



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Transatlantic Programs Center

Deployment Center opens at TAC for those headed to Iraq and Afghanistan

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has deployed 2,000 of its military and civilian members to Iraq and Afghanistan. Until recently, the gateway for Corps civilians deploying to these combat theaters was through CONUS Replacement Centers (CRCs) located at Fort Benning, Ga., Fort Sill, Okla., and Fort Bliss, Texas.

Early this year, the Corps directed its Transatlantic Programs Center to establish a Deployment Center to certify civilian members for deployment to and redeployment from Afghanistan and Iraq.

This mission was accomplished when on May 8, all Corps civilians deploying to Iraq started coming through the USACE Deployment Center at TAC.

Prior to May, TAC deployed Corps Civilians and contractors to Afghanistan and had done so for the last two years, while Corps Civilians, military members, and Iraq-bound contractors generally deployed to Iraq through the Fort Bliss CRC.

Since TAC opened the Corps' Deployment Center in May, all Civilians deploying to Iraq now go through the new center. Corps military members continue to deploy through Fort Bliss CRC, which provides additional military and security training not required for Civilians. Contractors going to Afghanistan no longer come to Winchester, but now go to Fort Benning, while contractors deploying to Iraq continue to deploy through Fort Bliss.

By establishing the Deployment Center, the Corps accomplished several important goals, said Scott Lowdermilk, Chief, Plans and Operations, the office responsible for running the Deployment Center.

"People in the Corps have talked about opening a Deployment Center since our involvement with Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1991, but we've never had the funding," Lowdermilk said. "However, when Afghanistan and Iraq came along and we had people deploying in larger numbers, it began to make economic sense. We're able to send people through the Deployment Center several days quicker than they can go through CRC at Fort Bliss. We estimated a savings of \$1,800 per person if we trained our people at our own USACE Deployment Center. When we were able to show that a Deployment Center would save money, everything became possible."



Photo by Janet L. Dove

The members of the USACE Deployment Center are focused on preparing civilians for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. The deployment center opened in May, under the Transatlantic Programs Center's Plans and Operations Office.

“Saving money is good, but even more important is the way we take care of people. Deploying to a combat zone is unsettling, but deploying through an installation can make the deployment process even more difficult,” Lowdermilk said.

He pointed out that many deploying Civilians learned first-hand at Fort Bliss about the expression ‘Hurry up and wait,’ as well as experiencing other unique elements of military life.

“Some of our Corps folks have never been on an installation. It is one thing to go to an installation and another thing to play by the Army rules. You get up at 0500 for the first roll call and find out what you are doing for the rest of the day. You also find out that there is a three-hour gap between roll call and when you first do something.

Civilians also experienced sleeping in open-bay barracks with several hundred people making more than a little noise,” Lowdermilk said.

The Deployment Center curriculum is organized to cover the essential requirements covered at CRC. These include medical screening, shots, and a wide variety of training courses including first aid, information management, ethics, law of war, human resources, media awareness, cultural



Photo by Steve Wright

Phyllis A. Ward, Information Technology Specialist, assists Corps employees preparing to deploy to Iraq at the USACE Deployment Center. The Information Management portion of the curriculum includes demonstrating how to access email and Sharepoint servers and assisting with password changes.

awareness, and anti-terrorism/force protection. Deployees are issued ID tags, military clothing, and gear and trained in the proper use of equipment such as gas masks, protective vests and helmets.

The training schedule includes briefings on filling out time sheets and travel vouchers. As a result, the numbers of pay and voucher-related issues have dropped, said Judy Lynskey, who works in the Administrative Processing Personnel Office (APPO). The APPO processes pre-deployment paperwork, issues travel orders, and keeps time and attendance for 600 people located throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Our number one problem used to be pay issues,” said Lowdermilk. “I worked 200 pay issues at the Gulf Region Division when I was in Iraq. I thought at the time that most of these issues could be lessened if we offered a class to explain pay to the people being deployed. Once we had the chance to work with them, the number of pay issues dropped significantly.”

Another valuable benefit is being able to control the schedule and processing of pre-deployment paperwork for Civilian team members, said Keith Frye, the officer in charge of the Deployment Center.

“We’re in control of processing the pre-deployment paperwork and establishing the Deployment Center schedule. Therefore, we set our own priorities and can accommodate people when we need to. We are in control of the entire process and this gives us great flexibility,” Frye said.

Setting up an expanded Deployment Center required increasing the staffing throughout the Plans and Operations Office, according to Lowdermilk.

“We’ve had people assigned in the APPO for a few years, along with an ENGLink coordinator and our Emergency Operations Center folks,” Lowdermilk said. ENGLink is the Corps of Engineers’ system for linking emergency operations job requirements to volunteers with the needed skills.

“When GRD asked TAC to assist with personnel selection, we ramped up our workforce to accommodate that mission,” Lowdermilk said.

“Setting up an expanded deployment operation required adding 31 positions. Persons in these positions perform such functions as transporting deployees to and from the Deployment Center, sewing names and insignia on uniforms, and issuing metal ID tags and Civilian Access Cards,” he continued. “We are using military reservists, Civilians in term and temporary positions, and contractors to perform our support missions for GRD and AED. We could not even consider performing this mission without the great team that has come on board to plus us up.”

Lowdermilk said that these numbers don’t include the people from throughout TAC who support the Deployment Center with its training requirements. TAC staff members teach classes in Equal Employment Opportunities, Resource Management, Human Resources, Public Affairs, Office of Counsel legal areas, Security, Program Management and Information Management.

“Operating the Deployment Center is a total team effort,” Lowdermilk said.



Photo by Steve Wright

Sandy Ginn, registered nurse at the Deployment Center, administers one of several necessary immunizations to Frank Spears, hired from the private sector for deployment to Iraq.



Photo by Steve Wright

John Ashley (left) and Jim Parks apply a leg tourniquet during the first aid portion of the Deployment Center training. Ashley, from Mississippi Valley Division, and Parks from North Atlantic Division, both deployed to Iraq.

Selecting TAC to stand up a deployment center is a natural fit due to TAC's long-standing responsibility for Corps missions in the Middle East. Although TAC has had five names since it was established in 1952, its mission of engineering and construction support in the Middle East remains the same. In addition, TAC has been designated as the Corps' organization to provide reachback assistance to GRD and its districts, as well as to the Afghanistan Engineer District.

"Having team members process through TAC provides an opportunity for many of the deployees to meet TAC people who will provide them with technical or reachback support services," Lowdermilk said. "That helps to build relationships for the successful completion of our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan."

John Lonnquest, from the Office of History at headquarters USACE, has deployed twice to Iraq. In July 2003, he deployed through the CRC at Fort Bliss. This June, Lonnquest deployed through the Deployment Center in Winchester. He was impressed with the speed in which he was able to deploy and redeploy through the Deployment Center. He said that it took a few hours to turn in his clothing and equipment and complete the medical screening in Winchester versus three days to accomplish the same task at Fort Bliss.

"When I processed back through the Deployment Center, the folks remembered me, and said, 'we want you out of here as quickly as we can' and my goodness, they did. I take my hat off to all the folks in the Deployment Center because the service they are providing is wonderful. It makes it easier for our (Corps) folks to volunteer and deploy," Lonnquest said.

For Lynskey and the 10 members of the APPO team, meeting the people who volunteered to serve is special. "One of the highlights is when we see the people we worked with by phone and know on a first-name basis. Now that we have the Deployment Center, we have the chance to meet everyone who we issue orders for and make sure that they are paid," she said. "It is truly rewarding to talk to someone over the telephone, get their information and qualifications, and then have that person walk through our door to say 'hello.'"

Editor's Note: For more information about the deployment process at the Deployment Center in Winchester, Va., see the USACE Deployment Center website at <http://www.tac.usace.army.mil/deploymentcenter>.



Photo by Steve Wright

Master Sgt. Ron Wagner adjusts the fit of a protective mask for Darion Taylor, deploying to Afghanistan, during the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical briefing, a standard part of the formal pre-deployment training. Wagner is a member of the USACE Deployment Center staff.