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SUPPORTING GWOT CHALLENGES, ENLIGHTENS BIRGADO BROTHERS

By Sarah H. Cox, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI – NR 06-06) When Wayne Birgado left Hawaii in July 2004 to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan he never expected to be working alongside his older brother on crucial military construction projects.

Birgado, a construction representative from Honolulu District's Schofield Resident Office, has spent the past 18 months serving as a Construction Representative for Afghanistan Engineering District (AED).

Wayne and his brother, U. S. Army Staff Sgt. Clifford Birgado, are currently working as a team at Bagram Airfield on different projects for the Corps of Engineers. Staff Sgt. Birgado serves as a Logistics NCO and a construction representative for the new base entry control point project, while Wayne currently works on the construction of the new airfield and control tower.

"I've been showing Staff Sgt. Birgado the ropes and training him on Corps procedures and policies," Wayne said. "Everyday he wants to learn more and more about the Corps' functions and how we get involved with the Projects within Afghanistan".

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2-2-2 BIRGADO

Prior to arriving in Afghanistan, Staff Sgt. Birgado served in Iraq with the 411th Combat Engineers attached to the 1st Cavalry. .

Staff Sgt. Birgado says working in Afghanistan alongside his brother was partly by design. After returning from Iraq, he realized he wanted to provide support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the Corps needed his experience in asphalt placement and construction.

The chance to keep an eye on his younger brother was an added bonus.

"When we go outside of Bagram, my brother is like my body guard. Since he is active duty, he carries the weapon, I feel pretty safe," Wayne said.

Wayne Birgado's work, ensuring that crucial construction projects for the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and U.S. Forces meet strict government guidelines, has presented some serious challenges.

"It's like nothing I've done before. The type of resources we have to work with and overcoming the language problems has been a bit tough," Birgado said.

Together the Birgado brothers have witnessed drastic changes in the Afghanistan. Afghans, suffering for years under Taliban and Russian rule, are some of the poorest people in the world. During the Taliban rule, Afghanistan developed a critical shortage of educated and skilled laborers.

When Operation Enduring Freedom began in 2001, only six percent of the country had electricity and the infrastructure was degraded or nonexistent.

AED's mission provides direct support to the stability and success of the country with the Corps helping to create the infrastructure and support facilities to ultimately serve 70,000 ANA Soldiers across Afghanistan.

The ANA program alone currently encompasses more than \$800 million of work that includes providing all of the facilities to support operations, maintenance and training of the ANA.

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3-3-3 BIRGADO

When Wayne Birgado first arrived in Kandahar, the Corps was beginning to build an ANA camp to include barracks, a dining facility, water wells, medical clinic, force protection structures and a power plant. He was later transferred to Kabul to provide quality assurance on the ANA Camp project at Daraulaman, which included construction of similar buildings as well as a 13-megawatt power plant, a hospital and sewage treatment plant.

Wayne's extended Afghanistan tour has allowed him to be part of and witness positive changes in Afghanistan's social climate. He says he feels a great sense of accomplishment by helping to rebuild the country and seeing Afghans seeking freedom and trying to do away with violence.

"When I first came here in 2004, there were no kites or singing allowed in many of the provinces," Wayne said. "There weren't many people walking around Kabul Capital and all the women were dressed in burkas. But now the kids are playing with kites everywhere, people who'd moved away are coming back and some women have stopped wearing burkas."

Wayne Birgado went to Afghanistan to help provide a better life for the Afghans and to help reduce the threat of terrorism. What he received in return can not be measured.

"I've learned so much about life, other cultures and how proud I am to be an American," Wayne said.

He also feels honored to be a part of Afghanistan's reformation.

"The people want to get back to their lives with goats, sheep and honey. I think they want to put the dark days behind them and educate and feed their children".

To learn more about serving with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan visit www.aed.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Honolulu Engineer District, check out our website: <http://www.poh.usace.army.mil>.