

HEARTLAND ENGINEER



KANSAS CITY DISTRICT'S NEWS MAGAZINE

AUGUST 2006



STRATEGIC VISION

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers -
*One Team: Relevant, Ready, Responsive
and Reliable*, proudly serving the Armed
Forces and the Nation now and in the
future.

A full-spectrum Engineer Force of high
quality Civilians and Soldiers, working
with our partners to deliver innovative
and effective solutions to the Nation's
engineering challenges:

- An Army Values-Based Organization
- Focused on the Mission and Those We Serve
- Dedicated to Public Service
- A Vital Part of the Army



THE VISION

Relevant, Ready, Responsive, Reliable

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submitted photo

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NEWSWATCH

Newsbriefs from around the District and around the Corps.



LASTWORD

Amanda Chirpich spent a day interacting with children at Ladd Elementary School. She says it was an eye-opening experience.



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HEARTLAND ENGINEER

AUGUST 2005
 VOL. 4, NO. 3

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ON THE COVER: Col. Michael Rossi speaks on the Corps' Strategic Vision on Aug. 22

Photo by Rusty Thomas

'Shift happens'

COL Michael A. Rossi



I had the pleasure of attending the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Senior Leaders' Conference in mid-August. While our leadership discussed many issues and challenges facing our Corps, the emphasis of the conference was developing the USACE Campaign Plan. I shared with you that Campaign Plan—the Vision, three Campaign Goals, and eight Enabling Capabilities—at the District town hall on 22 August (See article, page 8).

The lasting lesson I have from that conference is not so much from the structured agenda, but from something I read while in Dallas. One of the neat perks from this conference was that attendees were allowed to select a professional book from about a dozen or so offerings—I like books, so this beat the heck out of a t-shirt as far as I'm concerned. I chose Douglas Macgregor's "Transformation Under Fire: Revolutionizing How America Fights," and began reading while at the conference. The lasting impression came from a historical vignette cited by the author to show how turf retards transformation.

"It was when the "emergency" had been declared (after the Germans invaded Poland in the autumn of 1939) that Gen. John K. Herr wrote a letter to all officers in the cavalry (he was Chief of Cavalry) asking them to state a preference between horse cavalry and the mechanized force. Since he was known to detest the mechanized force, this presented recipients of the letters with quite a dilemma. If they opted for horse, they would be ruined professionally by missing out on what was obviously the coming thing. If they opted for mechanized, they knew that Herr would make them pay in other ways. Either

way, then, the response would cause them to cut their throats professionally. Herr loosened up later and allowed some mechanized units to be formed, but not at the expense of a single horse regiment. His counterparts as Chief of Infantry (Lynch) and Artillery (Danford) were equally hidebound, which led to George Marshall's abolishing the positions of chiefs of branches, thereby winning the war (p.14)."

So, what's the lesson for us? Think in terms of USACE 2012. The key line above is that, "Herr loosened up later and allowed some mechanized units to be formed, but not at the expense of a single horse regiment." The world was changing—the world is *always* changing—and Marshall and the nation needed agents for change. The stovepipes in the Army's bureaucracy refused to give up turf, even with the nation facing World War II. So he abolished them. Are we being asked to change for the greater good — to share or give up some turf to meet future challenges? Are we grudgingly accepting new structures and ideas (regionalization) while holding onto some of our "horse regiments?" We can either spend energy resisting the inevitable crush of change or we can embrace the opportunities it brings. We owe it to ourselves and our Corps to be not only clear-eyed, but aggressively visionary as we go forward.

As Yogi Berra once said, "The future ain't what it used to be." I look forward writing the District's future with all of you.

The Gladys Davies Award



Ms. Rhonda Williams, Information Management, 2005 Gladys Davies Award Winner

Rhonda Williams, the recipient of this year's Gladys Davies Award for Administrative excellence, was unaware she had been nominated for the award.

The Davies Award, created in 1987, honors administrative assistants for excellent service. It is named after Gladys Davies who served 17 different District Engineers from 1936 to 1973.

"I didn't have any idea until we were at the ceremony," Williams said. "Echo Kean, our supervisor, asked that we all attend the ceremony, but I didn't know way. It was a total surprise."

She learned she was winning the award when her name was called.

"I was sitting in the back of the room and they said my name. For me it was like 'Oh, my gosh! What did I do?'" Williams said. "I'm not very good at being in the spotlight," Williams said. "I was quite flushed and surprised when

I got the award."

Williams has been in government service for 32 years.

"I started out with the Department of Treasury in the disbursement center as a keypunch operator," Williams said. "I moved to the Corps of Engineers two years later – I was still doing keypunch but it was an upgrade.

Today Williams works in the District's information management office.

"I do administrative services and I'm the substitute librarian," she said.

She said receiving the Davies award made her more aware of details in her job.

"I never think of myself as doing great, great things. It made me realize how important all the little things are – I like being in the background but still being recognized."

PEOPLEPOWER

People Power is a monthly column designed to highlight the outstanding accomplishments of a district employee. Supervisors and peers are encouraged to nominate team members to be featured in an upcoming issue of Heartland Engineer.

Nominations should include a brief summary of the nominee's accomplishment and contact information for the person submitting the nomination. Nominations should be submitted by the 15th of the month for consideration for the next issue.

Nominations should be sent to:

PEOPLEPOWER
c/o Public Affairs Office
700 Federal Building
601 East 12th Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64106
or e-mailed to:
thomas.a.o'hara@usace.army.mil

CORPS PROVIDES HURRICANE RELIEF

MONTGOMERY, Ala.-- The Walla Wall District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, deployed an eight-member power team to support Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

The team was sent to Montgomery, Ala., where it will support the region's power needs. The team will work to meet the emergency power requirements established by Alabama's Emergency Operations Center, including setting up generators for police and fire departments and other emergency responders.

The Corps typically is involved in eight disaster relief missions including power, humanitarian support (ice and water), debris removal, temporary housing, emergency restoration of crucial facilities, demolition and stabilization of structures, temporary construction of access routes and temporary roofing. - *Walla Walla District Public Affairs.*

USACE TO ASSIST DISPLACED AFGHANS

KABUL, Afghanistan-- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Afghanistan government representatives signed a Memorandum of Understanding Aug. 16 on a multi-phase project to provide housing for displaced Afghans.

Representatives from the Afghanistan Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Kabul Municipality, the US Agency for International Development, and the USACE Afghanistan Engineer District signed the memorandum.

The MOU details the group's cooperative efforts to provide dwellings for up to 2,000 displaced families currently living in Kabul.

CMD Constructors Inc. is currently performing the first phase of the project which includes drilling water production wells, setting up a pump station and a transmission line to lift groundwater pumped from the wells to an elevated storage reservoir.

As an added benefit, the Boys' School in Janan Kala village is slated to receive a water transmission line, and the village will get a frost-free tap.

Phase 2 creates planning and site

development for up to 2,000 housing units, three schools, two clinics, a community center, and neighborhood parks.

Phase 3 of the project implements construction training for the beneficiaries of the homes, who will then construct their own home.

The dwellings themselves will be single level, four-room housing units with two living/sleeping areas, a food prep area and a wash area.

"The project is wonderful. It will not only provide displaced Afghans homes but will also provide the skills training needed for future employment. It will enable participants to literally build their own community," AED Project Manager Shannon Swartz.-- *Mo Ramsey, Afghanistan Engineer District.*

MILITARY TOPS AMERICAN TRUST LIST

WASHINGTON-- The American public has more confidence in the military than in any other institution, according to a Gallup poll released this week.

Seventy-four percent of those surveyed in Gallup's 2005 confidence poll said they have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military - more than in a full range of other government, religious, economic, medical, business and news organizations.

The poll, conducted between May 23 and 26, involved telephone interviews with a randomly selected sample of 1,004 people 18 and older, Gallup officials said. Those surveyed expressed strong confidence in the military, with 42 percent expressing "a great deal" of confidence in the military and 32 percent, "quite a lot" of confidence. Eighteen percent said they have "some" confidence, 7 percent, "very little," and 1 percent, "none."

Public confidence in the military jumped following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and has remained consistently high, Gallup officials noted. The 2002 survey reflected a 13 percent increase in confidence in the military over the previous year's poll. The public expressed a 79 percent high-confidence rate in the military in 2002, an 82 percent rate in 2003, and a 75 percent rate in 2004.

This year's 74 percent confidence level exceeded that of all 15 institutions included in the 2005 survey. Police ranked second, with 63 percent of responders expressing "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in them. Organized religion rated third, with 53 percent of responders expressing high confidence, and banks rated a 49 percent high-confidence rate.

Health maintenance organizations bottomed out the list, with just 17 percent of responders expressing high confidence in them. Big business and Congress tied for the second- and third-lowest rankings, with 22 percent of responders expressing "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in them.

The Gallup organization noted that public trust in television news and newspapers reached an all-time low this year, with 28 percent of responders expressing high confidence in them. - *Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service*

CORPS OFFERS NEW LAKE ANNUAL PASSES

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Outdoor enthusiasts in the Midwest can now buy their 2005 Army Corps of Engineers annual day use pass at any of the Corps' lakes across the country.

The \$30 annual pass permits a vehicle and accompanying passengers to use boat ramps and swimming beaches at Corps-operated recreation areas anywhere in the country.

"The passes have changed significantly since last year," said Ken Davidson, a recreation specialist with the Corps in Kansas City. "Even with all the changes, we have been able to keep the price the same."

The sticker-based pass system previously used by the Corps has been replaced this year with a tag that hangs from a vehicle's review mirror. "We have also done away with the half-price second tag, as the new tag can be easily moved between the pass holders' vehicles," Davidson said.

Golden Age and Golden Access discounts still apply; however, each cardholder is only eligible to purchase one tag at the discounted rate.

For more information on the Corps' new annual passes or for the nearest location of an office to purchase a pass, contact Davidson at (816) 983-3650.

for V alor

By Diana McCoy

A former Kansas City District employee received the Federal Executive Board Distinguished Valor Award in a special ceremony, May 5, 2005, for showing extraordinary courage, selflessness and bravery in a war zone, which resulted in saving a contractor's life during his tour in Iraq last October.



Submitted photo

Mitch Frazier, former Kansas City District public affairs officer, visits Egyptian contractor Wardah Williams in the hospital along with Jim Cullum of the Little Rock District. Frazier and Cullum gave Williams first aid after a mortar attack in Baghdad.

Mitch Frazier, former chief of Public Affairs for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kansas City District, volunteered to serve four months in Iraq in 2004 as part of the Corps' Gulf Region Division.

"At approximately 1400 hours on October 9, 2004, I was sitting at my desk in the Green Zone when I heard an explosion," Frazier said. "I grabbed my combat lifesaver bag along with other gear, and headed outside to see if I could do anything to help."

The Project and Contracting Office Compound in the Green Zone, located in Baghdad, had been struck by an insurgent's mortar attack. While many people were running away, Frazier and Jim Cullum, a lawyer from Little Rock District, ran 400 meters into the impact area to render aid. Upon arrival, they discovered complete chaos.

Cullum, who used to be a police officer, described the scene in great detail.

"There were several SUVs in the area," Cullum said. "The tires were shredded, the bodies of the

vehicles were really chewed up with shrapnel and windows were broken."

Frazier and Cullum went from one end of the area where the casualties were lying to the other end and counted them as they went, weeding out the dead from those with what Cullum described as "fish eyes," meaning they were "still alive but so nearly dead" he knew they wouldn't make it.

"To give you an idea of how quickly and unexpectedly these attacks happen," Frazier said, "we saw one man still sitting in his lawn chair holding a Pepsi, even though he was already dead from the shrapnel in the back of his head."

Mitch was the first to reach Wardah William, a contractor from Egypt. She was unconscious and kept repeating a continuous cycle of reviving and going back into shock.

Although it had been two years since Frazier had completed the Army's combat lifesaver course, he

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VISION



District Engineer Col. Michael Rossi informed Kansas City District employees' about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers strategic vision in two town hall meetings Aug. 22 in the Richard Bolling Federal Building, Kansas City.

Rossi said the key component of the strategic vision lies applying the "Relevant, Ready, Responsive, Reliable" theme to the District's ongoing operations.

"When you're relevant, you're important, you're necessary," Rossi said. "If you're ready, you anticipate the needs of your customers, so when you're needed, you're there. When you're responsive, not only are you ready, but you can act immediately to meet the needs of the nation. How do you delight your customers? You deliver. Reliability is more important than price."

He said the Corps' spectrum of operation includes five areas: Water resources, the environment, infrastructure, homeland security and warfighting, all of which must be addressed with different emphasis depending on operations tempo.

"We range from situations where it is 'cool,' and the emphasis is on water resources or the environment to where it is 'hot' and the emphasis is on warfighting," Rossi said.

He said enabling capabilities, including sound water resources solutions, life-cycle infrastructure management and stability, reconstruction and homeland security operations can meet the operational needs and fulfill the Corps' mission.

The colonel said regionalization will help address some of the District's challenges. Rossi said one example of this lies in the additional military construction work coming to the District as a result of base realignment and closure, and the return of troops from Europe to bases in the United States.

"At Fort Riley, Kansas, they're going to go from about 10,000 Soldiers in the garrison to about 20,000," Rossi said. "That's going to mean new barracks, new company areas – a lot of military construction. We're going to see a big spike in the workload. The challenge is, we're not going to get twice as big."

He said one approach will be the use of under-employed assets from other districts to help meet the additional workload.

Another area where the Corps is evolving lies in the way it will address

By Eric Cramer

deployments for disaster relief and other missions outside the District, Rossi said.

Rossi said new methods will help foster an “expeditionary mindset,” encouraging those who want to work in contingency operations overseas or in the United States.

“Under (the National Security Personnel System), there will be monetary incentives for being on teams that deploy for contingency operations,” Rossi said. “This means more pay and more training will be available as we build an organization other than the ad hoc ‘who wants to go this time’ organization we’ve used in the past.”

He encouraged District employees to volunteer for

deployment at home and overseas.

“If you have deployed, thank you. If you are planning to go, thank you. And if you’ve had to pick up the slack for someone who has gone, and just because they leave doesn’t mean their work leaves, thank you,” Rossi said.

He said news organizations, including the Associated Press, have begun to tell some of the stories about the Corps efforts. “The good news is starting to get out, and we’re getting away from that old saying ‘if it bleeds, it leads,’” he Rossi said.

Rossi responded to a number of questions from the employees attending the meetings.

Addressing the P2 resource software and its problems, Rossi

said the Corps is working to resolve those problems. “Our options are fix it, or ditch it,” he said. “We’re going to fix it.”

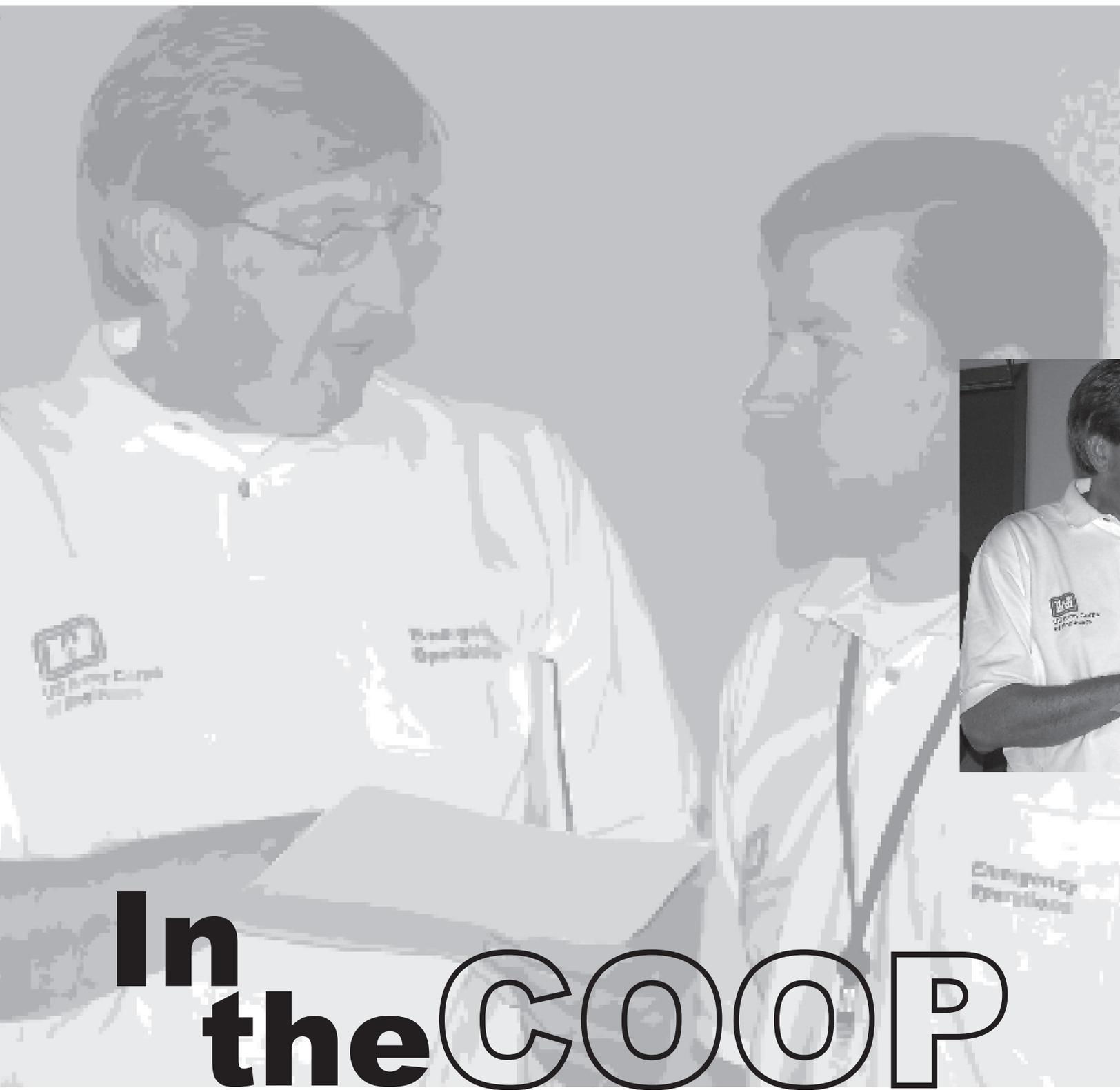
Rossi also responded to questions regarding resource allocations for new projects and problems with contract preparation software used by legal counsel.

The colonel said the new National Security Personnel System will offer pay incentives to those who volunteer for deployment on teams for missions such as hurricane relief or construction in Iraq. He said regionalization will mean making use of resources throughout the Corps to accomplish certain projects without hiring staff that would to be released upon completion.

Photo by Rusty Thomas



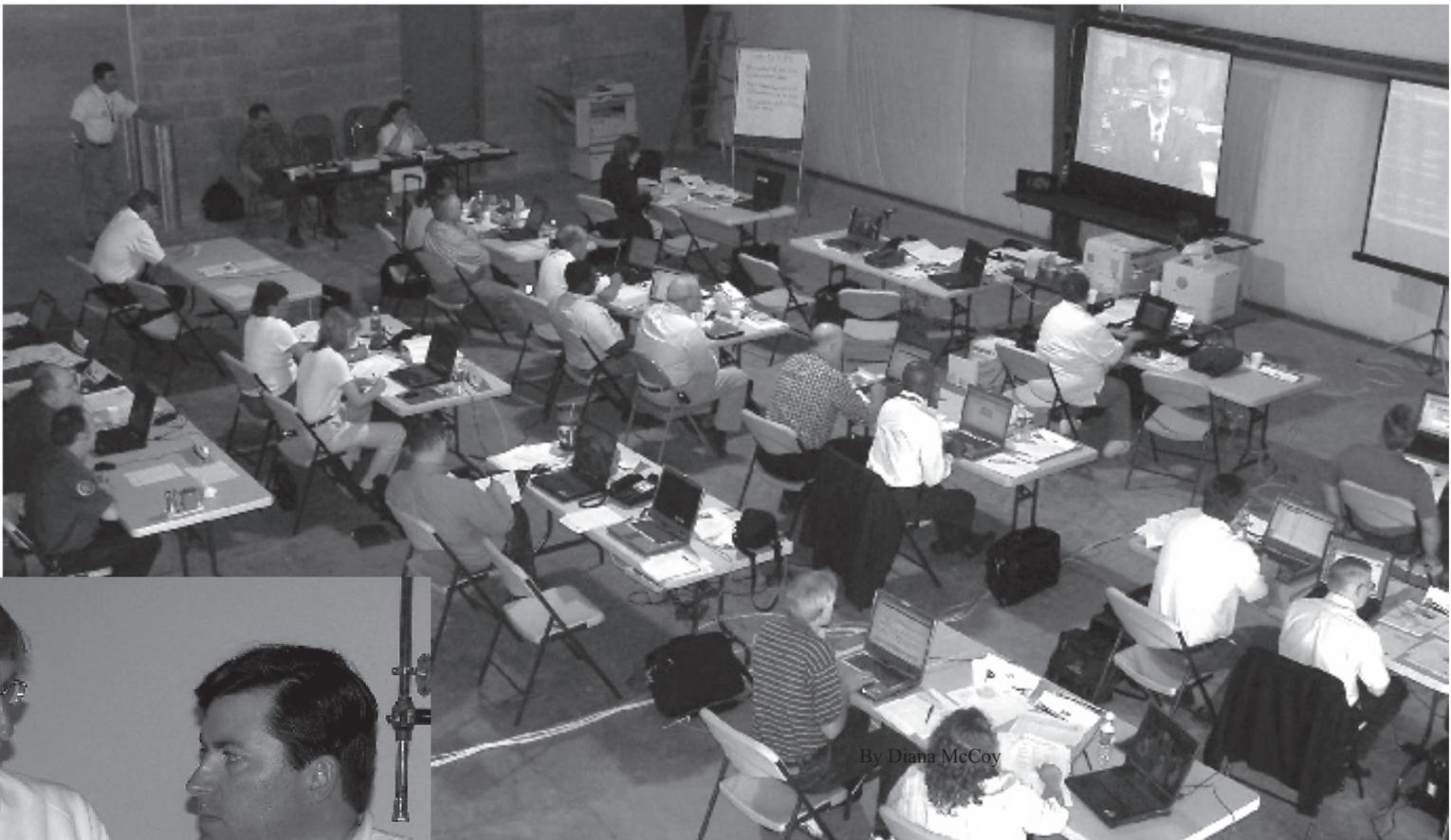
Col. Michael Rossi answers questions about the USACE strategic vision at a town hall meeting held Aug. 22. The district engineer responded to employee questions on a number of topics. He said the Corps is using innovative methods to address meeting its missions in an ever changing world.



In the COOP

Story and photo by Diana McCoy

At left, Paul Flamm, chief of the Kansas City District's emergency management branch, confers with Judd Kneuvean during the COOP exercise. Above, the exercise brought together more than 500 federal government officials from throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.



By Diana McCoy

More than 500 federal government officials from across the Kansas City metropolitan area responded to shootings, bombings and what was thought to be a “dirty” bomb June 2.

From an underground command center in eastern Kansas City and several undisclosed relocation sites across the Midwest, agencies directed the emergency response to the chaos left in the wake of multiple terrorist strikes on the city.

Although the attack was fictional, the responses were aimed at testing and improving part of the federal government’s ability to operate during crisis in Kansas City.

“Exercising emergency plans is the only way to find out if agencies will actually be operationally sound in a time of emergency,” said Brad Scott, President of the Kansas City Federal Executive Board. “Each time we exercise these plans, the better prepared each of us are to respond to an emergency.”

The continuity of operations, or COOP, exercise challenged agency officials from the entire spectrum of the federal government with a day-long scenario that began with a plane crashing into the Missouri River near the downtown airport.

Riots, shootings, looting and contaminated food and water sources followed. Mock news reports broadcast in the Kansas City command center and at the relocation sites provided participants updates on scenario events.

The exercise marked the first time federal agencies in Kansas City physically relocated

emergency teams to preidentified remote command sites. Eight of the 50 agencies involved in the exercise had teams that operated from sites outside the metro.

“We plan for emergencies and relocation, but this is the first time we were able to see how those plans would function in an emergency situation,” said Col. Michael A. Rossi, the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers Kansas City District.

Rossi was one of 25 Corps emergency responders who deployed before 8 a.m. June 2 to coordinate emergency engineering support from the Corps’ emergency relocation site. Seven additional Corps responders coordinated the agency’s emergency response from the federal command center.

“Flexibility is the key in emergency situation” said Vira Dobbins, an emergency operations specialist with the Corps in Kansas City. “I think our team showed

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Kansas City ENGINEERS

Three engineers from the Kansas City District recently have been certified as Project Management Professionals by the internationally known Project Management Institute, after taking classes offered by the Johnson County Community College.

They join a larger group of employees who have received the certification.

The Pennsylvania-based institute is the project management profession's leading professional association. It certifies members using rigorous examinations and documentation of experience. The Corps has used PMI's project management principles since the 1990s. The Corps' commitment to these principals has manifested in various programs, including the use of product delivery teams, Project Management Business Processes and several other efficiency enhancement programs.

To receive certification, students take the PMP Certification examination preparatory training given by JCCC, then apply on-line for authorization to take the exam. They must then take the exam at a Prometric Testing Center. They receive PMP certification from PMI if they pass. A candidate also has to document project experience before given authorization from PMI to take the PMP test. Candidates for the certification do not have to be project managers, a project delivery team member with experience could also qualify for the examination.

Cindy Moses, Robin Wankum and Christine Hendzlik are the most recent District employees to receive the professional certification. A PMP certified trainer provides training to help them pass the PMP exam.

"Having the Center come onsite was a clincher," said Steve Iverson, the District's deputy engineer for project management. "The coursework was perfectly aligned with what we're trying to accomplish, which is a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful PM – and registration was a piece of cake."

"The PMP certification is very important to what I do every day at the USACE. My experience in gathering the knowledge for the certification is that there is a lot of information that can be used in all entities of the work we do, not just Project Management. Whether you're a Federal Government employee or a Contractor, the PMP puts all of us on the same playing field with the same 'toolbox,'" said Wankum.

"Getting the PMP certification is something I've wanted to do for over a year because the title is recognized throughout the cooperate world and not just with in the government," Moses said. "It shows to our customers that Corps employees take the matter of good project management practices seriously."

Moses said it took time and effort to study for the certification examination, which was taken on a computer rather than using paper tests.

"Doing the computerized test was better than the professional engineers exam and it was nice to get the results immediately," Moses said. "(When I finished the test) I jumped up and did the 'touchdown score' move in the computer lab which caused a bit of a scene."

Although she didn't speak of such enthusiastic displays, Hendzlik said the certification is important.

"I think the certification puts us on the same professional level as private industry project managers," she said. "It indicates the Corps is taking 'project manager' seriously as a profession."

Hendzlik said the certification is challenging. "The test process is straightforward but does require study to pass," she said. "PMI uses different terminology and phrases that aren't standard to the Corps, which makes it difficult to pass the test without studying the Project Management Body of Knowledge."

Other district employees who have received the certification are: Brian Rast, Josephine Newton-Lund and Ron Jansen.

Earn PMI Certification

Story and photo by Eric Cramer



Cindy Moses is among several engineers in the Kansas City District to be certified as a Project Management Professional by the internationally known Project Management Institute.

FOR VALOR

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was able to recall the first aid training and went to work applying bandages to the casualty's six shrapnel wounds located on her back.

"She had fluid building up in her lungs," Frazier said, "so I made sure she had a proper airway and kept talking to her and asking her questions to keep her from going into shock."

William kept complaining of abdominal pain, which was caused by shrapnel inside her body cavity.

"She could talk a little bit even though it was very difficult for her," Cullum said. "She just wanted to close her eyes and go."

Frazier and Cullum were so focused on stabilizing William, they weren't fearful of follow on attacks.

"My field of vision was narrow," Cullum recalled. "It was like I could only see what was immediately in front of me and nothing to the sides."

"When I got to the area, it was so crazy with people walking around and not knowing what to do," Frazier described. "After Jim and I took care of Wardah, I looked up and everyone was gone."

"The only people left were Jim and I, Wardah and the casualties, which had all been placed in one area," Frazier said.

Frazier and Cullum lifted William onto a stretcher and prepared her for immediate evacuation. Once the ambulance arrived, Frazier gave the medical personnel a quick assessment of her condition and continued to load several other casualties onto the medical vehicles.

William still keeps in contact with Frazier and Cullum through email. Talking through the ordeal helps the three get past the painful memories of that day.

"I opened my eyes, and the two of you were there," she told Cullum. "I thought you must be angels."

"Mr. Frazier is an outstanding example of the many Corps employees serving in theater as a part of our global war on terrorism," said Col. Michael Rossi, Kansas City District commander.

Also honored during the ceremony was Maj. Kim Walter, former project manager for the Kansas City District.

She received the FEB Distinguished Military Service Award for her service in the Kansas City District.

Frazier now serves with the South Pacific Division in San Francisco, Calif.

AMANDA CHIRPICH

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really fast to make a whirlpool, drawing pictures on the computer, and trying to decide what was under the school building for a foundation. There were several points where I just stood there and laughed. The kids grasped the pictures I'd printed out showing different projects on which engineers work. Two little boys came running up to me with their science books open to the page showing the cycle of precipitation, evaporation, transpiration, and condensation while we were talking about the river's importance to our everyday lives. I was almost constantly surrounded by kids, begging for attention and a chance to weigh in their two cents on engineering. When a woman came to the door, I knew it was time to wrap up my talk. I collected my pictures, promised to bring them back after my next presentation as everyone was begging to keep one, and then stood there shocked as about 15 kids stood around me waiting their turn to give me a hug.

I about dropped my notes! I thanked all the kids for their enthusiastic attention and told them goodbye as I made my way to the next room of eager kids.

These kids were just as curious and willing to volunteer answers to my questions. They seemed so interested in the infrastructure of our city's water and power systems and loved seeing its connection in their own everyday lives. I hope I at least planted a thought in them that engineers solve problems and make the world a better place and they can some day become an engineer.

As I thanked the class and left, I was sure to return to the first class to handout the photos I'd promised to my buddies there. I was even hit up for a few autographs as they fought over who got to keep the picture of the Jefferson City Flood of '93. I was happy that I'd had the opportunity to come be a part of Ladd's career day. I felt good about the small part I'd played and it made me want to do more. I intend to return to help with their mentor program, and to drag along any

guys I can convince, to help be positive role models in these kids' lives. Not only was participating in this career day a positive experience for me, I believe it was in the best interest of the District. If I swayed even one talented child towards engineering, the payoff we could receive as they reach their goal would be phenomenal. The world of engineering could use a little more energy and maybe even a few dance moves.

IN THE COOP

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their ability to quickly adapt to change in the exercise,"

Dobbins, a veteran emergency responder who deployed with the Corps to the Sept. 11, 2003 terrorist attacks on New York, said the exercise brought new meaning to emergency response for many team members.

"When the (mock) television broadcast showed the federal building exploding from a car bomb, I think it brought the reality of what could happen close to home," she said.

An evaluation session at the Kansas City command center following the exercise allowed agencies to identify areas that need improvement and hear how fellow feds plan to address issues in the future.

Communications and coordination between agencies top the list for improvement, Scott said.

Scott, who led the area's first federal emergency response exercise last year, has established himself as a leader in emergency response planning since his appointment as regional administrator for the General Services Administration in Kansas City six days after Sept. 11, 2001.

Another exercise is already being planned for 2006, he said.

Emergency plans for government agencies first appeared during the Cold War to prepare agencies to respond to a nuclear attack.

"Practice makes perfect," said Larry Myers, the executive officer for the Corps in Kansas City. "By exercising our plans and continuously improving them, we can ensure we as a government are ready to respond to any emergency and are able to provide services to the public with minimal disruption."

AMANDA CHIRPICH

It was a sunny, humid Friday afternoon as I wound my way through a sea of sad-looking, run-down homes on my way to visit the fifth graders at Ladd Elementary School. The further I drove away from the interstate off-ramp, the more distractions presented themselves that took my thoughts away from my privileged job and my naive life. Sparsely clad, unshaven people were everywhere, as though an unofficial street party was going on. I double-checked that my car doors were locked and closed my passenger side window, despite the heat building up in my car's charcoal colored interior.

I slowly gathered my notes and scanned the parking lot in hopes of other Career Day presenters to make me feel less out-of-place. My search produced two men from Kansas City's semi-pro football team, and a park ranger carrying a large snake. I followed the snake, but not too closely, into a loading dock entrance to the building. I was immediately welcomed by a wonderfully warm and friendly, grandmotherly woman, who I later learned to be the school counselor, Bobbie Matlock.

After finally arriving on the next floor, we were led to a toasty classroom and asked to make ourselves comfortable while we waited for all the presenters to arrive. All along the walls in the hallway I noticed the familiar look of children's artwork, calming my fears that at least some things seemed to be the same everywhere. However, instead of the bland manila walls behind the construction paper collages, that I was used to, there were painted murals of African heroes and values. The children at Ladd were obviously being taught to respect and understand their heritage.

I chatted with the football guys and learned more about their organization than I ever wanted to know, but it still beat talking to the snake lady and risking having to touch it! A construction worker came in with about 50 little hard hats and finally Matlock returned with the principal. The principal welcomed us encouraged us to please return to the school to help in their volunteer

mentor program. She specifically mentioned needing men, reminding me of the predominantly female households most of the students come from. I was beginning to think that the kids would be bored to tears with my civil engineering talk, compared to the football players who were alternating classes with me. I worried that I would begin my very interactive talk to a group of quiet, uninterested kids. I couldn't have been more wrong.

The sound level in the large room compared to an amusement park offering its visitors a rap concert. There were kids yelling, dancing, singing, applauding someone, and generally having a good time.

I looked for even a shelf on which to set my notes and purse. The limits of the facility became even more obvious to me, yet the kids didn't seem to notice what their school was lacking. I called on my abundance of baby-sitting experience to get their attention. I didn't want to stifle their energy or excitement, so I just elevated the volume of my voice to their level, with the aim of pointing their enthusiasm in the direction of engineering. I started out by introducing myself and telling them that I am a civil engineer. To cheers, I then asked if anyone knew what that meant and a roomful of hands shot up. I thought it was funny that they even bothered to raise their hands since they all began yelling out their ideas – car fixer, journalist, house builder, airplane driver, etc. When one little girl got close, using the word design, I told her she was absolutely right and the whole class cheered, clapped, and several broke into dance moves. That was pretty much how the next 40 minutes went.

I got all kinds of suggestions for "better" engineering such as: covering the ground with steel for army tanks' practice courses, using glue to clean wastewater and build dams, and employing kids to run around in the storm sewer pipes eliminating the need for surveyors. We found engineering ties in things like stirring Kool-aid



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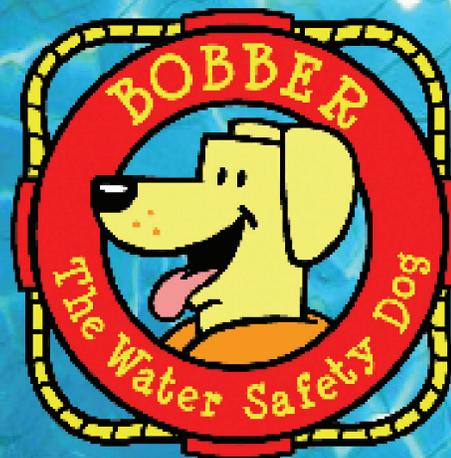


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