



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

**Public Affairs Office
Honolulu District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Fort Shafter, Hawaii 96858-5440**

**Contact: Joseph Bonfiglio
808-438-8317
or Dino Buchanan
808-438-9862**

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PAKISTAN RECOVERY

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Major Helps Pakistan Recover from Its Worst Monsoon Season in 80 years

By Alicia Embrey – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Transatlantic Division Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI NR1-11) In July 2010, monsoon rains of historical magnitude caused catastrophic flooding throughout Pakistan. Approximately one-fifth of the country was submerged by floodwaters. The flood wiped out livestock, homes, crops, and critical infrastructure (roads, bridges, railways, etc.).

According to Pakistan's Natural Disaster Management Authority, over 20 million Pakistanis were affected by this catastrophic event. Damages have been estimated in the billions. The United States responded to Pakistan's international plea for assistance by standing up several Task Force organizations under the command of the Office of the Defense Representative to Pakistan (ODRP) to support the relief efforts.

As floodwaters from one of the country's worst monsoon seasons began to sweep downstream and overrun riverbanks, the United States immediately ramped up to deliver much needed humanitarian assistance.

According to the United States Army Corps of Engineers Transatlantic Division's G3-Contingency Planner, Mario Trevino, the unprecedented amount of rain and floodwater in the region triggered a United States Central Command Request for Forces for the Division.

"A Request for Forces initiated our involvement in the effort. We were also tasked to develop a rough order of magnitude for the damage and potential reconstruction of Pakistan," said Trevino.

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“Initially, ODRP requested the assistance of one engineer officer with experience in engineer planning, bridging, and ground lines of communication assessments. Later the Corps of Engineers were asked to provide a five man team of consultants to assist the Asian Development Bank with their Damage Needs Assessment.” Trevino explained.

Due to his diverse engineering background and experience in conducting engineer reconnaissance as an Army Engineer, Maj. Evan Ting, Commander of the 565th Engineer Detachment Forward Engineering Support Team (Honolulu District), was by-name requested and chosen to represent the Corps in this effort. “Ting’s mission was to assist ODRP with planning and design requirements for the temporary forward operations base camps from which the humanitarian missions were staged,” Trevino said.

Keys to Success

As with most catastrophic events, you really don’t know what to expect until you reach ground zero. Being well trained, flexible and having a great support network are all keys to success.

“I received a call on Aug. 12, 2010 notifying me that I was tasked to support the flood relief efforts in Pakistan. A week later, I was on a plane. I really didn’t know what to expect even as I listened to the news and read the incoming situation reports. I was originally billeted as a Planner/Ground Lines of Communications /Bridging Assessor supporting ODRP, and I didn’t have full comprehension of what was expected of me,” said Ting.

“My main concern was not about my own safety, but whether I would be able to make a positive impact,” said Ting. “Once in theater, the requirements became clear. Flood victims were suffering and desperately needed fresh water, food, and medical supplies. Forward Operating Bases were required for fixed and rotary wing assets to deliver these crucial basic needs. Planning, design, and construction of these bases are an engineer’s forte.”

Because of the flood’s devastation, road access to remote villages in the mountainous north and the flood plain in the southern part of Pakistan were cut off. “The way to provide humanitarian assistance was by fixed wing aircraft that flew supplies to forward operating bases and then rotary wing aircraft moved those supplies to United States Agency for International Development and World Food Program distribution locations in isolated parts of the country,” explained Ting. During his assignment in support of the Humanitarian Assistance mission, Ting was responsible for the construction and oversight of three major Forward Operating Bases located at existing Pakistan Military Bases (Chaklala Air Base, Pano Aqil Army Cantonment, and Ghazi Air Base).

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These forward bases were used by over 500 U.S. military personnel conducting fixed and rotary wing operations, delivering relief supplies to flood victims. Development of these bases included airfield and road improvements, troop billeting and work spaces, sewer systems, water supply and distribution, electrical upgrades, and other critical facilities required for successful operations.

“The 15th and 26th U.S. Marine Expeditionary Units and the U.S. Army 16th Combat Aviation Brigade needed facilities to conduct their operations,” Ting said. “In one forward base, we constructed two wells and a water tower to supply water for our latrines on the flight line. We relocated overhead electrical lines to mitigate hazards to the rotary wing assets. Although we didn’t have our own engineer units on ground, we were able to accomplish over 21 infrastructure improvement projects with an engineer, contingency contracting officers, the local labor force, and a partnership with the Pakistan Military.”

Tight Deadline

Just days after arriving in flood-stricken Pakistan, Ting was tasked to conduct an engineer reconnaissance and layout a base camp for 300 personnel at Chaklala Air Base near the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The base was used as an intermediate staging area for the 16th CAB, prior to their movement north to Ghazi Air Base. With reachback support from the USACE, Ting was able to provide the Task Force with a base camp design, technical specifications, and contract scopes/statements of work within 48 hours.

Immediately after, Ting was tasked to conduct an engineer reconnaissance of Pano Aqil Army Cantonment. Home to the Pakistan Army’s 16th and 21st divisions, Pano Aqil Army Cantonment is located about 25 miles north of Sukkur in Sindh province, The 15th and 26th MEUs would eventually make Pano Aqil their home for the next few months while delivering relief supplies to flood affected areas in southern Pakistan. During the two day recon, Ting met with the Pakistan Military Liaison Officers to conduct a feasibility study, and to determine the requirements of the forward operating base.

Upon returning to Islamabad, Ting briefed the engineer findings to the ODRP senior leadership. A day later, Ting was part of a specialized ten-man quartering party with a mission to stand up the forward operating base and have helicopters delivering relief supplies within days.

"The forward operating base at Pano Aqil supported approximately 200 Marines from the 15th and 26th MEUs, ODRP personnel, and eight Marine aircraft (four CH-46 and four CH-53). In order to accommodate the troops, upgrades were required: barracks renovations, upgrading electricity, installing sewer treatment systems, improving the airfield to be AC-130 capable, constructing work spaces, and establishing a Dining

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Facility in an existing structure,” Ting said. “It was a tight time frame in getting this base camp stood up but we had the right team at the right time, and great Pakistan Military support.”

Personal Account

While stationed at the cantonment, Ting also assisted in the delivery of supplies to stranded flood victims. The 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units delivered millions of pounds of food and supplies in the southern Sindh province, the worst hit area covering hundreds of miles.

“Most of the flood victims in the south were hungry, destitute and still marooned by a sea of floodwater. It was a horrible sight to see. Mothers, children, and the elderly were stranded on roof tops, on islands with no access to food or fresh water. People’s lives shattered, homes gone,” Ting said. “There were literally hundreds of square miles underwater and a lot of suffering.”

“It was amazing how dedicated and hard working our Marines, Airmen, Sailors, and Soldiers were, working alongside our Pakistani counterparts. Day to day, you could see friendships forming as we worked together. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of this mission,” Ting said. “It was an honor to deliver relief supplies, and I’ll never forget the look of gratitude on the faces of many of the flood victims. There is no better feeling than getting the opportunity to help those in need.”

During Ting’s service as an ODRP engineer liaison to the Pakistan Government and Military, International community, USAID and the State Department his contributions also included conducting engineering and ground lines of communications assessments. He generated three major engineering infrastructure reports, numerous CADD design plans, and technical specifications.

Additionally, the floods wiped out numerous bridges throughout Pakistan cutting off transportation routes for supplies. Ting made significant and enduring contributions by playing a key role in coordinating the transfer of over \$8 million in bridging assets to the Government of Pakistan.

The bridges, held in “Theatre Reserves” in Kuwait, were shipped to Pakistan, ground transported to Northern Pakistan, and delivered to the Pakistan Military. The bridges were administratively transferred through USAID to NDMA, for the Pakistan Military Engineers to install. A bridge turnover ceremony was held at the US Embassy in Islamabad to officially mark the turnover Dec. 1, 2010.

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Ting deployed back to the Honolulu District mid-December 2010 and was one of the honorees at the Honolulu District's Townhall on Jan. 10, 2011.

According to Honolulu District Commander Lt. Col. Douglas Guttormsen, Maj. Ting's outstanding work under difficult conditions received the attention, praise and accolades of the Vice Admiral running the mission in Pakistan.

"He did a super job representing our nation and the District," Guttormsen said.