

# Reconstruction team teaching self-sufficiency

Capt. Christopher Corsten, left, examines a retaining wall on a road project in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Corsten, with the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team, said the team focuses on projects, like roads, that will give locals the framework on which to rebuild the province themselves.

PHOTOS BY ANITA POWELL  
Stars and Stripes



## Reservist-led group is laying the groundwork for Afghans to rebuild

BY ANITA POWELL  
Stars and Stripes

JALALABAD, Afghanistan — Lt. Col. Linda Granfield recalls her first meeting with local leaders in June — when Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province was threatened with the worst flooding in decades — as a defining moment in her tenure as the area's top civil affairs officer.

"Everybody's turning to me and saying, 'When are you going to solve our problems?'" she recalled. "And I said, 'Well, what are you going to do about it? ... So, Mr. Governor, let's go. I'll meet you on the bridge and we're going to fill sandbags.'"

Nine months later, the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team, composed mostly of civil affairs reservists from around the U.S., has forged an unusually tight bond with local leaders who have, for the most part, enthusiastically embraced the team's mission and resources.

"I earned a great deal of respect from this community then," she said. "One of the things they'll tell you is that I taught them to be self-sufficient."

Nangarhar Gov. Gul Agha Sherzai has shouldered that responsibility with what seems to be extraordinary zeal. Sherzai, a native of Kandahar who was appointed to the position by the central government, has made numerous public appearances urging residents to eradicate poppy crops, to respect the government's resettlement process for refugees, to report suspicious activity and to work to improve the province's infrastructure through cooperation.

"If the international community is supporting me and working shoulder to shoulder with me," he said in Pashto, through a translator, "we should work even harder for them."

His efforts, he said, have

gained public support, though problems remain: notably, changing attitudes and ferreting out corruption and administrative problems within the government.

But for most residents, the majority of whom are illiterate, proof of success is in the projects. To that end, Granfield's team has funded more than \$1 million worth of roads and funded the construction or reconstruction of numerous government buildings and irrigation projects.

"This looks great," Capt. Christopher Corsten said as he walked down a rebuilt road in Jalalabad, surrounded by the road's Afghan contractors, who proudly pointed to their handiwork.

"This used to be the worst road in town," said Corsten, a civil affairs team leader from the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion of Phoenix, Ariz. "Now it's turning into the best road in town."

Part of the team's philosophy is to focus on projects, like roads, that will give residents a framework on which to rebuild the province themselves. The team takes recommendations from local leaders in choosing projects.

"We say no a lot," he said. "If they have the capacity to do it themselves, we try to get them to do it themselves."

Corsten said he's also seen residents increasingly go to local leaders to request projects.

"Very rarely do we have anyone coming to our gate anymore," he said.

Granfield said she feels the team — which will redeploy in less than two months — has made significant progress in what she considers the team's primary goal.

"We're really here to work with the provincial leadership to empower them to create self-sufficiency," she said. "That's why we're here."

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Lt. Col. Linda Granfield discusses upcoming projects and politics with Nangarhar Gov. Gul Agha Sherzai. The Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team has formed a tight bond with local leaders.