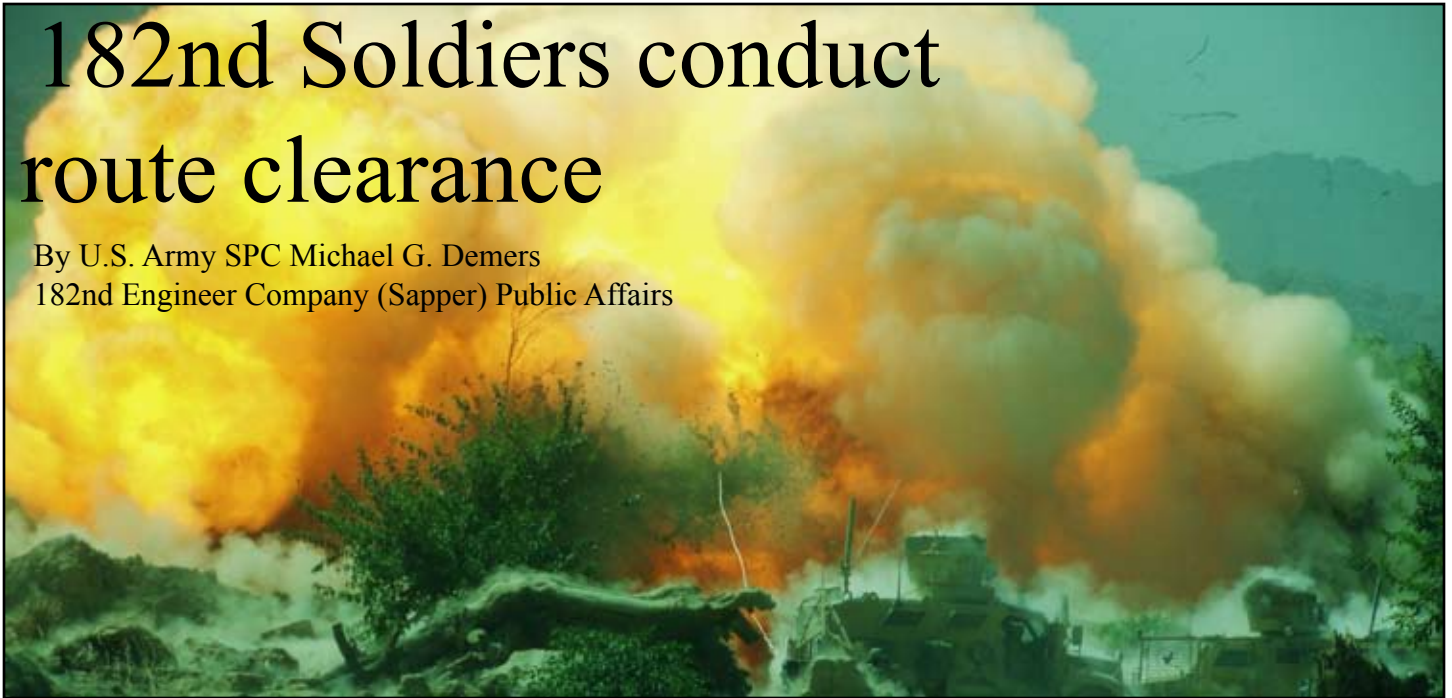


Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Michael G. Demers

KANDAHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan- The sound of engines broke the silence of Combat Outpost Makuan in the Zharay District of Kandahar, Afghanistan. It was early morning and the Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, 182nd Engineer Company were headed on a convoy. Their mission was simple: clear the route and provide freedom of maneuver to Afghan and Coalition forces tasked with building a new check point.

The Husky Tactical Support Vehicle pushed forward to scan for road-side bombs targeting Coalition and Afghan Security Forces. The crew of the Buffalo interrogation vehicle sat prepared to interrogate and dispose of suspected improvised explosive devices. Meanwhile, everyone else remained ready to defend against a possible ambush. Helicopters and other aerial reconnaissance platforms provided surveillance of the route to ensure no previously placed IEDs could be armed in anticipation of the approaching convoy.

Combat Engineers from the 182nd Engineer Company (Sapper), Massachusetts Army National Guard, tasked to conduct route and area clearance on a partnered operation, detonate a Mine Clearing Line Charge in a target area of interest to clear the corridor of improvised explosive devices, July 3.

As the patrol pushed forward, they were forced to cross deep irrigation canals unsuitable for fording. The challenges of terrain were quickly met by a Rapidly Emplaced Bridging System. As the lead vehicle began the process of bridging the canal, insurgents on the trail ahead seized the opportunity and attempted to activate previously emplaced IEDs. The Infantry immediately responded and the insurgents fled the scene as close air support was in pursuit.

After the bridge was emplaced, the 182nd Soldiers continued their push forward. They would be clearing an area with a show of their own. Due to the high concentration of known IEDs along the route, the 182nd was given clearance to reduce the explosive obstacles with the Mine-Clearance Line Charge. The MICLIC trailer holds explosives towed behind a rocket that is fired

from a launching platform. In route clearance, it is used as a vital tool to prevent risking the lives of U.S. Soldiers when a target area of interest is identified. The 182nd would fire five of them that day. Although it wasn't a conventional fireworks show, the Soldiers witnessing the display will likely never forget how they spent their Independence Day this year.

The rockets screamed from their launchers with the line charge in tow, one after another they detonated. The concussion of the blasts sucked in the air around the route and then quickly shot it back outwards. IEDs emplaced along the route quickly reduced in what the Engineers call "sympathetic" detonations. The route was then double-checked by the Huskies and RG-31's Mine-Protected Vehicle, because in the mission of route clearance there



SAFETY STOP

JOINT TASK FORCE
EMPIRE SAFETY OFFICE



This Month:

“Composite Risk Management”

By Mr. Marcus M. Heard
Joint Task Force Empire Safety Officer



Composite Risk Management is the Army's primary decision-making process for identifying hazards and controlling risk across the full spectrum of Army missions, functions, operations and activities. CRM allows you to predict, to some extent, the various risks that may have a critical impact on your life. We use CRM everyday without realizing it. When you check for oncoming traffic before crossing the road or when you stretch prior for physical training, you are utilizing the CRM process.

Risk management therefore is an integral part the Army's planning process.

LET'S CONTINUE TO USE IT!



Composite Risk Management

CRM MATRIX			HAZARD PROBABILITY				
			Frequent	Likely	Occasional	Seldom	Unlikely
			A	B	C	D	E
SEVERITY	Catastrophic	I	EXTREMELY HIGH		HIGH		
	Critical	II	HIGH		MODERATE		
	Marginal	III	MODERATE		LOW		
	Negligible	IV	LOW				



Photo courtesy of Khaama Press
Afghanistan's Rohullah Nikpai displays his bronze medal in taekwondo at the 2012 London Olympics.

ISAF congratulates Afghan Olympic medalist

Story courtesy of ISAF Joint Command

KABUL, Afghanistan - The International Security Assistance Force congratulates Afghanistan's Rohullah Nikpai for winning the bronze medal in taekwondo at the 2012 London Olympics. ISAF also recognizes the support he received from the National Olympic Committee of Afghanistan as well as his fellow countrymen.

“Nikpai's medal is a unifying achievement that all Afghans can be proud of,” said Brig. Gen. Günter Katz, ISAF spokesman.

“Competing before the entire world, Nikpai represented the determination of the Afghan people,” added Katz. “We congratulate him on his performance. His dedication and his sportsmanship make him a distinguished representative of the Afghan people, and clearly one of the remarkable winners of these Olympic games.”



Stress Basics

Stress is defined as a feeling of emotional or physical tension. Emotional stress usually occurs when situations are considered difficult or unmanageable. Therefore, different people consider different situations as stressful.

Stress can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or anxious. What is stressful to one person is not necessarily stressful to another.

Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension or fear. The source of this uneasiness is not always known or recognized, which can add to the distress you feel.

Stress is defined as a feeling of emotional or physical tension. Emotional stress usually occurs when situations are considered difficult or unmanageable. Therefore, different people consider different situations as stressful.

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Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension or fear. The source of this uneasiness is not always known or recognized, which can add to the distress you feel.

Stress is a normal part of life. In small quantities, stress is good -- it can motivate you and help you be more productive. However, too much stress, or a strong response to stress, is harmful. It can set you up for general poor health as well as

specific physical or psychological illnesses like infection, heart disease, or depression. Persistent and unrelenting stress often leads to anxiety and unhealthy behaviors like overeating and abuse of alcohol or drugs.

Emotional states like grief or depression and health conditions like an overactive thyroid, low blood sugar, or heart attack can also cause stress.

Anxiety is often accompanied by physical symptoms, including:

- Twitching or trembling
- Muscle tension, headaches
- Sweating
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Abdominal pain

Sometimes other symptoms accompany anxiety:


- Dizziness
- Rapid or irregular heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhea or frequent need to urinate
- Fatigue
- Irritability, including loss of your temper
- Sleeping difficulties and nightmares
- Decreased concentration
- Sexual problems

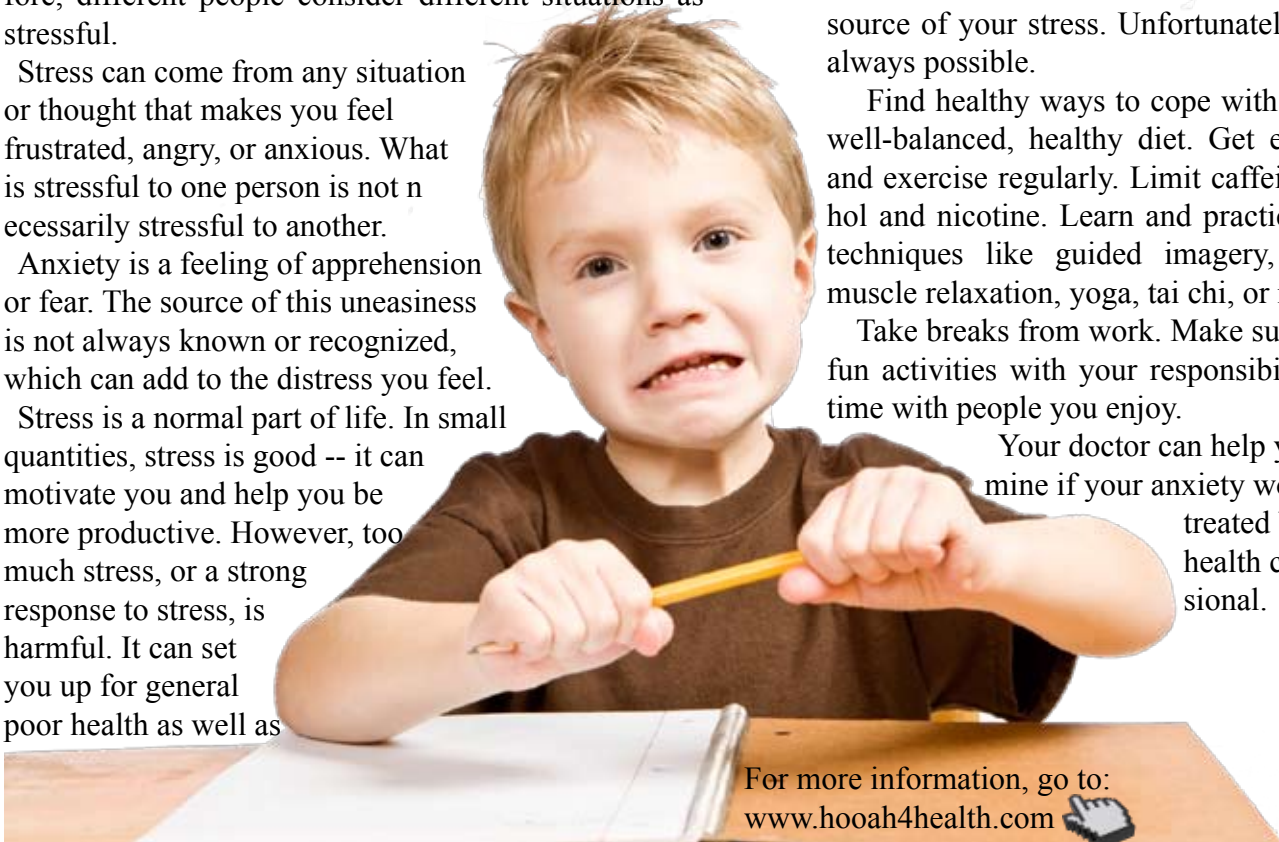
The most effective solution is to find and address the source of your stress. Unfortunately, this is not always possible.

Find healthy ways to cope with stress. Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet. Get enough sleep and exercise regularly. Limit caffeine and alcohol and nicotine. Learn and practice relaxation techniques like guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, tai chi, or meditation.

Take breaks from work. Make sure to balance fun activities with your responsibilities. Spend time with people you enjoy.

Your doctor can help you determine if your anxiety would be best treated by a mental health care professional.

For more information, go to:
www.hooah4health.com 



Route Clearance From Page 13

is little room for error.

Once the route was cleared, the engineers took up defensive positions to ensure everything they had cleared remained safe while elements of Afghan National Army and National Police moved forward with support from the U.S. Infantry to construct the outpost on the objective. As the 182nd engineers set up firing positions, the infantry entered a village south of the proposed site of the checkpoint.

"Shots fired," raced across the radio with the sound of machine guns in the background. The advance had been met with small arms fire from insurgents armed with AK-47's. ANA and ANP pushed forward with the support of the U.S. Forces. There would be no stopping the installation of the checkpoint or the clearing of the village. After the engagers had been suppressed, the construction of the checkpoint once again took center stage as Soldiers of the 182nd worked to build the




The 182nd Engineer Company (Sapper), Massachusetts Army National Guard, conduct route and area clearance operations on a partnered patrol with the Afghan National Army in order to build a check point to bolster security in Zharay District, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan July 3.

Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Michael G. Demers

compound that would slowly take shape as the newest ANA checkpoint.

During the three-day operation, the 182nd platoon remained focused on their task of securing the route. Armed insurgents were seen maneuvering around the grape vineyards by local children. Afghan Soldiers moved the children to a

safer area and passed the reports on to U.S. forces all while preparing for an impending ambush that would ultimately never came.

The 182nd Soldiers from Massachusetts maintained security until they were relieved of their positions and cleared their own route back to their home at Forward Operating Base Sarkari Karez. 



A  **Ask your buddy**

- Have the courage to ask the question, but stay calm
- Ask the question directly: Are you thinking of killing yourself?

C **Care for your buddy**

- Calmly control the situation; do not use force; be safe
- Actively listen to show understanding and produce relief
- Remove any means that could be used for self-injury

E **Escort your buddy**

- Never leave your buddy alone
- Escort to chain of command, Chaplain, behavioral health professional, or primary care provider
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

TA - 095 - 0510

USAPHC <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-8255 (TALK)



Operations at a glance: Images from around JTF Empire

Photos by U.S. Army Maj. James Flowers, Task Force Warhammer Public Affairs



The 14th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Rugged, commanded by U.S. Army Lt. Col. John Buck and Command Sgt. Maj. Douglas Padgett, transfer authority of route clearance operations in Regional Commands-Southwest and West, Afghanistan to the 507th En. Bn., Task Force Warhammer, commanded by Lt. Col. William Myer and Command Sgt. Maj. Darrell Wagner during a ceremony at Camp Leatherneck July 13. The ceremony culminated the "battle handoff" between TF Rugged and the TF Warhammer Soldiers who cleared over 700 IEDs during their 12-month deployment.



Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Justin Casey,
Task Force Red Devils Public Affairs

(Left) A new dawn arrives for Afghanistan. The Afghan National Security Force Color Guard drills at the Tranche 3 Ceremony at Camp Miawon July 12. The ceremony marks the third stage of the transition of power from the International Security Assistance Force to ANSF. The ANSF will assume security responsibilities in Logar Province. (Below) The sun sets on another day over Bagram Air Field.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Derek M. Smith, Joint Task Force Empire Public Affairs

Legal Matters

JTF EMPIRE COMMAND JUDGE ADVOCATE

Social Media and the UCMJ

Social media websites can instantaneously connect users to a global network, allowing information to be shared transparently and quickly. Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, LiveJournal and Flickr are some of the more popular sites used by service members to post personal information about themselves and their activities. Unfortunately, they can also provide a platform for misconduct. As social media sites are not private, it is important for service members to use common sense when posting on these websites.

Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice makes it a crime for a commissioned officer to use contemptuous words against the President, Vice President, Congress, Secretary of Defense, the Service Secretaries and certain other Government officials. Article 89 applies to disrespecting a senior commissioned officer and Article 91 applies to disrespecting a warrant or noncommissioned officer. While “disrespect” is broadly defined, the line between “contemptuous words” and mere complaining is more subtle - but important.

“Contemptuous” is defined as “insulting, rude, disdainful or disrespectfully attributing meanness, disreputableness, or worthlessness to another.” As important as what is said is how it is said. Article 88 implies the criticism was made in a public setting. Conversations in a private setting among one’s close peers are generally not held to the same standard as overt criticism made in, for example, the mess hall or the company of subordinates.

Article 134 of the UCMJ punishes all disorders and neglects which prejudice good order and discipline in the armed forces. This includes postings that disparage leaders or Soldiers, or otherwise undermine their authority. Conduct of a nature which brings discredit upon the armed forces is also punishable under Article

134. In this context, “discredit” means to injure the reputation of, including lowering it in public esteem. Discrediting conduct includes use of discriminatory remarks which suggest a bias against a particular race, color, national origin, religion or gender.

In addition to exercising caution with choice of words, also consider any unintended messages sent by photos or videos. If a photo or video contains any material that is contemptuous, disrespectful to commanders or other service members, prejudicial to good order and discipline, or in any other way service discrediting (i.e. offensive), don’t post it. Also ensure any appearance in uniform complies with applicable service requirements. Remember, discipline is judged, in part, by the manner in which a service member wears a prescribed uniform, as well as by the individual’s personal appearance.

Lastly, consider not only what is placed in postings, but also what is placed in e-mails and other messages. Remember, use of government computers and other communications systems constitute consent to monitoring and may not be considered “private” communications. Additionally, any “private” communication may still be public if sent on a government-monitored system (e.g. Sniper Hill), or if the communication is disclosed by its recipient.

Social media can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can provide an invaluable connection to family and friends. On the other, it can become a platform for irresponsible communication resulting in disciplinary or adverse administrative action. Use good judgment in all online communications.



In Remembrance . . .

"It is a far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."
~ Charles Dickens



Staff Sgt. Alexander Povilaitis
570th Sapper Company
1965-2012



Sgt. 1st Class Barrett McNabb
562nd Engineer Company
1978-2012



Spc. Sergio E. Perez Jr.
713th Engineer Company
1991-2012



Spc. Nicholas Taylor
713th Engineer Company
1991-2012



Pfc. Jeffery L. Rice
584th Engineer Company
1987-2012



Cpl. Darrion Terrell Hicks
42nd Route Clearance Co.
1990-2012



Pfc. Jose Oscar Belmontes
630th Route Clearance Co.
1987-2012



Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Estle
630th Route Clearance Co.
1974-2012



Sgt. Kyle McClain
1433rd Engineer Company
1987-2012



ISAF transitions power of districts in Logar Province

By U.S. Army Capt. Justin Casey
Task Force Red Devils Public Affairs

LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The Governor of Logar Province, Assistant to the Ministries of Defense, members of Parliament, tribal elders, the 203rd Afghan National Army Corps commander and Soldiers, and Afghan National Police commander and police were all in attendance for a ceremony at Camp Miawon to mark the official transfer of power of three districts within Logar Province from the International Security Assistance Force to Afghan Forces June 12.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the official launch of Transition Tranche 3 May 13, the third phase in a process to an Afghan self-sustaining state. Tranche 3 includes 122 more districts, including all provincial capitals and now more than 75 percent of the people of Afghanistan living in security areas controlled by Afghan National Security Forces. Key leaders from throughout Logar Province, and members of ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces gathered at Camp Miawon to celebrate the transfer of power of three districts in Logar Province to the control of


ANSF.

The mood was jovial as tribal elders, ANSF Commanders, and members of Parliament greeted each other. Each welcomed the third stage of the transition whereby ANSF assume security responsibilities in the three northern districts of Logar Province and they expressed their gratitude to ISAF for assistance.

The Governor of Logar Province

expressed his thanks, “I am grateful to ISAF for the many years of support for ANA with weapons and training that helped in defeating the enemies of the people, but now with the transfer of power, a new ANA will emerge to care for its country.”

Tranche 3 is the third of five tranches planned as ANSF progress toward taking full responsibility for security of Afghanistan. The 203rd ANA Corps commander accepts his new responsibility in Logar Province, “I assure all the people of Logar that their security will be my priority and I can assure them they will be safe.”

Tranche 3 marks the start of transition in each of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. 



Photos by U.S. Army Capt. Justin Casey

(Top) Afghan National Security Force commanders render honors to the Afghan National Flag as it replaces the International Security Assistance Force flag to symbolize the transfer of power in Logar Province in a ceremony at Camp Miawon July 12. (Above) ANSF commanders stand ready to assume security responsibilities; this following the third phase of the transition of power from ISAF to ANSF.