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**Overseas Contingency Operations:
Observations of BUILDING STRONG®
Toni Agustin: *Bringing the “Spirit of Aloha” to the fields of Afghanistan***

By Dino W. Buchanan, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI NR 15-09) As part of the Pacific Connection’s continuing coverage of our deployed civilian warriors downrange, the Pacific Connection interviewed Toni Agustin, a secretary in the District’s Programs and Project Management branch via email from Afghanistan where she is currently deployed to the Corps’ Afghanistan Engineer District (AED). Toni offers her early insights on volunteering to work at the tip of the spear:

How is it that you deployed to Overseas Contingency Operations?

“I volunteered. I wanted to go to AED and make a difference while learning more about the Corps and maybe help my career.”

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2-2-2 AGUSTIN

How does your mission impact the people of Afghanistan?

“I don’t know yet, but I hope the people in Afghanistan appreciate our being here. I know we’re making progress, but it will take some time before we can see the real results. I think if we all work together the world can be a safer place.”

What is your mission / Where are you working and what kind of experiences are you having?

“I’m in Kabul, Afghanistan, but due to my job description I’m not able to go ‘outside the wire’ and see anything. However, I was able to get onto a helicopter ride that was doing a recon mission and I was able to see a lot of the land. Also there are people who keep us apprised of the situation and tell us what it’s like to be out ‘on the ground.’ ”

What’s the work like?

“The only hard thing about working 10 hours days (and only four hours on Friday) is we don’t have a day off to rest. But we’re here to do one thing and that’s to support the mission - so we do what we have to do.”

What is it like working in a military environment with civilian contractors/GS employees?

“It’s like working back home with everyone. We are all Americans and we watch out for each other.”

Do you feel secure, safe?

“Yes I do, but that doesn’t mean you don’t think about what going on outside.”

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3-3-3 AGUSTIN

What was the deployment process like?

“For me it was very crazy, very hard and I think it needs improvement. There should be one check list and one source that you go to when you have questions.”

Would you recommend deploying to other civilians?

“Yes. Because I think it can be a great and rewarding experience.”

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

“I think that it depends on where you work here, but mainly I think they get more experience. For example, I’m in contracting now and some people never get to see the end product, but working here in AED you can see a project from beginning to the end in a year and to me that’s a feeling of real accomplishment.”

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

“It’s not easy being away from your family and friends and I sometimes wonder why I did this. However, I think that this is a once in a life time experience and right now I’m glad that I did it. It sure does make you proud to be an American.”

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