



Arctic Engineer

"Building and Preserving Alaska's Future"



Ground breakers

See Page 6



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The "Arctic Engineer" is published by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District Public Affairs Office at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska.

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Cover photo

Mike MacMillan, Alaska District project manager, (second shovel from right) and Dustin Roses, U.S. Embassy defense attaché (third shovel from right) join local officials and contractor representatives to celebrate the ground breaking of the Sanxai Primary School project in Laos in 2011. The school was built under the Humanitarian Assistance Program, which marks the first time the district has managed construction projects in Asia. (Courtesy photo)

Commander's Corner

Future presents new opportunities

Welcome to the Summer-Fall 2012 edition of the Arctic Engineer. I am pleased that you are able to take the time to read more about the Alaska District and how we “Build and Preserve Alaska’s Future” as part of a team that is “Building Strong.”

My hope is that you find it interesting, informative and whether or not you are assigned to the district, proud of the service the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provides to the nation and the great state of Alaska.

One of the first topics you will read about is this issue’s cover story about our Humanitarian Assistance Program. This effort first came to the district in 2008, and has grown annually and created unbelievable opportunities for the district throughout Asia. The program, which supports the engagement strategy for U.S. Pacific Command, started with projects in three to five nations and led to work for other customers in five programs in more than 10 countries.

We now have a near continuous presence in Bangladesh and shortly will have a team executing construction oversight in India for a \$152 million facility package associated with the Indian Air Force purchase of C-17 aircraft. Given the new U.S. defense strategy focused on the Asian-Pacific region, I expect this program to grow because the district continues to prove it can deliver excellence in Asia.

Another story in this issue is about the Warrior Transition Complexes completed in late 2011 at Fort Wainwright and early 2012 on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Both projects should make us all proud of being in the military construction business because they provide first-class facilities to soldiers recovering from the physical and mental impacts of their service. The project delivery teams for each facility did a fantastic job ensuring the soldiers’ needs were met.

Meanwhile, I know you will enjoy the article about the new Alaska Gold Rush. With now three reality TV shows about gold mining in Alaska (OK, I admit that I watch them) and skyrocketing prices for gold, a stampede is expected to hit our Regulatory Division’s front door this summer. Please read about how we are meeting this need.

Also in this issue you will see stories about our very own roller derby leader from Internal Review,

Stasia Wierzbicki, and Maj. Justin De Armond, whose outstanding achievements on the district’s military contingency contracting team led to a federal award.

Of course, these articles only touch on a piece of our mission and the accomplishments of the team.

Summer construction season is in full swing, and we are executing an incredible program. Our total workload for fiscal year 2012 will exceed \$500 million, and we expect it to be even higher next year. We anticipate dramatic shifts in where and how the work is executed in the near future, and as most know, this is the reason we developed a plan called Operation Crossroads. It will help to position the district through the years ahead to 2017.

While we cannot exactly predict our income for future years, we know that the sources will change with much less military construction and more environmental and international work. Although this will create challenges, it opens opportunities as well.

Ultimately, we will likely be a smaller and more agile district, so we will need to shape the organization in

a way that allows us to continue to deliver excellence. I appreciate your patience during this process and recognize many questions are unanswered about the organization’s future.

As many of you know, this is my last column for the Arctic Engineer as my term in command draws to a close. On July 2, Brig. Gen. Richard Stevens, Pacific Ocean Division commander, will pass the privilege of commanding the Alaska District to Col. Chris Lestochi.

Chris served here 11 years ago, knows the business and has a passion for people. In short, he will lead the Alaska District to even greater heights as we continue to deliver excellence for customers and supported commanders.

I cannot fully express my appreciation for the privilege to serve with you during the past three years. It has been a blessing that I will never forget. Melissa, Caroline and I take with us incredible memories of the successes of the team and most importantly, the friendships we made.

Thank you for your service and everything you do to “Build and Preserve Alaska’s Future.”



Col. Reinhard Koenig

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reinhard E. Koenig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



The Warrior Transition Battalion-Alaska headquarters and Company A operations building of the Warrior Transition Complex are located on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The Company B complex is at Fort Wainwright. Both facilities have a barracks as well as soldier and family assistance center to help troops during a prolonged recovery after experiencing an injury or illness.

Transition center

Complexes simplify services for ‘wounded warriors’

Story and photos by Curt Biberdorf

Within a week, two new complexes officially opened for the Army’s Warrior Transition Battalion-Alaska.

The \$22 million Fort Wainwright Warrior Transition Complex for Company B marked its beginning Feb. 28 while the \$43 million complex for Company A and battalion headquarters at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson

celebrated its start March 2.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District managed both projects as the construction agent for the Army and Air Force, including much of the medical community in the state.

“We’re proud to accomplish this,” said Col. Reinhard Koenig, district commander, before handing over a ceremonial key to Capt. Mitchell

Casteel, Company A commander.

The battalion operates the facilities to assist ill or injured soldiers who require complicated care lasting six or more months, with about 10 percent of these “wounded warriors” entering the unit because of battlefield injuries.

By the end of their stay, these troops will return to their same job, move to a new position in the Army or be prepared to enter the civilian work force.

More than just a campus of buildings, the Warrior Transition Battalion primarily serves as a place to heal, said Maj. Gen. Raymond Palumbo, U.S. Army-Alaska commanding general. It also helps the affected unit, especially when its leaders are not necessarily experienced at dealing with their troops’ recovery.

Several dozen of these battalions exist across the Army’s Warrior Transition Command, and as of March serve more than 10,000 soldiers, Palumbo said.

“Imagine you are a major corporation and you had 10,000 employees who weren’t working in their jobs. How profitable would you be?” he said. “That’s the commitment the Army is making to our soldiers to get them well.”



A child activity room is located at each soldier and family assistance center. The building is a meeting area for activities and also houses services essential during transition.

Before the new complex was constructed at JBER, the unit, housing and services the soldiers needed were spread across the installation. Now all of these functions are collocated conveniently next to medical and Veterans Affairs buildings.

Both complexes consist of a soldier and family assistance center, barracks, and administrative and operations facility, with the JBER location being larger as it also houses the battalion headquarters.

The assistance center offers a wide array of services and learning opportunities.

It's a "one-stop shop" for career counseling, identification cards and other services important during transition.

It also includes a small kitchen and separate child care room.

"This makes it more comfortable for whatever situations the soldiers are going through," said Sgt. 1st Class Kelechi Madubuko, battalion training and operations noncommissioned officer-in-charge.

At the company building, nurse case managers and administrative functions are consolidated under the supervision of company leadership. Meanwhile, the battalion building staff oversees both companies, and includes other healthcare employees essential to healing and recovery.

"Everybody can come together. It's phenomenal," said Staff Sgt. Joseph Pearson, 2nd Platoon sergeant for Company A. "We're self-supporting. Everything they need is here."

The two-story barracks building has rooms designed to accommodate its tenants. Compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, rooms are adaptable and feature wheelchair-accessible showers, toilets, closets and kitchens. Room amenities include cable TV and Internet access.

"We have had a world-class team for a long while, and now we have a world-class facility to match," said Lt. Col. Jason Benefield, Warrior Transition Battalion-Alaska commander.

Leaders and caregivers help soldiers develop and execute comprehensive transition plans, each as unique as the soldier, to accomplish the next phase of their lives. Both complexes will contribute to that success, he said.

The battalion accomplishes its mission when each soldier leaves the unit confident and equipped for success, but it is the soldiers who do the work. Many of them are successful alumni,

Benefield said.

He recounted one soldier who shared his story with others assigned to the unit.

"He couldn't talk or walk after a brain injury but recovered those abilities," Benefield said. "He had a very powerful message that if he could recover, they can recover."

Others overcame cancer and post-traumatic stress disorder to serve as role models for other soldiers.

"They won't all return to duty, but each one of them will leave this battalion better than when they arrived," Benefield said.

Palumbo said the unit and new facilities are a shining example of the Army's commitment to providing the best possible care for soldiers.

"It sure is heartwarming and feels good to have a wonderful place like this and wonderful leaders come together to help our soldiers," Palumbo said.



(Above) Barracks rooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act have lower closet shelves. Rooms are adaptable and also feature wheelchair-accessible showers, toilets and kitchens.

(Below) The company operations building provides office space for nurse case managers and social workers along with military leadership and unit support staff.



Assisting Asia

Humanitarian program grows despite many challenges

By Curt Biberdorf
Editor

Cyclone shelters and tuberculosis clinics are among the types of projects now managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District as its workload expands to Asia through the Humanitarian Assistance Program.

Since taking on this work for the U.S. Pacific Command in 2009 and regardless of many obstacles, the district has managed 126 projects worth nearly \$45 million, and the workload is growing.

The program was established by the federal government in 1986 to assure support to selected friendly nations and allies, and provide basic humanitarian aid and services to populations in need.

Goals of the Department of Defense and combatant commanders, such as at the Pacific Command, are to help avoid political and humanitarian crises, promote democratic development and regional stability, and enable countries to begin to recover from past conflicts. In noncrisis peacetime settings, the program supports combatant commanders by providing access to and fostering goodwill for the U.S. military.

The Pacific Command is responsible for providing humanitarian assistance

to 36 countries across the Asian-Pacific region, and the Alaska District is involved there for the first time in seven nations, said Stan Wharry, program manager in the Environmental and Special Projects Branch.

The Alaska District may seem like an unlikely candidate for this role, but it is located in the Pacific Command area of responsibility and surprisingly close to Asia, said Clare Jaeger, Environmental and Special Programs Branch chief.

“There is a long history of the Department of Defense working together with the State Department, and we are pleased to be part of the team,” Jaeger said. “We do these projects because there is a need but also to support DoD missions in these countries and help build partnerships.”

New level

Projects mainly consist of schools, medical facilities, flood management centers and cyclone shelters constructed in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. In addition, Nepal has four projects planned for this fiscal year, including a blood center and airport structural upgrades to withstand earthquakes, which are vital to disaster preparedness and response.

Mongolia is the latest entry, with potential renovation and construction of various tuberculosis facilities.

“We want to take the program to a

new level. We are constantly trying to standardize and improve our efficiency,” Wharry said.

Reaching that next step is complicated for many reasons, including cultural and language differences.

Project sites are usually spread across rural areas where the help is needed most. Traveling from Alaska can take up to two full days, so visits are normally scheduled four times annually and cover multiple countries to minimize expenses.

Once they have arrived, team members need to work effectively on the road, interacting with foreign dignitaries and U.S. Embassy personnel in addition to host-nation businesses contracted for design, construction and quality assurance.

Contracts are administered through Alaska District’s military contingency contracting team. It is part of a Corps-wide effort to assign soldiers in the Army acquisition career field to districts in order to gain design and construction contracting experience with an emphasis on applying those skills in a contingency environment. Humanitarian assistance projects fit the criteria for gaining that kind of exposure, said Chris Tew, Contracting Division chief.

“The humanitarian assistance program is challenging but provides

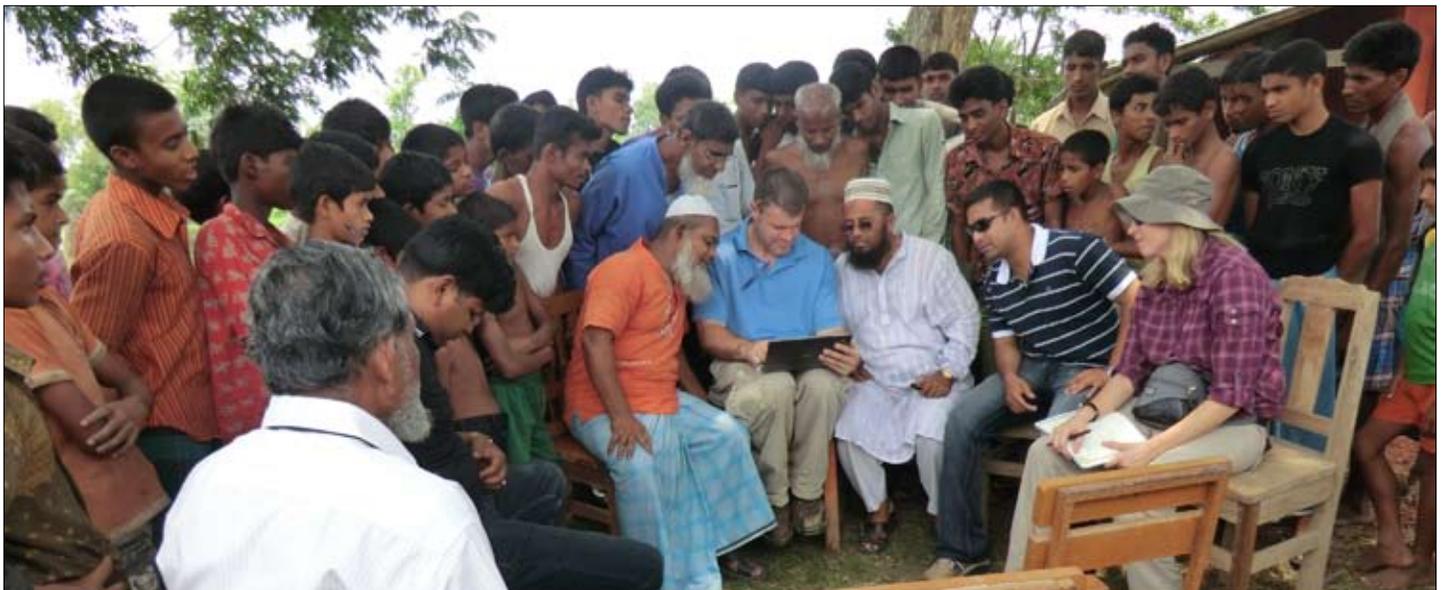


Photo by Maj. Justin De Armond

With village residents gathered around him in Bangladesh, Stan Wharry, program manager, uses a tablet computer to show photos of endangered plants and animals to learn if any were sighted in the area.



Courtesy photo

U.S. and local officials celebrate the opening of the Thmar Pouk Clinic in Cambodia Sept. 9, 2010. Besides medical facilities, the Alaska District is managing construction of projects mainly consisting of schools, flood management centers and cyclone shelters in Asia.

great real-time experience dealing with complex contracting situations,” said Maj. Justin De Armond, a contracting officer credited for his critical contributions to the program’s success.

To control costs, the district is developing standard designs. An easily adaptable design also streamlines the effort with contractors, said Wharry.

For instance, school layouts are similar except for the number of rooms and toilets. Typically built for 40 pupils, rooms have tile flooring and ceiling fans, but with sanitation a primary objective of the program, restrooms are provided for all facilities.

Water is drawn by a well, and a rain catchment supplies a backup source. Desks and chalkboards are installed to complete the project and make it fully operational.

However, medical facilities are more complicated because of their diverse uses, Wharry said.

Most countries have multiple medical facility layouts developed by their health ministry, depending on the population served. The district evaluates which facility is right for humanitarian assistance with the aid of

local designers. They use the existing layouts to develop standard designs that are right for the program.

While most countries receive clinics, small hospitals are built in northern Sri Lanka because its infrastructure has degraded through years of civil war. It makes sense to provide that type of facility through the humanitarian program, Wharry said.

High quality

Besides the right type of project, these nations are receiving a high-quality product focused heavily on structural design.

District structural engineers developed country-specific structural requirements based on the International Building Code. Designing the buildings to meet austere conditions and serve local populations are other areas of emphasis.

“The cornerstone is being able to merge with the country’s own standards instead of forcing them to do it our way,” Jaeger said.

Providing intricate features from a U.S. perspective can result in facilities that are tough to maintain or

clash culturally. With little money for maintenance in developing countries, “simple is usually best,” said Wharry.

Moreover, schools and hospitals typically have no maintenance staff, resulting in difficulty with upkeep of buildings. To help with that problem, the district now requires construction contractors to provide operations and maintenance manuals, and train the end-users.

“PACOM and the host nations are very happy with the results of the construction,” Wharry said.

That success has generated more customers.

The U.S. Agency for International Development gave the district more than \$40 million to manage and construct as many as 100 cyclone shelters in Bangladesh. The work is planned over five years and modeled after the district’s accomplishments for Pacific Command. Twelve buildings are under construction with seven more scheduled for next year.

“Bangladesh is filled with great people who make due despite the hardships,” Wharry said. “It’s rewarding to help provide them with better schools and a place to seek shelter.”

The district is working with the Bangladesh Coast Guard to build coastal crisis management centers that are full-time stations to help protect the local population and waterways, and also assist with natural disasters.

“Unfortunately, they have a lot of disasters,” Wharry said. “The facilities help both Bangladesh and the international community respond more effectively during crisis and recovery.”

Besides Pacific Command and USAID, a third Pacific customer is the Global Peace Operations Initiative Program.

The district is gearing up to manage construction projects in Mongolia and Bangladesh to renovate and expand facilities that help train host-nation peacekeeping forces.

“Becoming good at what we do puts us in position to accept more work,” Wharry said. “If we have multiple programs and projects in the region, we can leverage resources and products to meet customer needs.”

By containing costs and adding value for Asian customers, the district can further help make a difference for the people of developing countries and support the U.S. mission abroad.

“We want to be really good at working in Asia,” Wharry said. “Working in the region is difficult, but the people are wonderful.”

Reality TV shows are fueling mining interest in Alaska from people across the nation while permitting agencies prepare to keep up with a modern-day...

Gold rush

By John Budnik
Public Affairs Student Intern

“There are strange things done in the midnight sun by the men who moil for gold,” wrote Robert Service in his poem “The Cremation of Sam McGee.” The days of the Klondike Gold Rush are over, but the allure of gold remains in an era where ambitious prospectors can turn on the TV and watch others seemingly strike it rich.

This is the case for Nome, Alaska. A gold rush is expected for the summer of 2012 because of interest aroused by the premiere of Discovery Channel’s reality show, “Bering Sea Gold,” which aired after another mining reality show on the same station, “Gold Rush.” Interest is spurred further by gold’s market value. Price per ounce began a steep ascent from \$900 in 2008 to nearly \$1,900 in 2011 before declining a few hundred dollars in 2012.

“Bering Sea Gold” records the life of gold miners using suction dredges to extract the precious metal off the ocean floor near the rural town’s coast.

However, prospectors cannot simply set up a barge and legally start mining. For any effort that might affect the environment, they need the proper permits, and multiple state and federal agencies are involved to ensure that the activities are “not too strange under the midnight sun.”

One of the organizations issuing permits is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District. To help streamline application review and prevent duplicating work, its Regulatory Division formed a five-member mining team this year with staff at the district headquarters and Fairbanks Field Office, which is located in the heart of the state’s mining industry.

The team’s purpose is to ensure that miners comply with Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbor Act of 1899 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1972, which guide Regulatory’s mission to minimize environmental impacts on U.S. aquatic resources while allowing necessary and reasonable development.



Photo by Curt Biberdorf

Gold flakes or nuggets are separated from other materials in placer mining, the method of operation used in the reality TV shows “Bering Sea Gold” and “Gold Rush.”

Previously, the norm was to download miners’ annual applications from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources Web site and assigning them to Regulatory staff for review in addition to their other duties.

The district usually receives an average of 600 mining applications during the season, but with the impending gold rush and volume of applications expected to double due to the show’s popularity, this process is obsolete, said Victor Ross, project manager and mining team leader.

After each new episode of “Bering Sea Gold” last year, Alaska Department of Natural Resources offices received calls about every five minutes, said Kerwin Krause, exploration permit

manager at the agency. Regulatory is dealing with its own influx of phone inquiries from people across the country.

Velvan Webb, administrative assistant, prepared a form email ready to send to miners. It lists steps on how to obtain necessary permissions to operate a suction dredge, conditions of the general permit covering suction dredging in Alaska and answers to frequently-asked questions.

An instruction sheet outlines permissions needed to mine at new or existing claims on federal, state or private land along with an overview of permits that may be necessary from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Department

of Natural Resources and Corps of Engineers.

Potential prospectors also are cautioned to learn about Alaska's geographical size and transportation limitations. Nome is off the road system, but uninformed people still ask how far and how long it takes to drive there from Anchorage.

The gold rush appears to be on for Nome, but across the state, placer—including suction dredge—and hard rock miners require permits.

The mining team is challenged by this variety. From anonymous novice dredge miners to high-profile international mining companies caught in Alaskan politics and facing public scrutiny, all require federal and state review.

Generally, bigger mining operations take longer to approve. A successful large mine may take more than a decade to open. Exploration is completed within the first three to four years while environmental and feasibility studies, financing and permitting occur in the latter years.

For example, Ross was hired in 1992 by the Corps to work on the Kensington Mine application. By 2005, Coeur Alaska Inc., owners of the underground gold mine in Southeast Alaska, obtained a Corps permit.

Regardless of the mine's size or type, the Regulatory staff appreciates

when applicants include legible plans and drawings because it saves time.

"You wouldn't build a house without a plan," Ross said. "You shouldn't be building a mine without one."

Ross said goals of the team are to gain efficiency by understanding what other federal and state agencies are permitting, improve dialogue and collaboration with these agencies, and seek the public's input.

The mining team plans to teach the

public about permitting. For instance, Ross spoke with Alaska Mining Association members in Fairbanks in April to educate prospectors about Corps regulations. All types of miners need to do their research before getting involved, he said.

For those who have done their homework and at last have permits in hand, they are free to pursue an element that's royal and whose high value continues to "make men moil."



Photo by Tom Findtner

A mining dredge prospects for gold off the coast of Nome. Dredging operations like this one are the focus of Discovery Channel's reality show, "Bering Sea Gold," which has contributed to an increase in mining interest in the northwest Alaska town.



Courtesy photo

The Fort Knox Gold Mine is an open pit operation located about 30 miles northeast of Fairbanks. Mines of this size require Army permits pending plans and infrastructure necessary to operate. The Regulatory Division mining team ensures that the environmental impact on aquatic resources are avoided, minimized and mitigated.

Land link

Corps-built road remains historic engineering feat

From "Engineering in the Far North: A History of the U.S. Army Engineer District in Alaska"

Army engineers and civilian contractors constructed the Alaska Highway 70 years ago through the wilderness of Canada and Alaska.

It marked the realization of an idea promoted by visionaries for more than 50 years to build an overland link between Alaska and the Lower 48.

The highway's completion represented a momentous development in the history of the Far North.

Constructed in eight months, it secured Alaska's lifelines. From the fall of 1942 to the end of World War II, thousands of tons of supplies and equipment traveled over this road to Alaska. The Alaska Highway also helped open the Far North to civilians and is credited with helping transform an isolated territory into a state.

Completed before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District was established in 1946, the Alaska Highway remained the most significant transportation line built by Army engineers in wartime Alaska.

During the initial military buildup in the Far North from 1940-1941, the Army depended on vessels using the ports of Seward and Valdez to deliver bulk cargo to Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Congress proposed several plans to end Alaska's reliance on sea transport through the construction of a railroad or highway from the continental United States to Alaska during the 1930s, but the War Department was unreceptive.

However, the threat of war brought new urgency to the need for a continental supply route. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the War Department immediately initiated plans for an alternate route to Alaska.

In January 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt requested the War and Interior departments to prepare recommendations for the construction of a military road to the Far North. By March, the United States and Canada reached an agreement to build a road from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Big Delta, Alaska.



U.S. Army photo

A vehicle crosses a steep portion of the Alaska Highway during its early days.

The Army selected the inland route from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks, which would link the isolated airfields scattered across Canada and Alaska, ensuring their continued operation.

The U.S. military dubbed the road "ALCAN," short for Alaska-Canada. Anthony J. Dimond, territorial delegate to Congress, suggested calling the road the "Alaska Highway," and in 1943 the United States and Canada adopted this term. Although the road passed through northwestern Canada, transportation route names traditionally reflected their destination, as in the Oregon Trail.

The Army Corps, led by Brig. Gen. William M. Hoge, was responsible for constructing the pioneer road, which contractors straightened and paved years later. The War Department supervised the Army engineers and civilian contractors while the Alaska Roads Commission oversaw connections to existing roads in Alaska.

Seven engineer regiments, including three all African-American units comprising one third of the 10,000 troops, worked on the project.

In one construction season beginning March 13, 1942, these regiments built 1,428 miles of road across tundra and permafrost, along glaciers, through mountain passes and over a multitude of streams that cost nearly \$135 million.

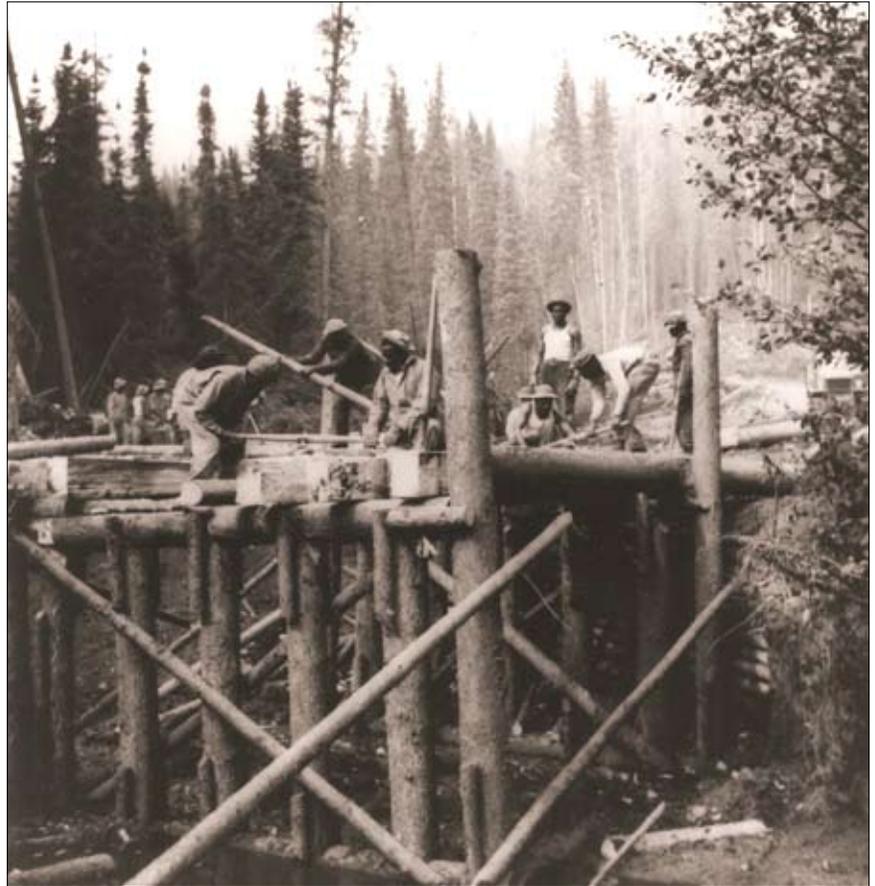
They endured primitive and hazardous conditions, such as melting permafrost in the summer to temperatures as low as 60 below zero in the winter.

The soldiers built the highway in three sections. The southern section began at the Dawson Creek railhead near the British Columbia-Alberta border. The central section commenced at Whitehorse, which was supplied through the Port of Skagway, and White Pass and Yukon Railway. The northern section was supplied through the Port of Valdez and Richardson Highway.



U.S. Army photo

Corduroy roads were necessary in many muddy areas. Logs were later covered with dirt and gravel.



U.S. Army photo

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers troops build a trestle bridge with timber cut next to the site. This structure was the most common type of crossing used during the road's construction.

Typically, the regiments approached the work in one of two ways. Companies either completed an entire segment by clearing timber, placing culverts and grading the road and then moving ahead of other companies similarly engaged, or completed a specific task for each portion.

Either way, the unit lived in tents and worked as fast as possible. They left the finer details of road-building to the Public Road Administration's permanent highway. Impatient about the progress, Hoge reportedly told a subordinate his road was "too good, too wide and too short."

The lead bulldozers of the 18th and 97th Engineers met at Beaver Creek Oct. 25, 1942, just a few miles from the Alaska-Canada border. For the next month, the engineers constructed a temporary trestle bridge to span the White River.

Meanwhile, contractors working for the Public Road Administration finished sections from Big Delta to Tanacross and from Whitehorse to Jake's Corner. Engineers finished work on the bridge, and the Alaska Highway opened from Dawson Creek to Big Delta Nov. 20, 1942.

Alaska Highway 70th anniversary celebration planned with convoy

By Pat Richardson
Media Relations Specialist

To celebrate the Alaska Highway's 70th anniversary, the Military Vehicle Preservation Association, based in Independence, Mo., is planning a trip along the famous route and other "rugged" roads in Alaska and Canada in August.

A convoy of 97 military vehicles from World War I through current issue and 250 people from across the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Australia, New Zealand and Belgium are scheduled to travel 4,100 miles in 27 days.

The vehicles are privately owned and restored by people interested in preserving them and their important roles throughout military history, said Terry Shelswell, convoy commander, on the association's Web site.

The association noted that military vehicles were the backbone of the

Alaska Highway construction project. It would have been impossible without more than 7,000 pieces of military equipment.

As they travel through cities and towns, the group will pause to thank military veterans while drawing attention to the engineering feat and people who made the highway possible.

They plan to drive the Campbell Highway, Top of the World Highway/Taylor Highway, Hatcher Pass and Denali Highway no faster than 35 mph. Historic military vehicle collectors love gravel roads, Shelswell said.

In Alaska, they plan on staying overnight in Chicken Aug. 15, Glennallen Aug. 16, Willow Aug. 17, Denali Aug. 18-19, Paxson Aug. 20 and Tok Aug. 21.

For updates and details, go to <http://www.mvpa.org/> or visit Facebook at "MVPA 2012 Alaska Highway Convoy."

Employee profile

Contracting officer achieves excellence

By John Budnik
Public Affairs Student Intern

In high school, he thought the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., was in California. His father corrected him on the location of what would become his alma mater, but the desire to serve his country never waned.

No longer a naïve teenager from Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, Maj. Justin De Armond has a much broader perspective of the world after many opportunities to travel during his Army career.

The contracting officer was assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District in July 2009 as the first member of a new military contingency contracting team. The team is part of an Army initiative, and a Corps undertaking, to provide forward contracting support in war zones and for humanitarian missions worldwide while exposing acquisition career field soldiers to Corps contracting.

His main duties are orchestrating contracting actions for

the district's humanitarian assistance program in Asia. He has visited projects in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," De Armond said. "The travel and the opportunity to work with foreign contracts and contractors have been great."

He has been absolutely central to the success of the humanitarian assistance mission, said Chris Tew, Contracting Division chief.

The path to contracting started after he graduated from West Point in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and was commissioned in field artillery. Upon completion of the basic field artillery officer course at Fort Sill, Okla., he was stationed at Babenhausen Kaserne, Germany, for three and a half years.

In 2003, he deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom during the initial invasion and completed a second tour from 2006-2007 as a battery commander and fire support officer for an infantry battalion.

He has celebrated New Year's Eve in London, visited Normandy just before the 60th anniversary of D-Day, spent time in Greece when it was the 2004 Olympic Games host and witnessed Lance Armstrong win the Tour de France twice.

"Europe is my favorite place, but Alaska will have a special place in my heart because I love mountains, snow and the outdoors," De Armond said.

He said he could stay for the rest of his life in Alaska for the biking and skiing, but his wife might disagree with that idea.

Favorite moments from his time on the Last Frontier include backcountry skiing, helping sled dog teams at the Iditarod ceremonial start in Anchorage and the birth of his son, Burke, in October 2009. His wife, Kara, gave birth to their second child in June.

De Armond became the Special Projects Branch acting chief in February, where he is in charge of ensuring that customers receive timely solicitations, notices and awards. He loves the challenge of his work and being around the "contracting family," he said.

His accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. In May, he was recognized as the Alaska Federal Employee of the Year in the military administrative, professional, executive category.

"I just hope I do a good job and make a difference," De Armond said.

The accolades De Armond has earned helped shape him into a top-performing Army officer, but the most important leadership lesson comes from those he has worked with closely throughout his career.

"Listen to the people you work with," he said. "Listening to them makes your job much easier if you're trying to lead them in a positive direction."

De Armond will depart in July to attend Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., full time to pursue a master's degree in business administration to complement a master's in management and leadership from Webster University.

"We're losing a real good teammate," said Tew. "It's more than just that. He's family to a lot of us."



Photo by John Budnik

Maj. Justin De Armond, contracting officer, was recognized in May as the Alaska Federal Employee of the Year in the military administrative, professional, executive category for his service on the military contingency contracting team.

ACTIVE IN ALASKA



Marsha Schreiber, information technology specialist, and her husband, Carey, explore the Knik Glacier during an outing with their ATVs.



David Kaplan (left), quality assurance representative, and Paul Schneider, Northern Area Office engineer, participate in the annual staff picnic at the Chena River Lakes Flood Control Project in North Pole.



Michelle Sappa, administrative assistant in the Construction-Operations Division, and her husband, Pelenato, take a break near Jim Creek during an ATV outing to Knik Glacier.



Heather Boyer, Regulatory Division project manager, cuddles her lamb, Dewdrop, born May 10. Boyer raises sheep on her farm and uses them to train her border collies to herd.



Ron Toombs, Environmental and Special Projects Branch program manager, takes his grandchildren, Owen (left) and Kylee, fishing at Clooney Lake on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

Rolling Ruckus

Auditor leads revived sport once known for staged fights

By John Budnik
Public Affairs Student Intern

When she isn't helping her employer achieve success during the day, Stasia Wierzbicki by night trades her business attire for another outfit—one that includes helmet, pads and fishnet stockings—to assist with leading her other team to victory.

Wierzbicki is the Internal Review Office chief for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Alaska District, but on bout nights, she transforms into “Shocker Khan,” skating into the rollicking sport of roller derby.

Wierzbicki participated in soccer, curling and bridge before a friend,

Kathy Wooldridge, introduced her to roller derby. When Wooldridge joined a league to make friends in the Anchorage area after a move, Wierzbicki soon followed suit.

“She begged me to get involved with derby, but I thought I was too busy, so I kept making excuses as to why I couldn't join,” said Wierzbicki, now a three-year derby veteran and president of Anchorage's first league, Rage City Rollergirls. “Then she got me a ticket to one of the first bouts in Anchorage, and I was hooked.”

Roughed up

Roller derby started during the Great Depression. At its heyday in the 1970s,

roller girls were the highest paid female athletes in the world. It was more of an exhibition then, where staged fights and the occasional elbow to the face were not only allowed but encouraged.

Today's roller derby revival began in Texas in 2003. As its popularity grew, the sport expanded to Anchorage in 2007 and formed the first of seven leagues now competing in Alaska. Rage City Rollergirls has around 75 members and plays by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association rules.

The organization's rules veered from staged fights and focused on validating the sport for widespread appeal. Players who fight are ejected from the arena,



Photo by Curt Biberdorf

Kathy Wooldridge (left), contract specialist, and Stasia Wierzbicki, Internal Review Office chief, cheer teams competing in a roller derby bout during the Halloween Showdown as they wait to take the track at the Dena'ina Center in Anchorage Oct. 29.

and if tempers flare during the intensity of competition, the roller girls are likely to make amends afterward, Wierzbicki said.

The audience draw instead is rooted in the game's competitiveness.

"I want to see it grow and definitely want to see it legitimized," Wierzbicki said.

Action packed

Wierzbicki loves the sport's athleticism, and though it might look easy rolling around a track on quad skates, it is a full-body workout.

Wierzbicki plays pivot for her home team, Devil's Club. Pivots on each team stand out with a stripe on their helmet. They are allowed to place their toe on the starting line at the beginning of each of the two 30-minute periods in a bout, and usually control the pack's speed and strategies.

All other roller girls must line up behind the pivot's hip or else face a minor penalty. When a skater gets called for four minor penalties, they serve one minute in the penalty box.

Pivots are also able to receive a "star pass," making the pivot the new point scorer. Wierzbicki will sometimes play relief jammer when her team's designated jammers need a break. The jammer's role is to sprint ahead of the other team while the opponents try to block her.



Photo by Curt Biberdorf

Stasia Wierzbicki and Kathy Wooldridge skate practice laps before a four-team showdown event in front of a near-record 1,200 spectators in Anchorage Oct. 29.



Photo by Curt Biberdorf

Stasia Wierzbicki (left) plays jammer for the Frankenbabes in a bout against the Killer Clowns during a Halloween showdown at the Dena'ina Center in Anchorage Oct. 29. The event consisted of three half-hour mini bouts, with the winners of the first two bouts advancing to the championship round.

For every blocker a jammer passes, the team earns a point. However, this isn't Wierzbicki's favorite position.

"I don't have the endurance to sprint for two minutes," she said.

A jammer is a target for crushing hits by blockers trying to keep her from bursting through the pack. Wierzbicki prefers hitting to getting hit. Skaters can legally contact the front of an opponent from below the neck to the middle thigh without using their arms below the elbow.

All that action can take a physical toll. She chipped an ankle bone during one bout, which was surgically-repaired.

"She's really powerful," said Wooldridge, Shocker Khan's teammate and Alaska District contract specialist. "She's one of the most powerful hitters out there."

Nicknamed

Roller derby has its own lingo. Roller girls start as "fresh meat" and become a "rookie" within a few months to a year, but every skater's progression is different, Wierzbicki said.

Unique also describes their nicknames written on the backs of their jerseys and sometimes taped to their helmets.

Once a roller girl becomes a rookie, she can register a roller derby name at

a Web site used by leagues around the world.

If what she chooses is similar to another, the etiquette is to ask that person if it is OK to still use the name.

Nicknames often creatively express a tough image, such as Razor Burns and Nautical Nuisance. Wierzbicki's nickname plays off of R&B singer Chaka Khan.

Wierzbicki's desire is to see the sport attract thousands of fans similar to Alaska's minor league professional hockey team, the Alaska Aces, who play their home games in Anchorage and fill the city's largest arena.

Despite the risk of injury, the love of the game and the people involved motivate Wierzbicki to continue to compete. Its players are a diverse group, and the sport opened an avenue to new friendships.

"The women that are involved in it are amazing," Wierzbicki said. "It really is a culture, not just a sport."

Wierzbicki volunteers Monday nights with other roller girls at an Anchorage roller rink to introduce women interested in learning more about roller derby and welcomes new players.

"Fresh meat" are warned—they too may get hooked.



U.S. Army photo

District flashback

The Chena River Lakes Flood Control Project's floodway filled with impounded water in May and June of 1992 for the first time since the project became operational in 1979. Without the project, the Chena River would have drenched downtown Fairbanks with four feet of water. In 1967, nearly 85 percent of North Pole, Fairbanks and Fort Wainwright flooded when the Chena River overflowed its banks. Congress authorized and appropriated construction of an 8.5-mile-long dam and outlet system to reduce the flood risk to those communities in 1968. Construction of the \$256 million project began in 1973. Since becoming operational in 1981, it has controlled flows of the Chena River 20 times to either regulate floodwater or divert it to the Tanana River to protect lands in the floodplain downstream of the dam. Total flood damages prevented to date are estimated to be \$259 million.

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