



What's a Family Readiness Group?

Traditionally called the FRG, the Family Readiness Group is a command sponsored organization of all assigned Soldiers, married and single, Department of the Army civilians, volunteers and their families. Together they try to provide mutual support and assistance and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command and community resources. For those who do not have support in their geographic location, the Army has developed the vFRG or *Virtual Family Readiness Group* available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at <http://www.armyfrg.org>. The resources on the site include everything from finding an FRG to creating one of your own. It includes separate guidance for family members, deployed Soldiers and civilians, commanders and FRG leaders.

Family Readiness Network gaining momentum

By Sandra Hudson

A group of volunteers met for the first time in September last year to stand up the District's Family Readiness Network. It didn't take long for them to realize the unique aspects of their charter, compared to similar organizations you'd find on military installations.

"We already know we're different than the military sector and we're not trying to mirror them," said FRN coordinator, Paula Hanna, who works as an administrative assistant in the Resource Management Division. "We're trying to build on the specific needs of the Corps."

As a military spouse herself, Hanna notes the vast majority of people deployed from the Savannah District are civilians who have volunteered to serve for a specified period of time. However, as her involvement increases, she's realizing a growing need for the FRN.

"What will help is more marketing to educate family members about what is going on," said Hanna.

One of the FRN's first duties was developing individual questionnaires for deploying members and their families to see what type of support they would like from the FRN during the separation. Hanna smiles when she reports, "Two of four team members asked for our service in the last pre-deployment group."

The FRN is currently creating a brochure to distribute at the employee newcomer's

orientation. "Once people get a better understanding of who we are, then we'll get better involvement," she said.

The FRN's next focus is to get family members of the District's deployed teammates to attend special district events, such as the "Night with the Gnats" baseball game.

While Hanna and her team do what they can to proactively support camaraderie for family members, she also wants them to know about support systems readily available to deter difficult times.

Two of those include www.militaryonesource.com and www.FOH4YOU.com. They offer free and low-cost counseling services on a wide variety of topics including emotional, financial, legal, and health and wellness issues.

The Savannah District FRN holds monthly meetings. They also participate in monthly, division-wide video teleconferencing sessions. The latest innovation from that collaboration is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, South Atlantic Division Facebook page. There, families and deployed team members can keep track of SAD news, events and deployment services available.

For information on joining the FRN as a family member or volunteer, send e-mail to paula.j.hanna@usace.army.mil.



Some members of the Family Readiness Network show their team spirit at Corps Day. From left: Lt. Col. David London, Deputy Commander; Gwen Myers; Col. Jeffrey Hall, Commander; Paula Hanna; Adrienne Wildy; Patti Casey; and Tyrone Williams.

Ins and outs of deployments

How to get a head-start

By Billy Birdwell

Have you thought about a deployment? Did you hear that there's just too much involved in getting from the Savannah District to the overseas location? A seasoned deployee from the Savannah District has some inside tips to make the process go smoother.

Diane Davis of Savannah's Civilian Personnel Advisory Center has deployed twice to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.

Davis advises potential volunteers to talk to their supervisors early. "The jobs will be posted on the Civilian Personnel On-Line (CPOL) web site," she said. "Keep that résumé updated." Volunteers must be well qualified with the needed skills, Davis said.

Often jobs need to be filled quickly, so Davis advises keeping immunizations up-to-date. "You have to have a medical clearance," she said. Keeping routine immunizations current not only helps the deployment process, it also makes for good routine health care.

Volunteers receive official selection notification. Detailed instructions on gaining medical clearance will come after official selection. With the new regional occupational health unit in the Savannah District, many of the tests and exams can be accomplished in the District headquarters building free of charge – but only after a volunteer has received official selection notification. "There's less running around, and it's all done in-house," Davis said.

After selection, volunteers still have several steps to complete.

"Be prepared for online training," she said. "Be sure your supervisor is aware of the time it will take to complete."

Preparations don't end at the office. "You really need to talk with your family," she said. "Have instructions in place for the family to take over those family responsibilities you normally do."

"Make sure your will is up to date, along with reviewing your beneficiaries," Davis said. These things can be completed now, even before applying for overseas deployments – and should be part of routine life, she noted.

Finally, once overseas keep in touch with the office back home. Friends at work will want to know about your safety and your successes. You will return to the District and will then need to slip back into the routine.

"I've really enjoyed my deployments," Davis said. "They've all been very gratifying."

If you are considering a deployment in your future, go to the USACE Deployment Center at <http://www.tam.usace.army.mil/udc/index.asp>

Team member helps Afghani contractors learn requirements



Mike Weaver from the Savannah District Contracting Division gives a briefing for the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency. He has been deployed for a year, serving as the first Deputy for Small Business Development for AED-N. "Above all, my greatest pleasure here has been the direct interaction I have had with the citizens of Afghanistan, the many students at educational institutions, and the agencies involved in helping the reconstruction and humanitarian efforts," he said. Weaver returned to the District in July.



Desert Times

Summer 2010

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District

Airfield project improves support to Warfighters

By Brenda Beasley, AED, and Jeanne Hodge, Savannah District

A dirt landing strip on a military base on the outskirts of a remote, dusty town at the mouth of a strategic valley once again makes history.

Located at Camp Holland in Tarin Kowt, the capital of Uruzgan Province in central Afghanistan, the landing strip serves Air Mobility Command airlifters, such as C-17s, to bring much-needed cargo to forward-deployed Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and coalition partners. Airlifters provide a means of transporting cargo or passengers, often to and from an otherwise inaccessible area.

Regardless of the type of aircraft, a lot of dirt gets kicked up. Dirt that's extremely fine – like talcum powder or flour – causing boots to sink down into it several inches.

To solve the problem, construction of the new landing strip made of concrete pavement is underway and sponsored by the U.S. Army Central Command and U.S. Air Force Central Command. The project, built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Afghanistan Engineer District - South (AES), will improve this vital strategic link at the Tarin Kowt Forward Operating Base (FOB).

The \$28.5 million project consists of four parts – the landing strip itself, a large helicopter landing pad, a fixed-wing parking apron, and a cargo handling area.

"The dirt landing strip will receive a concrete surface, and it'll be lengthened to support C-17 aircraft," said James Myers, lead quality assurance representative and Savannah District construction representative at the Fort Gordon, Ga., resident office. "The new parking apron will be large enough for two C-17s to park side-by-side at the same time." The cargo handling area will include a large

(Continued on pg. 4)



Top: The soon-to-be paved landing strip at Camp Holland is used by Air Mobility Command airlifters, such as this C-17, to bring much-needed cargo to forward-deployed Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and coalition partners. (Photo courtesy of AED)

Bottom Left: James Myers (center), lead QA representative (QA representative deployed from the Corps' Savannah District, Ft. Gordon Resident Office) and Michael Weiner (right), resident engineer, Afghanistan Engineer District-South Tarin Kowt Resident Office, explain the importance of engineered fill controls at the landing strip extension area at Tarin Kowt Airfield to Kayhan Suhrab (left), Kandahar Constructors CQC Manager. (Photo by Patricia Ryan, public affairs officer, AED)



Desert Times is an authorized, unofficial newsletter of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District. It is published in accordance with provisions of Army Regulation 360-1, under supervision of the Corporate Communications Office.

Submissions: News, features, photographs and art are solicited; publication depends on general interest as judged by the editor.

For queries to the editor: Contact the Corporate Communications office at (912) 652-5758, or CFSAS-CCO@usace.army.mil. Mail: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, CCO, PO Box 889, Savannah, GA 31402-0889.

Contents, views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army or this command. News copy is prepared in accordance with the Associated Press Style Guide. All photos, unless otherwise credited, are official U.S. Army photos.

Commander,
District Engineer

Col. Jeffrey M. Hall

Corporate Communications Officer

Joyce A. McDonald

Writers/Editors

Brenda Beasley
Billy Birdwell
Jeanne Hodge
Sandra Hudson

Layout

Brittany Phillips

Contributor

Jim McWilliams

"How we spent July 4th at Forward Operating Base Camp Stone in Herat, Afghanistan."



The Savannah District has 29 team members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Overseas Contingency Operations. They spend long days supporting the OCO mission in various capacities. Jim McWilliams sent in these photos from the Independence Day celebration at FOB Camp Stone to show how they bring "home comforts" to their remote locations.

My son Jason and I are both stationed here. My assignment is for 18 months and Jason's for 13 months. Here's a look at what we did to celebrate Independence Day.

It was our first day off in several weeks, so I "slept in" until 6:30 a.m., then jumped into the pool my wife sent over. The kit included chemicals, pump and all the accessories.

Later, I did some laundry and checked my tickets for an MWR raffle on post - didn't win anything.

The barbequed steaks marinated in Italian salad dressing all day were a hit! We worked into the darkness to complete the volleyball court. It's just as well, evening cools off nicely. The high for the day was 108 degrees, not too bad with only four percent humidity.

We wrapped up the evening by watching the A-Team movie under the stars in our own outdoor theater. Then it was off to bed by 10 p.m. Had to get up at 5 a.m. for the next day of work.

It was a good way to celebrate our nation's birthday.

-Jim McWilliams



Jim McWilliams, a Construction Control Representative, deployed to Afghanistan on a six-month assignment from the Fort Benning Area Office in October of 2009. He has extended his stay to May 2011.



- Photos courtesy of Jim McWilliams



Airfield project improves support to Warfighters

(Continued from front page)

warehouse to support the airfield.

Scheduled for completion in January 2011, the work which began in April is being done in three phases to meet its unique set of challenges. First, the existing dirt landing strip will be widened to create a temporary landing strip. This will satisfy the contractual requirement of maintaining a fully operational runway while improving the existing dirt surface with rigid pavement. At the same time, work will begin on constructing the rotary-wing parking apron and extending the current length of the runway about 430 yards.

Second, workers will cut the landing strip in half, length-wise, to prepare the north side and C-17 parking apron for concrete placement and finishing. Once finished, aircraft will be allowed to use the north side strip and C-17 apron, freeing up space for work to begin on the south side of the existing landing strip.

During the final phase, concrete will be placed on the south side, and work will begin on the cargo handling area which includes the warehouse that will store the equipment off loaded from the aircraft.

"Logistical problems due to weather effects at Tarin Kowt are one of the main reasons behind the decision to improve the dirt landing strip," said Michael E. Weiner, the resident engineer at AES' Tarin Kowt Resident Office. "It's been maintained as a dirt landing strip over the years, but, because of logistical and operational needs, the Air Force is having key landing strips paved."

From November to March each year, the heavy rains quickly degrade the air crews' runway condition reading (RCR), which determines how much braking effort will be needed to come to a stop. RCR values of the dirt strip and wet conditions often lead to a muddy surface that could take several days to dry out. Since the landing strips' silty-clay surface soil expands when it gets even the smallest amount of water, the conditions worsen when it rains. This causes the landing strip to be shut down often during winter. The goal is to make a permanent landing strip useable throughout the year.

However, such a monumental project comes with

its share of unique challenges, especially when there's no space to build a landing strip next to the existing one. "There's a requirement that the landing strip be kept open at all times," said Myers. "We have to build it while it's still in use."

Although leaving the landing strip open to support units that are deploying and redeploying caused a slow project start, Weiner is satisfied with the contractor's progress. "I'm working with a good contractor, and I have confidence that he'll get the work performed to a high level of quality," he said.

In order to improve the landing strip and keep air traffic open, the concrete will be placed at night and literally hours later C-130s will be landing adjacent to freshly placed concrete. The earth work and other preparations will take place during the day.

"I've been working on this project since I arrived here in August of 2009," said Myers.

"Being here since day one and even before the project was awarded, my strong desire is to see the airfield completed." Myers is set to return to the Savannah District's

Construction Division in August 2011.

Before 2007, the dirt landing strip was only one of two access points for the town. Ground access to the outside was a road to the regional center of Kandahar to the south, which was subject to Taliban attacks and washouts. In March 2007, the Army Corps of Engineers began construction of a road from Tarin Kowt westward to Deh Rahwod and then to Shahidi Hassas District, in the western areas of Uruzgan province. At the same time, the Corps also began paving and bridge construction to improve the road to Kandahar.

There are tactical dirt landing strips in use at several FOBs and combat outposts throughout the Uruzgan Province, but now the Tarin Kowt dirt landing strip will be the only paved one.

Once it's complete, the Dutch have discussed plans to build a passenger terminal. "In addition to providing support for the Warfighter, I like that this project is something that is going to be an enduring gift, one way or another, to this province," said Weiner.



A material screening operation at the site is used so that materials can be reused for other site work incorporated into the airfield improvements project. (Photo by Patricia Ryan, public affairs officer, AED)