US Army Corps of Engineers®
Far East District

EAST GATE EDITION

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The Corps, The Earth, and Its Scientists

By Edwyna W. Brooks
FED Public Affairs

A geotechnical and environmental investigation is required anytime the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructs something on or within the ground. This comprehensive investigation ensures the structures can be successfully constructed on solid foundations in accordance with analysis of subsurface conditions. Most importantly, it guarantees the building won't collapse or fall down because of foundation failure.

Therefore, the Geotechnical and Environmental Engineering (G&EE) Branch is vital to any project or construction site's big picture. Their site investigations take place before construction begins and the data they gather determines design of the structure and future stability of the proposed building.

Song Un-ho (left) and Choe Chong-uk (material engineering technicians) performing tests in the Materials Testing Lab. (FED file photo)

The geotechnical engineering discipline delves into the science involving the behavior of soils, rocks, groundwater and other materials. Ultimately, the Far East District (FED) G&EE Branch's goal is to investigate and understand what lies beneath the earth's surface. Their research is used to evaluate subsurface conditions; to identify potential impacts on the planned construction; and to design foundations and retaining walls for the planned structure.

The G&EE Branch consists of four sections including Geotechnical section; Geology and Hydrology section; Environmental section; Geomatics and support section and secures its proficiencies during the Design phase of a project. Each of the sections contribute to the overall quality assurance support the G&EE provides. This group of varied professionals include civil and environmental engineers, geologists, biologists, and chemists.

The Geotechnical Design Unit and the Materials Testing Lab (MTL) fall within the Geotechnical Section. Their MTL is periodically inspected and validated by the Materials Testing Center (MTC), Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC).

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The Far East District Leadership was on site to inspect its new well water drilling rig. This new piece of equipment will allow geologists to drill 1000 feet beneath to earth's surface and through its bedrock to find water sources. (FED file photos)

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No other commercial lab in Korea has been validated by MTC and fully confirmed to the ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials). This enhanced capability allows the branch to provide various quality assurance activities such as the inspection of the QC lab, concrete and asphalt batch plants as well as quality assurance testing in-house and in the field.

PROVIDING QUALITY ASSURANCE SUPPORT FOR THE FED

The G&EE Branch provides quality assurance via inspections, its test pile program, and construction materials testing. The construction materials testing analyzes soil, concrete, aggregate, and bituminous material at both design and construction stage.

Geotechnical engineers develop the drilling, sampling and laboratory testing programs to understand what is beneath the footprint of the facility and provide geotechnical recommendations to the project designer concerning the grading plan, design load, and performance criteria.

Materials engineering technicians, Song Un-ho and Choe Chong-uk are responsible for conducting a portion of the geotechnical investigation that discovers the bearing capabilities and degree of settlement that take place as a result of a proposed construction. This information contributes to the overall construction process because their determinations will be used by the branch's geotechnical engineer to design the foundation and soil improvement recommendations.

For example, Camp Humphreys' new Family Housing Towers has a concrete placement of over 3000m3 based in part on the results from the Geotechnical Section's reporting. This means that over 8,000 tons of concrete was placed to support this massive structure.

CLOSING OUT THE GEOTECHNICAL PROCESS

The geotechnical phase of the project is complete once the preparation of the geotechnical design report is complete. This extensive report is comprised of the engineers' analyses and design recommendations, topographic survey, subsurface explorations, and materials testing that was performed for the project.

The idea of geotechnical engineering or using scientists to complete a building may seem a foreign concept, but to put it plainly, this dynamic team is put in place to make sure its latest building doesn't lean or collapse.

Song Un-ho (standing) and Choe Chong-uk (material engineering technicians) performing tests in the Materials Testing Lab. (FED file photo)

The Power of Recruiting, Training, and Retaining: Assembling the Best Workforce for the FED

By Edwyna W. Brooks
FED Public Affairs

As the Corps of Engineers Far East District works to complete the 107 projects currently in construction phase, the District's general and administrative (G&A) staff work diligently behind the scenes to support all the public can see as they drive by any U.S. Army Corps of Engineers construction site.

Touchpoint Leadership: A Way to Get After it ALL

This mighty administrative team of approximately 100 civilians is overseen by the Far East District's Deputy Commander, Lt. Col. Dennis J. McGee. The District Deputy is responsible for recruiting, training, and retaining the market's most qualified candidates. His selections directly impact the overall business performance of the Corps and helps provide its organizational cohesion.

In fact, this team's super-effective response during the peninsula's latest bout with COVID 19 was exemplary. Its operations involved everything from providing safety in the office's mail room to those traveling to and from the peninsula, and even facilitating installation access for just over 2,000 construction contractors during the elevated health protection condition.

Keeping abreast and current of the District's G&A needs is a challenge. To stay well-informed and organized, the deputy holds bi-weekly 30-minute meetings with the heads of each of his nine departments. This touchpoint leadership style gives the deputy commander face to face interaction time with each department-head at least twice a month.

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Lt. Col. Dennis J. McGee is seen here holding a traditional staff meeting with his team in Pre-Covid 19 conditions. (FED file photo)

Michael Banks: From Cavalry Scout to Engineer and Project Manager

By Edwyna W. Brooks
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The Project managers (PMs) are vital to the work of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They are project catalysts who combine both customer and stakeholder expectations to ensure a project is completed on time and within budget. Michael Banks is one such Far East District Project Manager.

However, Michael's career began in a field far removed from Construction. He joined the U.S. Army as a cavalry scout but was unable to shake his lifelong dream of becoming an engineer. Michael studied to obtain a degree in civil engineering and later a master's in construction management. He commissioned, became an engineer for the Army, and fulfilled his life-long dream. Now he works as the "eyes and ears" of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"I have been able to use my work experience in the U.S. Army to optimize my day to day operations within the Corps," Banks says. "Organization is key because there is so much going on, but I don't operate in a vacuum. I am able to rely on my team to share responsibility across the project. One thing is for sure," he says, "You are never bored here! I've worked on all types of projects. I've worked on 80 million-dollar projects and I've worked on 150 thousand-dollar renovations. Each has their challenges but our team here at the FED is always there to meet and overcome them."

"The Corps is filled with problem solvers and each team member can bring a different method to solving an issue. This type of collaborative approach makes us a stronger unit and ensures we utilize the best solutions available," Michael Banks says. "Our team is filled with subject matter experts and everyone has their role."

The Corps' PMs are exceptional customer experience managers who nurture collaborative relationships with their customers. They gather and report feedback on project delivery performance and proactively address customer concerns. They stay in constant communication with all stakeholders to keep them informed of plans, progress, issues, resolutions, impacts, and lessons learned.

These specialized team builders identify the areas of expertise required for a project and coordinate with their Far East District team to build and maintain a capable Project Delivery Team (PDT). PMs later lead this diverse interdisciplinary PDT through high-quality assignments that meet the customer's expectations, the established project objectives, and the Corps requirements.

Michael Banks works as a project manager in the Far East District. (FED file photo)

Michael Banks, FED Project Manager says, "You have to learn how to best support the team to keep things rolling. Leaning on the people around you and getting them to work with you helps us anticipate and mitigate any issues."

As such, PMs rely on the organization's subject matter experts who use their knowledge in civil works programs, policies, and project delivery to endorse and sometimes challenge the quality of all products procured in the support of a project.

They also work to ensure the project schedule is maintained. The Corps' project managers achieve this by consistently analyzing performance trends, forecasting schedule,

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This consistency in process is due to his collaborative approach to organizational development. Lt. Col. McGee has created an organizational culture that motivates his subordinates while enforcing the goals of the Far East District. As such, it is quite the commonplace to see the deputy moving through the halls of the FED headquarters greeting employees and simply asking about their day.

His direct charge includes the executive office, equal employment opportunity, internal review, information management, logistics management, public affairs, safety and occupational health, security-plans and operations, and the workforce management offices.

The Far East District Deputy empowers each of his departmental managers to think outside the box to achieve the Far East District mission. He doesn't settle for the staff providing an initial "no" and pushes them to find a way to get to "yes" so the District's managers and supervisors can take care of their employees and meet the mission. This leadership style allowed his managers the autonomy needed to help their employees adjust to the new normal of the pandemic and now to transition back into the organization's post-COVID environment.

Recruit, Train, And Retain for the Corps

When asked how he gets to the business of recruiting the best candidates for the District, Lt. Col. McGee provided a very detailed answer, "We have an ongoing recruiting campaign to find the markets holding the largest areas of recruitment opportunity. I think our largest challenge is that we aren't well known in the general public. We use several initiatives to better advertise our employment opportunities and have a few recruitment programs outside the USAJOBS network. We also advertise in a number of professional engineering magazines and other publications."

"We take every opportunity to meet the general public during local career fairs and monthly informational sessions with the Solider for Life-Transition program," says Lt. Col. McGee .

Additionally, the Far East District has a resume/email tracking system for those seeking to work with the Corps here in Korea. Interested parties should submit their current resume and any supporting documents to: DLL-CEPOF-WM@usace.army.mil. You may also find career opportunities listed here: https://www.pof.usace.army.mil/Careers.aspx.

"The Corps of Engineers portfolio performs better than any large Engineering firm in the industry and there is virtually nothing in the world to compare us against. We compensate our employees very well and have a large variation in the positions and salaries we offer as a result of our many career options. Additionally, we offer the benefit of stability, job security, and retirement. These are attributes that aren't as easy to find outside of government employment."

Deputy Commander, Lt. Col. McGee is dedicated to the Corps mission and ensuring that its staff is prepared to handle it. As an organization that prides itself on its efficiencies and employment training, the Far East District is always prepared to not only hire the best candidate, but to also provide them with additional tools to sharpen their skills simultaneously.

Michael Banks: From Cavalry Scout to Engineer and Project Manager

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budget, manpower, or quality issues to proactively implement actions that maximize project execution. In short, the Far East District's highly trained project managers work diligently in the background to provide project continuity.

If you or someone you know is interested in a career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, send your resume and any supporting documents to: DLL-CEPOF-WM@usace.army.mil.

You may also find career opportunities listed here: https://www.pof.usace.army.mil/Careers.aspx.

Project Engineer Nicole Hill and Her Pet-Friendly Assignment

By Edwyna W. Brooks
FED Public Affairs

Nicole Hill is the Project Engineer overseeing the construction of Camp Humphrey's newest pet-friendly facility. Charged with ensuring this project is completed safely, on budget, and schedule; Nicole has worked diligently with project contractors to deliver amenities pet enthusiasts will love.

From heated floors in the kennels to cameras in every corner of the building – inside and out; this Project Engineer has used her educational background in mechanical engineering to deliver engineering excellence. Nicole's work experience with Caterpillar© makes her an excellent candidate to see this job through.

Nicole was a prime candidate for employment with the Corps of Engineers after having worked on projects at the Pentagon and other military installations. Finding her footing with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Fort Bragg (Wilmington District), Nicole was able to transfer her skills to the Far East District as her family PCS'd to South Korea.

Here, her extensive professional background in civil construction and corporate projects could instantly be put to use in Humphrey's highly anticipated pet care facility set to house 9 small and 21 large kennels. Equipped with heated outdoor sections just off their kennel units, this building comprised of sound-absorbing ceiling tiles and walls will be a great addition to Humphreys family-friendly options for pet care.

A 20-unit cat condo and doggie daycare were also mentioned in her description of this new facility set to end construction in Summer 2021.

"I have two dogs myself and I can see my family bringing them here. The people who use these facilities will have the same amenities they would find outside of the post. This facility is going to be really nice," Nicole says.

The beauty of Nicole's job is watching the idea of a pet care center actually turn into one. "My job on this project is to foresee a problem and provide clarification or verify that a problem exists. Then it becomes my duty to solve it via code and regulation within scope or by way of a modification," says this project engineer. "The great thing about this project is that it is small enough that I get to become closely involved with all of the inner workings, but it's also complex enough that it isn't monotonous. It remains challenging and therefore exciting."

Nicole Hill works as a project manager overseeing the construction of Camp Humphreys newest pet-friendly facility. (FED file photo)

"The best part of working with the Corps' Far East District is the comradery," Nicole Hill remarks. "There is nothing more satisfying than achieving a level of rapport with my coworkers from other cultures because once you've reached that point, all parties have no choice but to succeed. It is great to have the help of Con Rep JC Hayes. He makes sure our contractors are remaining safely on task and that our specifications are being met as we progress throughout the project. JC has been an asset to this project."

Mr. Hayes' work onsite allows Nicole to focus on administering payroll for the site contractors and resolving issues in the field. Having also worked as a project manager, Nicole is skilled at balancing projects and their budget.

Nicole and her Con Rep JC Hayes look forward to completing construction on this project for the Humphreys Community.

FED Safety Gram

November 2020

Prepare for Cold Weather

Winter will be here before you know it:

- Check tires for proper air pressure.
- Secondary roads have full sandbags to assist if POV is stuck in the snow.
- Check you POV out every week or have a qualified mechanic perform the checks.
- Check anti-freeze with a tester
- Plan to travel in the middle of the day when the sun is out.
- It will be colder outside when the sun goes down or if it overcast skies.
- Park your POV facing the sun, so the sun rays heat up the inside of your POV.

Thanksgiving Safety Tips:

- Food safety starts from the purchase to the preparation to serving.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap.
- Keep the kitchen off-limits to other than food preparation.
- Start cooking with a clean stove and oven.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Move away from the stove anything that could catch on fire.

Army Safety Management System: What is that?

- Program Management ensures compliance with safety standards.
- Training & Promotion ensures design and development of safety training.
- Inspection & Assessment ensures safety inspections, evaluations and surveys are conducted.
- Mishap Reporting & Investigation ensures incidents are reviewed IAW all standards.
- Hazard Analysis & Countermeasures focuses on collection, analysis of safety data to identify trends, establish priorities and guide safety initiatives.