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**Overseas Contingency Operations:
Observations of BUILDING STRONG®
Farley Watanabe: *Surveying Impacts of Troops on the Afghan Landscape***

By Dino W. Buchanan, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI NR 14-09) As part of the Pacific Connection's continuing coverage of our deployed civilian warriors downrange, we showcase this deployment interview with Farley Watanabe, an archaeologist who works in the District's regulatory office. For three months in early 2009 Farley was deployed to Afghanistan Engineer District. He offers his insights on volunteering for his tour and working at the tip of the spear:

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2-2-2 WATANABE

Did you volunteer to deploy in support of Overseas Contingency Operations?

“I volunteered when the Honolulu District Emergency Management Office mentioned the tasker for environmental baseline surveys in Afghanistan. I felt it was a good opportunity for me to put into practice those life skills I had learned as a District archaeologist, participant in DERP/FUDS (Defense Environmental Restoration Program-Formerly Used Defense Site) program assessments, civil works environmental studies and regulatory permits, as well as more recent experiences and certification with the Power PRT (Power Planning and Response team) and FEST-A (Forward Engineer Support Team) teams and the experience at the National Training Center, Ft. Irwin, Calif. Very simply, I believed it was just the right time, place and purpose to help our Soldiers and our reconstruction mission in Afghanistan.”

What did you hope to accomplish by deploying/ What was your mission exactly?

“To identify the condition of force protection measures and critical infrastructure to ensure that the expansion of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) would not adversely impact troop health and safety, the natural and cultural environment, and the health and welfare of the neighboring Afghan people.”

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3-3-3 WATANABE

What did you accomplish/ How did those accomplishments make you feel?

“We successfully completed the surveys and I met a lot of good people from American officers and Non-commissioned officers to Soldiers with coalition forces (like Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and Dutch), contractors and local Afghan proprietors. I felt good, satisfied, humbled that we live in an imperfect world and more appreciative of all those people, values, services and things that I often took for granted.”

How did your mission impact the people of Afghanistan?

“I’m not sure our mission made an immediate impact. It feels like we made just a small deposit for a rainy day. Our impact more probably will be felt when each Afghani feels safe, feels that family and livelihood are protected, that they can enjoy the comforts of reliable electricity, safe drinking water, smooth transportation, education and medical services; attributing it to the efforts and sacrifices of former American and Coalition Forces and contractors.”

How does the mission there make us safer in America?

“Hopefully, an emerging, stable, and self-sufficient Afghan and Pakistan national governments may minimize the impact of their insurgents on our shores by managing the elimination of those combatants-in-common on their turf.”

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4-4-4 WATANABE

Where were you and what did you experience/see?

“I worked in the command regions South (Canadian) and East (American). Despite impressions at home that all Afghan green fields are overflowing with opium plants, they aren’t. Most are filled with wheat. The snow-capped mountain ranges rival our Rocky Mountains. Steak & lobster was the featured dinner at the 101st Airborne DFAC (dining facility) on Fridays. I discovered haggling at the local bazaar is an artform. And looking at gravel surfaces can turn up quite a few gems.”

Was it rewarding? What were the best things you experienced?

“It was very rewarding. Being able to see the challenges and opportunities for improving the quality of life for the Afghan people unfolding through education, permanent infrastructure, agriculture, commerce and ecotourism seem to be endless. Our team camaraderie was great; being able to blend our collective skills to accomplish our customer’s needs (U.S. Army Central Command & U.S. Central Command), welcoming new experiences plus being able to peruse the many fine Afghan crafted works like rugs and gems at the local bazaar.”

Did you feel secure, safe?

“Yes and thankful as we participated in many “fallen comrade” ceremonies at Bagram Airfield. Ceremonies were held when a fatality from anywhere in the contingency theater went home - escorted with the honors and respect of peers.”

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5-5-5 WATANABE

What was the deployment process like?

“Atypical for our four district teammates as we were considered to be on separate missions from AED sponsorship, but we still in-processed at TAC (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Deployment Center, Winchester, Virginia, home of the Corps' Transatlantic Programs Center) for three days to receive shots, security briefings, a new CAC (computer access card), clothes and other mission-essential field equipment. We then flew via United Airlines to Kuwait's Ali Al Salem Airbase where clearing customs was a wake-up call to the workings of an Arabian service economy: tips for non-Kuwaiti porters, restroom attendants and parking lot porters. We waited nearly one week for our connecting AMC (Air Mobility Command) flight to Afghanistan by way of a detour via Manas AFB, Kyrgyzstan.

What advice would you offer to people who are considering deployment?

“Do it for the right reasons. Be flexible, patient, resolute, open-minded and mindful that you are not the center of the universe and that the Corps' mission is to help others. Also be mindful that certain experiences, good, great and not so great will happen whether you are ready or not.”

Would you recommend deploying to other civilians?

“Yes, once you find the right reasons for being there like public service, mind change, new experiences, travel and new adventures.”

What do you think civilians get out of such a deployment?

“A personal sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction for helping other people.”

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