

Martinez said of the humanitarian mission that developed. "But that was not an initial impression during deployment."

The FEST-A's primary mission is to support the warfighter, deploying with skills and equipment to bring engineering expertise to the combat engineer. One of the tools they bring is the TCED

"There were times I would sit there and the alarms would be going off, I'd run through the faces of my family and I'd think 'What am I doing here?!'"

Telecommunication Engineering Deployable kit that enables engineers to reach back through data, video, and voice transmission to engineering expertise in theater, and to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District and USACE Centers of Expertise in the States. "If any piece of equipment could be labeled as a success, it's the TCED," Hurst said. "It was an invaluable tool."

Fitzgerald deployed with one of the FEST-A's two TCED kits as he moved northward. The second TCED remained at Camp Virginia until that body jumped to Logistical Support Area Anaconda, at Balad Southeast Airfield, in late May.

Once there, the planning team worked with the Facilities Engineering Team 21, essentially an interim Directorate of Public Works, and got to work immediately conducting assessments of 557 facilities on the air base that were damaged by bombing, years of neglect, and vandalism.

"We each took a team of three: a carpenter, electrician, and plumber from the 168th Engineer Group," Cole said. "Fernando took half the post and I took the other and we went through every building. What we walked out of the building with was a bill of materials that would repair all concrete slab roofs and replace broken windows, light fixtures, toilets, sinks, and make any other repairs necessary."

As part of the survey, the planning team generated 'as-built'

drawings of buildings including fire stations, emergency operations facility, gymnasium, hangars, and concrete buildings of type E, EE, H, and HH. All drawings were created on laptop computers running AutoCAD software.

The team's contribution was the basis for a prioritized project list completed even as some units

with discretionary funds began to hire out repairs to local laborers. While most of the masonry buildings could be repaired, some were condemned due to bomb damage and demolished, Cole said.

For Cole, the work was not particularly demanding, though the hours were grueling. The wartime environment, however, was a real teacher.

"Like most everyone who goes through such an experience, I have a greater appreciation for my family. I also learned a lot about myself," he said. Although he served in the Navy and experienced boot camp, he found he had to reach down deep.

"I went into it thinking it shouldn't be a problem," he said. "There were times I would sit there and the alarms would be going off, I'd run through the faces of my family and I'd think 'What am I doing here?!'"

But adjusting to the tense situation allowed Cole to draw new boundaries for himself. "In that environment, I found I had a tendency to allow people greater latitude than I would otherwise. You're a fish out of water. Every few

hours the first couple of weeks I was fumbling around with my mask. ... It was a brand new experience. It took a while to become proficient and react quickly and appropriately. I felt incompetent for a time, so I kind of let people push me around more.

"I know anybody who would hear me say that would say, 'That's not the same Jon Cole I know.' I was out of my element. So this was good professionally. If I'm out of my element again, say if I find a job in Civil Works, then this experience in Iraq will benefit me. It may be new, but that's not to say I'm incompetent."

Martinez agrees that there are real personal benefits from serving, but cautions that it may not be for everyone.

"The thing about FFE and the mission in Iraq is that it is a whole different animal. It's not the hurricane relief field engineering type experience. There is a level of risk," Martinez said. "I can only speak for myself and tell folks what happened and all of the great benefits you gain from it by learning about yourself, learning about playing on a team, about engineering work, the amount of learning that's going to happen

Jon Cole ensures that supplies are compacted before his team departs Camp Virginia on a convoy.



Photo by Fernando Bautista

through that field engineering experience.

"You have all these benefits that start stacking up, and then you have the difficulties, the fact that you're going to be away from family for a very long period of time, the fact that there are big security issues, and the living conditions. ... You have to personally weigh all of those. ..."

Martinez said the value from successful accomplishment of an FFE mission can be great. The mid-July FEST-A transition came at a good time, Hurst said, taking place as the warfighters in Iraq transitioned from V Corps and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force into Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF7).

"We were basically finishing up missions we had started in support of V Corps and the new team would be coming in and starting new projects in support of the CJTF-7 that would affect the whole country," he said.

In addition to the six member FEST-A now in Iraq, 17 Europe District people are also supporting operations in Afghanistan, the Gulf Region in engineering capacities at bases, and with FEST-Restore Iraqi Oil.

► **Fernando Bautista climbs a water tank at the Balad Air Field in Iraq to survey the condition of the water tower.**



Photo by Fernando Bautista

This FIGHT is PERSONAL

Story by
Grant
Sattler

Recently returned from four months duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom, one Wiesbaden-based Army civilian relishes the opportunity to have been able to support America's Army.

Working as an architect deployed with a Forward Engineer Support Team from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District, Fernando Bautista was involved in master planning for 17 airfields,

including Balad airfield where V Corps Rear is now located, assessing all of the Balad airfield buildings for safety and usefulness, and generating floor plans of existing buildings.

But it is not just the contribution of his team to the war effort that gives Bautista a reason to feel pride. It is the sense that he has in his way helped strike back for the

terrible attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, particularly the attack on the World Trade Center.

"I'm a New Yorker, and I feel

"I am an American. I am a New Yorker. I had to do something."

great about it," the 20-year resident of the Big Apple said.

And like all New Yorkers, Bautista had his personal experience

on the day of the attack, one that the catharsis of duty in the desert has begun to heal.

A building designer for seven years with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New York District, Bautista was one of a group of architects and engineers working feverishly on final deadline for a complicated facility design on Sept. 11, 2001.

"We were working around the clock, by the second, because the fiscal year was coming to a close," Bautista said of the Corps of Engineers team working on the 20th floor of 26 Federal Plaza. They heard a big bang and felt a shake, but members of the architectural section kept working. They were so intent on the task at hand that the section lead was miffed and hung up the phone on what he thought was a minor incident when a

friend called with news that the Twin Towers seven blocks away had been struck by an airplane.

The friend called again, and as the realization that the interruption was of real importance dawned, the section lead asked Bautista to go to the other side of the building and see what was happening.

"I could see the upper floors of the North Tower, and the gaping hole between the 80th and 100th floors," Bautista said. He reported what he'd seen, was handed the chief architect's personal camera, and headed outside into a surreal scene. He headed toward the Twin Towers and snapped a few photos as emergency vehicles sped by. "We are used to a rush hour, but this was 100 times worse, it was crazy," he said.

Bautista would not learn until days later that one of the fire trucks carried the fiancé of a niece to what would be his last emergency response. Christopher

Santora would perish as a hero with the first fire fighters to enter the North Tower.

Out of film, Bautista returned to 26 Federal Plaza to find it already evacuated, and his identification, wallet, and keys locked in the office. He found himself compelled to return to the Twin Towers, and had approached to within two blocks when the South Tower was struck.

"We were just standing still, watching the development of this catastrophe," he said. Then the first of the towers collapsed. "Then came a very tall, thick cloud trying to find a way out through the streets at a roller coaster speed," Bautista said. Realizing he should run for his life, he turned. "I saw everybody going uptown, three, maybe four thousand people going the same direction." In his flight, he tripped and was trampled, severely injuring an ankle. Covered in dust, he had to walk home.

After a painful half-day hike out of Manhattan and across the Williamsburg Bridge to his home in Astoria, Queens, he found his spare keys in the garage, sought medical aid, and lived off of his



Photo illustration by Brian H. Temple



Photo by Fernando Bautista

▲ **Fernando Bautista assesses the demolition of a fire station damaged by bombs at the Balad Air Field in Iraq. The D-9 armored Caterpillar was used to level damaged buildings in a three day operation involving the Corps FEST.**

◀ **Bautista's vantage point where he snapped this photo on Sept. 11, 2001.**



Photo by Fernando Bautista

Bautista inputs data with AutoCadd (Computer Assisted Design and Drafting) software at Balad Air Field. His drawings communicated existing conditions of buildings such as barracks, a hospital, and more.

collection of pocket change until the city began to function two weeks later.

The Corps' New York District worked out of an alternate location for a time, and then returned to 26 Federal Plaza. Life slowly crept back to the way things had been before. "But things were different," Bautista said.

He became restless for a change, and after a year took a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Wiesbaden, Germany, where he had served twice before on temporary duty assignments.

Within two months of his arrival in January 2003, he read an e-mail soliciting volunteers to

participate in the District's Field Force Engineering program.

"I said 'wow,' this is the best way for me to revenge these guys," he said. "I said to the chief architect, 'Even if I have to wipe the

"I really experienced being a part of the greatest Army in the world. We were supporting our troops. And now I also feel I accomplished something personal ... for the Army."

floors, will you let me go?"

Just two days later Bautista was selected to join a Forward Engineer Support Team. His household goods were delivered March 16th and the next day he and the team of five were deployed to Kuwait, arriving at Doha on March 20th, just as combat began.

"I really experienced being a part of the greatest Army in the world," Bautista said. "We were supporting our troops. And now I also feel I accomplished something personal ... for the Army."

Although he did not directly take up arms in the fight against terrorists and

those who support them, Bautista feels he contributed with his laptop computer and dedicated labor.

"It has been one of the greatest things I have done in my professional life," Bautista said. "I am an American, I am a New Yorker. I had to do something."