



FREEDOM BUILDER

March/April 2011

Contractor awards

Corps of Engineers recognizes top construction firms.

Lisner's mission

N.D. Air Force man serves Army leadership role in Afghanistan.

Commander's blog

Magness touts role of civilian engineers to bloggers.

Intern graduation

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers trains and mentors Afghan soldiers.

Playing cards

Corps of Engineers, Embassy team up to explain the deal with Afghan artifacts.

Kabul University books

Corps of Engineers provides war-torn university with engineering books.



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of Engineers®
Afghanistan Engineer District

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All photographs appearing herein are by the Afghanistan Engineer District Public Affairs Office unless otherwise accredited.

The mission of The Freedom Builder is to support the Commander's Internal Communication Program for the Afghanistan Engineer District. It also serves as the Commander's primary communication tool for accurately transmitting policies, operations, technical developments, and command philosophy to the Afghanistan Engineer District.

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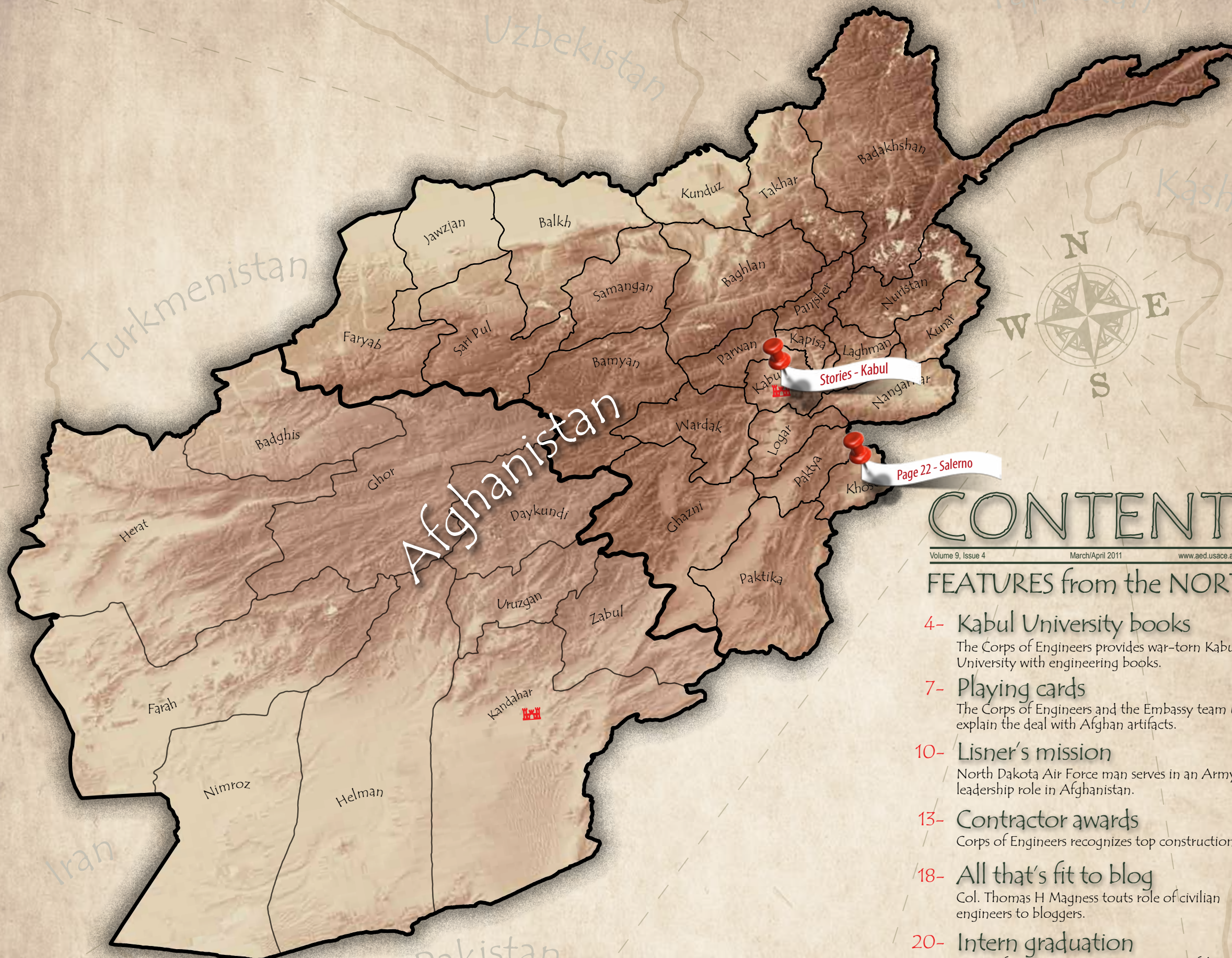
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Cover Image:



U.S. Army Corps of Engineer employees help load more than 400 boxes of engineering books bought by the USACE District- North. Lots and lots of books! (Full story on pg. 4)

Photo by | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

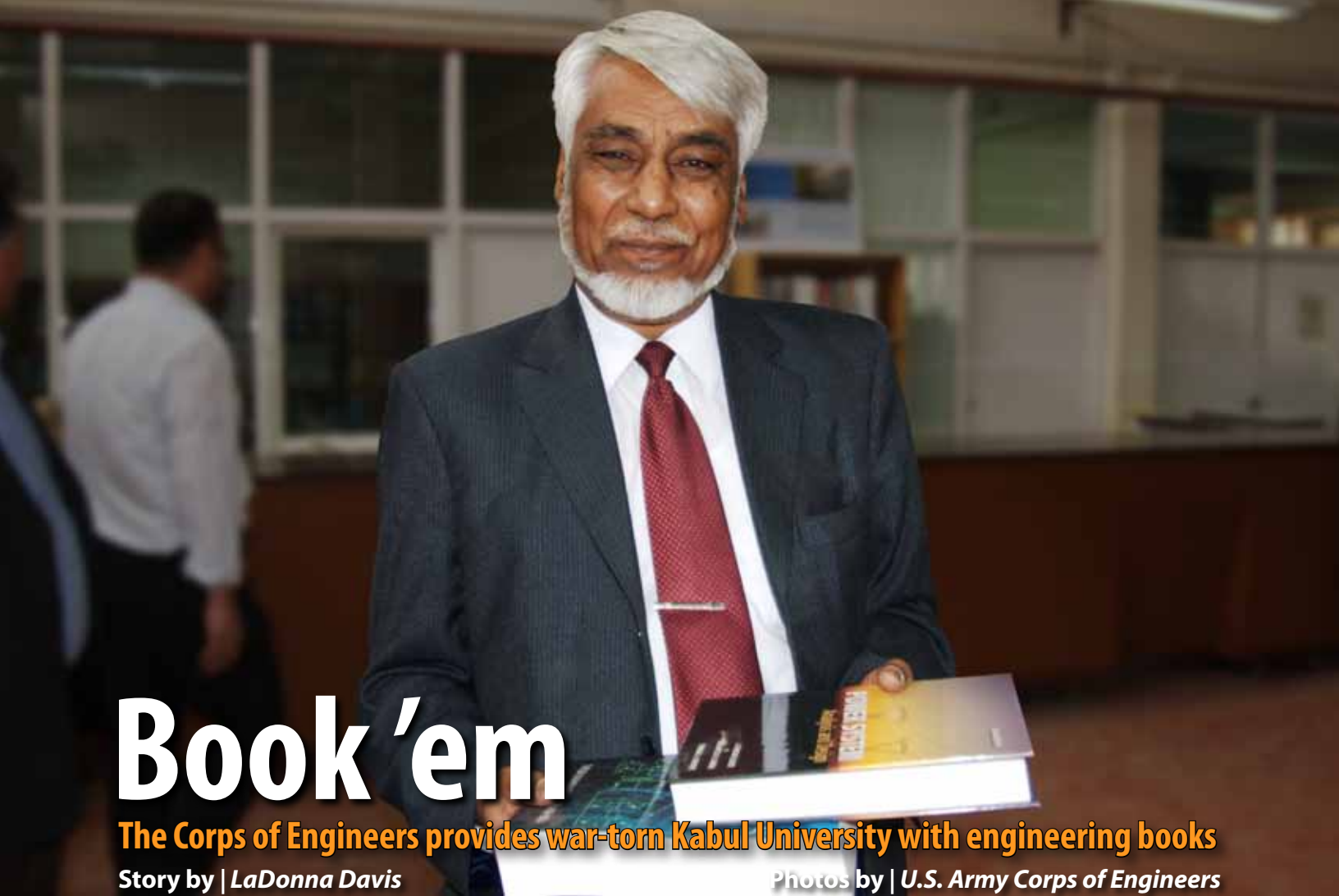


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Book'em

The Corps of Engineers provides war-torn Kabul University with engineering books

Story by | LaDonna Davis

Photos by | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Zalmi Zaheb, the dean of the engineering department at Kabul University displays one of more than 75 engineering book titles that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan District North purchased for the engineering college that has suffered because of lack of funds, years of war and Taliban rule.

KABUL – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employee Mustafa Kanishka attended Kabul University at a time when peace reigned in Afghanistan, when the university’s school of engineering was ranked one of the highest in the region, and when going to school to get a higher education was an expectation, not a privilege.

That was in the early 1970s.

Currently, university officials struggle to maintain the campus’ war-torn buildings and instructors teach outdated material from outdated books. What was once a renowned school for engineering, fails to provide the fundamentals of a good education – something Kanishka wanted to change.

“Practically anyone under the age of 45 can be called a child of war,” said Kanishka, a naturalized U.S. citizen. “And the education opportunities in this country have suffered because of it.”

Kanishka works as a project manager for the Corps of Engineers. He’s assigned to the capacity development department within Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul. He occasionally speaks as a guest lecturer at Kabul University, and during one of his lectures, he realized that something needed to be done to help the faculty and students of the school.

Kanishka enlisted the Corps of Engineers to do an evaluation of the school’s conditions and curriculum. “They didn’t have basic

“Books are the very first instruments of teaching and learning.”

things to provide a good education, like books and an adequate laboratory. What we found was horrifying,” he said.

He blamed the downfall of Afghanistan’s engineering education on what he calls “brain drain.” “The country has gone through a sad transformation in the last 30 years where education just wasn’t a priority. It has been suffering from brain drain for so long,” he said.

Assistant professor Farid Momand agreed. Like Kanishka, he had seen the educational opportunities in both Afghanistan and the United States.

Momand received his undergraduate degree in civil engineering from Kabul University in 2004, and then earned a master’s degree from Ohio University. In 2010, Momand came back to Kabul to teach at his alma mater. Coming home only highlighted the harsh realities and differences in the quality of education students receive in the United States and Kabul University.

“In the States, the universities are very well equipped and high tech,” he said. “Students have access to unlimited resources, labs and books for their programs; in Afghanistan resources are very limited. We don’t have good laboratories or access to quality materials.”

The downfall of Kabul University’s engineering college can be traced to the 1970s when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet government changed the language of the college from English, the widely accepted language of engineering, to Dari and Pashtu, the official languages of the Afghan people.

The college’s problems continued through the 1980s when the school was closed and all the professors were dispersed to other colleges within Kabul University.

In the 1990s, the engineering college opened its doors again with limited resources, but was overtaken by Taliban insurgents who banned women from studying, looted the college, and destroyed and burned all of the school’s books.

Upon seeing the degradation of Kabul University’s engineering college, Kanishka



Afghanistan Engineer District-North’s Capacity Development chief, Maj. Erica Iverson unloads boxes of new engineering books with the help of Afghan students at Kabul University.

had one goal in mind – restore the department’s educational foundation, one book at a time. “Books are the very first instruments of teaching and learning,” he said.

As part of the Corps of Engineers’ capacity building program, U.S. personnel help develop Afghan workers’ knowledge and skills in engineering and construction. The intent to ensure that Afghan professionals can continue to develop their own country long after Corps of Engineers personnel have left.

“If you are going to learn, you have to have the adequate resources, and textbooks are the first step,” said Zalmi Zaheb, the dean of the engineering department at the university.

In order to provide books, the Corps of Engineers had to develop a list of adequate books, manuals and teacher guides that the school faculty members could agree upon. The second step was securing funding.

Because the engineering department had been using outdated materials for so long, when it came time for the faculty members to prepare a list of books, all they could come up with was dated material.

“Our students were using photo copies of dated books, because there weren’t enough books to go around,” said Zaheb.

Corps of Engineers personnel requested lists of current engineering books from U.S. universities. Once the faculty at Kabul University agreed upon the list, it was time

to determine a vendor to supply the books.

Initially, Corps of Engineers personnel couldn't find a supplier who could provide books at an acceptable cost or arrange for shipping. The team finally found BookPal, a vendor that could do the job.

The team secured funding through the Commander's Emergency Response Program, an initiative that gives Army commanders the authority to use money at their discretion to fund humanitarian relief and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan.

The only problem was that according to the terms of the program, the district commander, Col. Thomas Magness, had a spending cap of \$750,000. The books cost \$851,000.

In order to get the funding for the books, Magness had to send a special request to U.S. Forces Afghanistan, a higher headquarters that oversees reconstruction efforts. Within weeks, the agency approved funding and the book drive was a go.

On Jan. 28, the first shipment of more than 400 boxes, and 3,000 books featuring more than 75 titles, arrived at the district's compound. Dozens of Corps of Engineers employees loaded the books onto several trucks for delivery to the university, where dozens of university staff members, students and Corps of Engineers employees unloaded them.

The labor was worth the effort.

"We needed variety," Momand said. "Before we only had a few books in each course. Before we had to copy books to give to the students. Now we have enough books to give the students, so we don't have to break any copyright laws."

Seeing the boxes of books stacked up against the wall of the school's study room was a sight that nearly brought tears to the dean's eyes.


"Right now I am so excited, it is hard for me to speak," Zaheb said as the books were being delivered. "From the first meeting with Col. Magness, I

was not sure this would happen, but now I see. Right now, these books are like water for a man in the desert. It is not enough to say thank you very much. It is very difficult to share my feelings."

Providing books for students and faculty at Kabul University wasn't enough for Corps of Engineers personnel. In coming months, they also will upgrade the engineering school's electricity and heating and air conditioning systems and provide new laboratories.

Furthermore, the Corps of Engineers has extended the book program to reach all the universities with engineering colleges in Afghanistan. That's 10 universities total.

"We want all the universities to flourish, because that is the main element in stabilizing the country, to stabilizing freedom," Kanishka said. "The Corps has thousands of projects throughout Afghanistan, and we need thousands of engineers to maintain and build them. When these students graduate, they will be the ones helping us with the transition of responsibility to the Afghan government."

For Momand, the new books bring the engineering department one step closer to the quality education that he received in the United States. "These are all the up-to-date books you can find in the States," he said. "These are all great tools to get us on the right path to a quality engineering program." 



U.S. Army Corps of Engineer employees help load more than 400 boxes of engineering books.

A big deal



Corps of Engineers, Embassy team up to explain the deal with Afghan artifacts

Story by | Paul Giblin

Photos by | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers archeologist Amy Holmes is working with U.S. Embassy officials distribute playing cards featuring cultural heritage themes in Afghanistan. Photo by Edreas Qasimi, U.S. Army

KABUL – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Embassy are distributing playing cards featuring archeological preservation messages to U.S. personnel throughout Afghanistan.

The goal of the program is to raise awareness among U.S. personnel about cultural heritage issues, and to reinforce the message that historic sites, pottery, artwork and other relics should be preserved, rather than looted or destroyed, said Corps of Engineers archeologist Amy Holmes.

History transcends international borders and it is important to people of all nationalities and cultures, Holmes said. Most U.S. military service members are

concerned about preserving artifacts – if they know what's at stake.

"We can get the troops to relate to it. In this pack, there's actually a picture of the Statue of Liberty and it says, 'How would we feel if someone destroyed her torch?'" Holmes said.

In fact, the Statue of Liberty message is the Jack of Diamonds card.

Holmes and Laura Tedesco, who serves as the cultural heritage program manager for the Embassy in Kabul, are helping to coordinate efforts to

distribute the cards to U.S. and coalition personnel. Holmes and Tedesco became involved in the effort through their roles as members of the U.S. Central Command's

“Protecting cultural property during times of armed conflict is required under the terms of the 1954 Hague Convention.”

Historical/Cultural Action Group. Central Command is the theater-level command unit for all U.S. armed forces in the Middle East.

The cultural heritage cards are reminiscent of the “Most Wanted” decks distributed to troops in 2003 that depicted photos and identifying information of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and leaders of his now deposed government. The cultural awareness program is modeled after similar programs in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and in Egypt in 2009.

Afghanistan is home to artifacts from a variety of cultures because of its placement along the famed Silk Road, ancient overland trading routes that linked Mediterranean Sea and Pacific Oceans through southern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

The 4,000-mile network of routes was used by explorers, conquerors and traders including Xuanzang, Alexander the Great and Marco Polo, among others, from around 200 B.C. through around A.D. 1700. Their interactions led to economic, religious and artistic exchanges between cultures from all points on the compass. As noted on the 8 of Hearts, Afghanistan became known as the “Crossroad of Empires.”

People of each culture left tell-tale signs of their presence. Troves of artifacts remain within easy access to travelers across the country. Afghanistan’s dry climate has preserved sites that are thousands of years old.

The back of each card shows a third century B.C. ceremonial plaque from Ai Khanum in northern Afghanistan with the slogans “Respect Afghan heritage” and “Support the

mission; show respect.” The front of each card has an individual photo and message aligned with one of four general themes, according to suit.

The Diamonds focus on saving artifacts. For example, the 2 depicts both sides of an antique coin with the message: “Coins are common archaeological artifacts in Afghanistan. As with other artifacts, do not buy them!”

The Clubs focus on raising awareness about the importance of cultural heritage. The 7 shows a soldier walking through Khan Neshin castle, an ancient stone fortress in southern Afghanistan, which dates back to the time of Alexander the Great, along with the message: “This site has survived for 23 centuries. Will it and others survive you?”

The Hearts highlight efforts to win the hearts and minds of Afghans. The 7 shows a modest gravesite and with the dictate: “Afghan cemeteries may not be well marked. Identify and respect.”

And the Spades caution against digging and site destruction. For example, the 5 features stripped landscape at Ai Khanum in northern Afghanistan, with the proclamation: “A looted archaeological site means that details of our common past are lost forever.”

The background images of the standard 52 cards and the two Jokers also comprise a puzzle, which shows an intricate first century gold and turquoise clasp from the village of Tillya Tepe in the northern region of the country.

The cards are made by the U.S. Playing Card Co., of Erlanger, Ky., the makers of Bicycle and Bee brand cards, among others.



More than 13,000 packs have been printed and a second production run of 10,000 packs is planned.

Distributing the decks throughout the country will be a large task, Holmes said. “We have to get a bunch of pallets shipped up here and figure out where we’re going to store them and how we’re going to distribute them,” she said.

The program is budgeted for as much as \$125,000 annually with funding provided through grants issued by the Department of Defense Resource Management Program and the Air Force Air Combat Command.

At least some of the decks will be given to military personnel in training before they arrive in Afghanistan. Protecting cultural property in theater benefits troops, said Jim Zeidler, the associate director for cultural resources at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo., who helped develop the program.

“It demonstrates respect for the host nation’s cultural heritage,” he said in an

e-mail. “Damage to archaeological sites, historic buildings, cemeteries and other tangible cultural heritage during conflict is to be avoided, subject to rules of engagement.”

Preservation also has strategic value, said Laurie Rush, the cultural resources manager at Fort Drum, N.Y., who also helped develop the program.

“Every time that a Soldier fails to identify and inadvertently damages a sacred place or a valued piece of cultural property in a foreign environment, he or she runs the risk of infuriating host nation personnel. This anger can easily be translated into violent action,” Rush said in an e-mail.

In addition, it’s the law. “Protecting cultural property during times of armed conflict is required under the terms of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,” Zeidler said.

The Afghanistan cultural heritage cards are accompanied by a Web site with additional information on the topic. 📧

The site: <http://www.cemml.colostate.edu/cultural/09476/afgh01.html>





Chief Lisner

boldly goes where no Airman has gone before

Story by | Paul Giblin

Photo by | Joe Marek

Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Forest Lisner, of Minot, North Dakota, is finishing a six-month with the Army Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan.

KABUL – Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Forest Lisner, of Minot, N.D, piloted a new course within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan during the past several months.

Lisner, 45, served as the first Air Force non-commissioned officer to serve in the top spot for enlisted military personnel within the Army command. He wraps up his six-month tour with the Corps of Engineers on May 12.

The Corps of Engineers is the primary organization that is building army bases and police stations for Afghan forces, plus roads, airstrips and other infrastructure projects to bolster the country's security and economy. It operates two districts within the country – Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which is based in Kabul; and Afghanistan Engineer

District-South, which is based in Kandahar.

Lisner's top responsibility was ensuring the security and well-being for a large and diverse group of employees. The Kabul-based district has approximately 1,410 employees at bases spread across northeastern Afghanistan. The group includes 125 military personnel from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines; 505 Department of Defense civilian employees; 155 civilian contractors; and 625 Afghan workers.

Lisner found that while some of the internal protocols and regulations differ between the Air Force and the Army, the service members are strikingly similar. The same holds true for Marines and Navy personnel who also work alongside one another within the command.

"Once you sit down at a table and have dinner

“ I walked up to my dad one day and said, ‘I’m better than this. I need to change my lifestyle.’ ”

or lunch with them, you see they're no different than you. They're military people. They have a common goal," Lisner said. "They're basically the same, but wear different uniforms."

Army Col. Thomas Magness, the district commander, noted that all the military positions within the district are opened to be filled by members of any service. In fact, Lisner is just one of several Airmen in leadership positions.

"The fact is that the Air Force truly has stepped up when it's come time to source this joint command," Magness said. "You look at every corner of this organization where we've got military people; the Air Force is highly represented."

Magness looked to Lisner to serve as the standard bearer for all the enlistees, regardless of their individual services. "He is the senior enlisted man in this organization and he will be the one to uphold the standards, to maintain discipline, to lead by example for the rest of the enlisted ranks in this command," Magness said.

The colonel said Lisner's position allowed him to serve as the point of contact for enlisted personnel and even civilians who have issues or concerns about a variety of topics. "The chief is someone whose door is open. He's willing to listen. Maybe he can solve their problem at that level," Magness said.

Not coincidentally, Lisner said he believes that one of his top obligations was working with the deputy commander, Army Lt. Col. Jon Chytka, and the civilian chief of staff, Jay Burcham, to keep matters off Magness' desk, allowing the colonel to focus his attention on the district's primary mission of building billions of dollars worth of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

There were many additional responsibilities. "At the end of the day, sometimes it's racking

and stacking tasks when everything is urgent, everything is an emergency," Lisner said. "You know what I mean by that – everything needs to be done now, but which one needs to be done more now?"

Among his other priorities were ensuring the safety for military and civilian personnel alike, and serving as a mediator for matters involving policies and procedures.

"A lot of these kids who are joining the military now are pretty smart kids," he said. "They tend to think that they have a say in everything. Sometimes we have to listen to that, yet we still have to articulate the fact that they still have a boss and they still have a set of orders to follow. That's where I come in."

He had to be most adaptive when familiarizing himself with the different services' official paperwork procedures, particularly when writing performance evaluations, which the military calls fitness reports or fitreps.

"The Navy has a fitrep. The Marine Corps has a different kind of fitrep. The Army is different. The Air Force is different. So you just have to open up books," he said. "Sometimes you have to ask questions. You can't expect to know it all."

Lisner, a Wisconsin native, joined the Air Force after losing an athletic scholarship to Northern Michigan University. During high school in Minocqua, Wis., he earned a slot on the U.S. Junior Olympic wrestling team and competed at 98 and 105 pounds. However, after signing with the university, he suffered a concussion while barefoot waterskiing.

He still can't remember anything about the summer of 1983, the year he graduated from high school. He was in no shape to report to the university for classes, so his collegiate wrestling career ended before it started. He worked for a few years, but wanted something more in life.

"I walked up to my dad one day and said, 'I'm better than this. I need to change my



Photo by | Joe Marek



Photo by | Mike Beeman

Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Forest Lisner, right, travels by helicopter frequently with Army Col. Thomas Magness, left, to inspect construction sites across northeastern Afghanistan.



And the winners are...

Corps of Engineers recognizes top construction firms

Story by | Paul Giblin

Photo by | Joe Marek

Afghanistan Builders Association president Naeem Yassin, left, and Col. Thomas Magness, right, present an award to Metag Insaat Ticaret A.S. business development manager Gorkem Marsan during the event.

KABUL — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers honored the top construction companies in northern Afghanistan during an awards ceremony at the Serena Hotel in the war-torn country. The event was presented by the Afghanistan Builders Association and was attended by nearly 200 engineering and building professionals doing business in the northern portion of the country. The ceremony was held in a grand ballroom and provided a rare opportunity for U.S. military leaders of the 14-year-old emerging construction sector to come together to network and build professional relationships.

Lisner, who has 24 years of service in the Air Force as chief enlisted manager for the 5th Civil Engineer Squadron, presented awards to more than 80 companies in nine categories. The categories reflected the Corps of Engineers' primary missions in Afghanistan: Build high-quality infrastructure projects to house and support Afghanistan National Army, Afghanistan National Police and coalition forces; and teach construction, engineering and business management skills to Afghan

“Security and safety are very potential massive problems here. But if you want to have a great company, you have to go everywhere.”

“It was an opportunity to recognize excellence,” said U.S. Army Col. Thomas

workers.

Corps of Engineers officials identified two to nine companies as finalists in each category. The top award, Contractor of the Year, was presented to Ishan Qurat and Prime Projects International JV, which best exemplified both quality construction and capacity development during 2010.

Virtually all of the companies that were recognized have steadily expanded their portfolios of work in Afghanistan during the past several years as Afghan and coalition military forces have reduced the economically crippling influence of insurgents throughout the country.

One of the biggest winners of the night, Metag Insaat Ticaret A.S., is a construction firm based in Ankara, Turkey, arrived in the country in 2003. The firm initially worked as a sub-contractor for other companies. After two years, it took on the role as a prime contractor for construction projects and now has more than 30 contracts with the Corps of Engineers.

“Afghanistan is a very hard place to do business,” said Metag business development manager Gorkem Marsan. “Security and safety are very potential massive problems here. But if you want to have a great company, you have to go everywhere.”

Maintaining worksite safety also is a major consideration for doing business in Afghanistan, he said. Most of the country’s laborers are unskilled and inexperienced, so constant supervision is required to ensure workers follow safety protocols as they learn construction trades through the Metag’s on-the-job-training program. “We must teach all of them – all of them – before the job is done,” Marsan said.

Metag picked up five awards during the ceremony. The company won the Excellence in Construction Award and finished as a finalist in the Capacity Development, Safety Performance, Military Construction and Contractor of the Year categories.

Ahmad Khalid, an executive with Afghan Builders Consortium, a Kabul-based construction firm, said his company followed

a similar path of expansion. The company got its first job with the Corps of Engineers in 2006. It currently has seven.

“We started with very small construction projects and then step by step, we got other projects. If you do good quality work, you will go further. If you have a project with poor quality, that will be your final project,” Khalid said.

Afghan Builders Consortium was a finalist for both the Design/Build Company of the Year and the Contractor of the Year categories.

Likewise, Jamal Aziz Construction & Engineering Co., of Kabul, was awarded its first job by the Corps of Engineers in 2008. It currently has 17 jobs.

Adhering to the construction schedule and employing highly qualified managers are the most important aspects of performing work for the Corps of Engineers, said company president Mahboob Jamal.

“Before we get the contract, we are thinking about profit, that we should have profit in the contract. But, after we get the work, then we don’t care about profit. We are just thinking about the project, completing it soon,” he said.

Jamal Aziz was named as a finalist for Afghan Contractor of the Year.

The concept of presenting professional awards to construction companies was new to Afghanistan, and well received by the country’s construction executives, Yassin said. The awards are certain to foster a greater sense of competition among the companies, which will benefit Afghanistan’s overall construction sector.

“They are trying to prepare for next year, all the construction companies. Now they want to compete, to build capacity and to bring management teams, to compete in 2011. It was a very great night,” Yassin said.

The president of the Afghanistan Builders Association said he hopes – and expects – that Afghan companies will be even more successful against their international professional rivals in next year’s event. ■

US Army Corps of Engineers
Afghanistan Engineer District-North

2010 Contractor Recognition Award Ceremony

The winners:

Contractor of the Year:

Ishan Qurat and Prime Projects International JV

Best New Contractor of the Year:

Helal Khosti Construction Company

Afghan Contractor of the Year:

United Contracting Company

Women Owned Business of the Year:

Eagle AA Construction

Design/Build Company of the Year:

Omran Consulting Construction & Engineering

Military Construction Contractor of the Year:

Yuksel Insaat A.S.

Excellence in Construction Award:

Metag Insaat Ticaret A.S.

Safety Performance Award:

Emta Insaat A.D.

Capacity Development Award:

Technologists Inc



All that's fit to blog

Magness touts role of civilian engineers to bloggers

Story by | Paul GIBLIN

Photo by | Joe Marek

Col. Thomas H. Magness speaks to U.S.-based bloggers from his office at the Qalaa House compound in Kabul.

KABUL – Col. Thomas Magness highlighted the contributions of civilian engineers to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' mission in Afghanistan during a live teleconference with U.S.-based bloggers on Thursday, April 28.

Magness, the commander of Afghanistan Engineer District-North, was the featured speaker on the DOD Live program. The public discussions with bloggers are part of the U.S. Department of Defense's initiative to reach out to online and social media outlets.

Magness fielded questions from U.S.-based bloggers about the qualifications and training of Afghans working for the Corps of Engineers, the use of sustainable fuel sources and road construction, among other topics.

The colonel discussed the role of civilian engineers in response to a question by Sandra Erwin, a blogger for National

Defense magazine. She asked whether the Corps of Engineers encountered difficulty in attracting highly qualified U.S. civilians to serve in Afghanistan.

"We're hearing some comments in Washington about the lack of specialized engineering skills, especially from the civilian side," Erwin said. "And sometimes that they bring military engineers who may be engineers in, you know, submarines, but not necessarily know anything about construction or energy."

Magness, who previously served as commander of the Los Angeles and Detroit districts, countered that the district is staffed with "best of the best" civilian engineers the Corps of Engineers has to offer. "I really believe we've got a varsity team on a varsity-level mission," he said.

"These are professional engineers. They have all the credentials and certifications that are necessary to do the mission, so we

have not had to bring in military engineers. It is the civilian workforce in the United States for the Army Corps that has stepped forward and volunteered for this mission," Magness said.

"We also round that out with engineers from other agencies and other qualified engineers that wish to join the Army Corps just for this deployment."

In response to a question by blogger Tom Goering of Navy Cyberspace, the colonel discussed the qualifications of the district's Afghan workforce.


The district employs approximately 600 Afghan workers. About 400 hold professional positions. Of those, roughly 75 percent have degrees from various universities in Afghanistan. Most of those employees

are recruited to work at construction sites near their homes, but are given job-specific training before they report to the sites.

"We send them through our Local National Quality Assurance Academy, our LNQA Academy," Magness told the bloggers.

"In that academy, which runs for a couple of weeks, we teach them the sort of things that we expect from a Corps of Engineers (employee), forward-deployed eyes and ears, for the project."

More about the roundtable is available at <http://www.dodlive.mil/index.php/category/bloggers-roundtable/>.

Department of Defense officials said they expect to schedule Magness to speak during future bloggers roundtables to discuss different aspects of the mission. 

Ripped from the blogisphere

"U.S. cities like San Diego are debating the wisdom of putting solar-powered street lights along their roads. Heck -- that's already happening in ... Kabul, Afghanistan? You bet. In fact, Colonel Thomas Magness IV, the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan, was raving about them Thursday!"

– "Illuminating Kabul," by Mark Thompson, *Time magazine Battleland blog*, April 28

"Col. Magness talked about sustainability in the building of Afghan security infrastructure. Some of the outposts are so remote that they can be reached only by donkey. Operating an electrical generator in these posts would require fuel supplies and he sees that as a near impossibility to sustain. Instead, a combination of solar and wind power is being explored along with changes in building standards."

– "Army Engineers Building a New Afghanistan," by Charles Simmins, *Yahoo! Contributor Network blog*, April 29

"Reconstructing Afghanistan involves partnership and close working relationships with the Afghan people, Magness said, noting the pace of rebuilding is faster and more efficient than ever before. 'We have transitioned from being in construction, to finishing projects at the rate of one completed project per day,' Magness said."

– "Army Engineers Help to Rebuild Afghanistan," by Jessica L. Tozer, *Department of Defense Emerging Media blog*, April 29



Intern graduation

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers trains and mentors Afghan soldiers

Story and Photos by | LaDonna Davis

National Military Academy of Afghanistan. Mir Firozuddin, left, and Khalid Amin stand tall during their graduation ceremony from a six-month internship with the Corps of Engineers.

KABUL – Afghan soldiers from the National Military Academy of Afghanistan got a different kind of learning experience while working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during a six-month long engineering internship that culminated with a graduation ceremony on March 17.

The internship program is intended to build upon the knowledge and training that the Afghanistan National Army soldiers, who are engineers by trade, receive at the academy through hands-on learning experiences.

As part of the internship, Afghan Lts. Khalid Amin and Mir Firozuddin were mentored by several Afghanistan Engineer District-North employees and went through several modules, including construction scheduling, engineering, project management and on-the-job field experience. Each module is administered

Corps of Engineers experts in each field.

"It is our mission to be a positive influence and contributor to the prosperity and the future of Afghanistan, and these two fine lieutenants represent the bright future that I know is ahead for Afghanistan," said Lt. Col. Jon Chytka, the district's deputy commander.

During the program, the lieutenants worked side by side with professionals in contracting, project management, engineering, quality assurance, construction scheduling and construction management, so that they could become familiar with Corps of Engineer processes. They accompanied district personnel on missions to project sites, explained Corps of Engineers requirements to Afghan contractors, and served as interpreters for district employees.

The internship program is part of the

district's capacity development program. The purpose is to train and teach Afghan engineers and employees how to build, maintain and sustain the projects that the Corps of Engineers is building, so that they can run the facilities after U.S. personnel leave the country.


Corps of Engineers personnel are looking to extend the internship program during the summer to allow Afghans to work at completed Corps of Engineers sites, learning how to run the facilities and fix and maintain the systems in them.

"I can confidently say that today we are graduating soldiers from NMAA that are capable of solving the problems of Afghanistan as part of the Afghan army," said Afghan Maj. Gen. Mohammad Zazai, the superintendent of academy.

University officials are grateful to Corps of Engineers personnel for creating the internship program that training soldiers in practical ways, he said.

Upon completion of the program, the two Afghan officers will use their newly honed skills to educate future army engineer officers by going on to become professors of engineering at academy.

"I have to teach the cadets, the future engineers that are graduating from NMAA," said Amin. "I have to transfer all of this knowledge that I have learned here. I feel better today that I know the way to learn, I know how to deal with problems, and I know how to learn from engineers, how to speak, and how to stand."

The National Military Academy of Afghanistan is designed similar to the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., whereas Afghan soldiers choose a field of study while training for the military. Amin and Firozuddin mark the ninth and 10th students to graduate from the Corps of Engineers internship program and the fourth graduating class since the internship program started. 



Parting shot

An aerial photograph of a large, ancient stone fortress. The fortress is rectangular with four prominent circular towers at the corners. The interior of the fortress is mostly empty, with some rubble and a few small structures. The fortress is surrounded by lush green agricultural fields, some of which are terraced. A dirt road or path runs through the fields, and a small cluster of buildings is visible near the fortress. The overall scene is a mix of ancient architecture and modern agriculture.

Photo by | *Mike Beeman*

Historic buildings, aqueducts and terraced agricultural fields that date back hundreds, and even thousands of years ago, dot Afghanistan. This fortified structure was spotted from above near Salerno near the Pakistan border.