

Teamwork, skepticism lead to early finish for project

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10/10/2007 - BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan (AFPN) -- The motivation to prove skeptics wrong and a strong foundation of teamwork set the stage for the recent completion of an important new ramp here.

The \$8.9 million construction project, started in 2005, created a 270,000 square-foot concrete ramp to replace the corrugated "steel beach" that had previously supported the Army's helicopter missions here.

"We were told it couldn't be done before winter," said Tech. Sgt. John L. Farley a 1st Expeditionary Red Horse Group lead craftsman, who noted that Afghanistan's harsh weather ruled out any work after late October. "We saw that as a challenge and wanted to prove those people wrong -- and we did."

Thousands of hours have been invested in the project since its inception, with about a dozen people at work at the site at any one time. He has deployed here three times in support of the project, said Sergeant Farley, who is from Stumptown, W.Va.

"When I came here the first time, I saw steel everywhere I looked -- and I thought to myself, 'We've got to get this out of here.' Those surfaces held water and were very uneven. In winter they would freeze over and be almost impossible to plow," he said.

Beyond the obvious improvements in safety, those involved in the project also praised the flexibility the new ramp brings.

"It was designed to hold the weight of a fully-loaded C-17 Globemaster III," said Tech. Sgt. James Toth, the project manager, who is from Hazelton, Pa. "That will mean bad things for the enemy -- and will definitely make it easier for us to take the fight to them."

Sergeant Toth said that in addition to the motivation provided by skeptics, teamwork was another essential key to the project's successful conclusion.

"It was very daunting at the start, when you would look down the 1,600-foot length and see nothing but steel. But our people have a great attitude and worked very hard. They had outstanding teamwork and pulled off what some people thought we couldn't get done," said Sergeant Toth.

Army Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, the Combined Joint Task Force-82 commanding general, added his own praise during an Oct. 4 ceremony recognizing the accomplishments of the Red Horse team.

"There was nothing you couldn't do," he told the team members. "It is characteristic of organizations like yours that you get it done better and faster than anyone else."

Sergeant Farley said he was proud to do his part in the war on terrorism.

"Our folks know that their work is really helping the mission," he said. "The Air Force wanted this ramp. The Army wanted it. Everybody wanted this but the bad guys."

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