

## **PRT provides expertise to construction contractors, workers**

Written by U.S. Air Force Capt. Tony Wickman  
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KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Building a school for several hundred children or a footbridge to cross a rushing river requires the proper mixture of training and manpower.

In a country like Afghanistan, where the literacy rate is around 10 percent and formal training programs are few and far between, it becomes the job of a select few to train the many to build structures to exact engineering specifications.

For the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team engineers, their job includes mentoring contractors who bid on construction projects here and train them to make the projects to standards. It's a tough job, but necessary to make sure the money being spent on building projects isn't wasted because of poor construction practices.

On a visit to the Nowabad School construction project Dec. 26, U.S. Navy Builder Chief Petty Officer David Zahm, and Brandon Toliver, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representative to Kunar PRT, met with the site foreman to discuss the progress of the project and offer critiques and support.

"It's important to do the work right. You have to make sure you're using good quality materials and the right construction practices," Zahm said to Safiullah, the site foreman. "You have to do things the right way."

The Nowabad project is just one example of ongoing efforts to improve the infrastructure in Kunar province. The school represents a \$219,000 investment by Coalition forces in the people of the area. Not only will it house 20 of 26 classes currently taught to more than 2,000 area boys and girls, but it provides needed jobs to local laborers.

But much of the labor is provided by unskilled laborers with little to no formal education. So the PRT engineers also become teachers to the site managers and work to get them to pass their knowledge on.

"You should have the skilled workers paired with the unskilled workers for two reasons," Zahm said to Safiullah. "One it gives them the training to become skilled workers, and two it teaches them the right way to do things."

As the PRT engineers walked through the site, they provided feedback to the workers.

"You have too much aggregate and you need to vibrate between the steel," Zahm said to one of the workers. "If you don't do it right it won't support the structure."

As they came upon a group mixing the ingredients for cement, Zahm and Toliver took the site foreman and workers aside to explain to them the proper mixture of rocks and sand.

"See this, these are too small and it won't work," Zahm said, showing a handful of tiny aggregate rocks from a rock pile used to mix concrete. "You have to use the proper screens to

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get this right.

Zahm asked to see the filtering screen the workers used for the rocks. When they showed it, Zahm and Toliver instantly saw the problem and worked to correct it.

“The holes in the screen are too big. You need to get a screen with smaller holes,” Zahm told the workers. They immediately came back with a screen with a smaller mesh.

“That’s the right size. Use that one,” Zahm said before addressing his concerns about the quality of sand.

Overall the work was fair, but more attention to detail is needed according to the engineers. As they concluded the quality assurance and compliance check, Zahm turned to Safiullah and offered words of encouragement.

“You’re doing a good job and I know it is tough,” Zahm said. “But, you have to teach your workers how to do things the right way the first time. You have several skilled workers, so use them to help teach the others to do the work the right way. See you soon.”

Another quality assurance and compliance check done for the PRT engineers, but many more are to come on the long road to build the Kunar people’s province.