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## Center leaders visit deployed

**HUNTSVILLE, Ala.** – U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center Commander Col. Nello Tortora and top members of his staff from Huntsville, Ala., thanked a group of Huntsville employees on Nov. 11 for serving in Afghanistan to assist the Corps of Engineers' mission to rebuild the Asian country's ravaged infrastructure.

Tortora, Huntsville Deputy Commander for Programs and Technical Management Charles Ford and Huntsville Director of Ordnance and Explosives Mike Hubbard, rendezvoused with eight Huntsville employees at the Qalaa House compound, which serves as the headquarters for the Corps of Engineers in northern Afghanistan.

Tortora thanked the Huntsville employees for leaving the U. S. to live and work in Afghanistan for periods ranging from six months to two years.

Tortora met the employees during a weeklong tour in Afghanistan that focused on mine clearance and environmental remediation, which are areas of expertise among Huntsville personnel.

"This whole effort over here is the number one priority for the Army Corps of Engineers," the colonel told the Huntsville employees. "There is no more important program than what you all are doing."

The Corps of Engineers' mission here — constructing facilities for Afghanistan's army and national police force, and to build roads, dams and other infrastructure systems — tops the Defense Base Closure and Realignment program or any other big-ticket project in the U.S., he said.

A factor that makes the team in Afghanistan even more exceptional is that it's comprised piecemeal of Corps of Engineers employees and other government workers from across the United States and the world.

"We don't have a group of civilians that are ready to just come on over here. We don't have them just standing by waiting to come over here. It's all volunteers," Tortora said.

"One of the things we're really proud of in Huntsville – and it's certainly because of you all – is that we've had well over our percentage of volunteers for the size of the organization that we are in Huntsville. I'm really proud of that because it shows that we have people in Huntsville who want to volunteer and want to make a difference for the Army Corps of Engineers and here in Afghanistan," he said.

Overall, about 16 Huntsville employees are on temporary assignments with the Corps of Engineers at locations across Afghanistan, which is the size of Texas. An additional eight Huntsville employees are on assignments with other organizations in Afghanistan.

Tortora gave a commander's coin to each of the employees at Qalaa House for accepting the challenges and hardships associated with working in a war zone.

The employee recognized were: program specialist Shah Alam, senior electrical engineering technician Paul Anderson, program manager Omar Ching, human resource specialist Jennifer Haapoja, contract specialist Nicholas Haas, financial

management specialist Carla McNeal, construction representative Alex Nicolas and supervisory workforce manager Stephanie Tucker.

Tucker said she was impressed Tortora, Ford and Hubbard made the effort to catch up with the Huntsville employees in Kabul.

“Here, you’re representing the Corps of Engineers, but you’re also representing your home district. That’s something to be proud about,” Tucker said. “It shows that what we’re doing is important when leadership shows up.”

Before the meeting, the colonel said he welcomed the opportunity to reconnect with Huntsville employees more than 7,400 miles from the home office. Working in Afghanistan provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for employees to gain both professional development and personal fulfillment, he said.

“To be quite honest, the folks that generally volunteer to come over here are some of our more motivated people to begin with. When they come back, I think they have a better appreciation for the Corps’ mission overall, a better appreciation for how they fit into the Army, and how they support the nation,” he said.