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Army engineers team with Air Force and Navy to provide quality housing

MORÓN AIR BASE, Spain – Tucked away among the olive groves, wheat fields, and occasional silhouettes of imposing iron bulls of southern Spain is the isolated Morón Air Base, a key stopping point for cargo and crews traveling to the Middle East. It's here that one of the most unusual threesomes within the U.S. military is taking place: A partnership between the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army to raise the quality of life for the warfighters and their families stationed here. And the progress, say officials, has been *muy bueno*.

When Pedro “Pete” Corona climbs to the top of the water tower to inspect repairs, he dons a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hardhat. When he oversees debris removal, manages the installation of wells, or helps remove runway impediments for NASA, Corona also wears his castle-branded safety gear. But when he enters the worksite for the renovation of 34 on-base family housing units, he swaps his red-and-white Corps’ brand for a blue-and-gold Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) one.

“I also have NAVFAC business cards,” said Corona.

Corona, the sole U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representative on Morón Air Base in southern Spain, wears two hats – literally – because of a unique partnership between three U.S. military branches of service. And, according to officials, it’s a partnership that works.

“Pete’s been absolutely great keeping us informed as far as what’s going on, any possible delays, as well as looking at ways to minimize those delays as well so we can keep on the plan,” said Lt. Col. Sean Gallagher, the 496th Air Base Squadron commander – the highest ranking U.S. Air Force official on this Spanish-owned air base located 30 miles from Seville. “The partnership’s really been great.”

Officially, Corona represents the Navy – the DoD’s executive agent for U.S. military construction in Spain – where he works as a quality assurance specialist for the \$5.48 million Air Force housing renovation, the largest ever seen on this base.



The \$5.48 million family housing renovations at Morón Air Base in southern Spain, the largest seen in the installation’s history, will bring larger living areas, new appliances, and a higher quality of life to Airmen and their families stationed there.

“I think it’s a very peculiar but interesting partnership – working for the Army Corps of Engineers on a NAVFAC project on an Air Force installation,” said Corona. “That’s unheard of.”

NAVFAC’s project manager for the housing renovation, Lt. j.g. Michael Hightower, said the prohibitive commute from his jobsite in Rota, Spain – almost 80 miles southwest – and other competing projects allow him to drive to the housing site only about once a week. Corona’s presence on base, therefore, has been a great benefit, he said.

“Pete’s Army Corps experience has provided valuable quality assurance and safety support,” said Hightower. “He acts as our daily on-site representative for the Morón Housing Project. I’ve been thoroughly pleased with Pete’s performance here. ... He really provides assurance that the project is being run efficiently and safely. I think he’ll continue to be a valued member of the NAVFAC team.”

The partnership began just over a year ago, when Corona’s predecessor, Howard Shoun, heard about the U.S. Air Force’s plans for NAVFAC to renovate the on-base housing units and proposed a three-way alliance.

“We took a look at that situation, recognized the value of economizing resources, and tried to partner with the Army Corps of Engineers to bring Pete on as part of the NAVFAC team,” said Hightower. “Thus far it’s been extremely successful.”

In addition to his experience and the ability to tap into the Corps’ resources, Corona also offered a skill that would weigh heavy on NAVFAC’s decision to use the Corps, Hightower said. As a Mexico City native, Corona speaks Spanish fluently.

“Spanish was huge,” said Hightower. “My level of Spanish is sufficient. I can get by. But it’s great to have Pete. It gives you that extra level of confidence that there are clear lines of communication going back and forth between our office and the contractor.”

Corona said that working in Spain is like working at home in Mexico. “This is like motherland,” Corona said. “I mean I can communicate directly with the contractor and ... also the subcontractors. And it makes



Because of a unique “resource-sharing” partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), Pete Corona, the Corps’ sole construction representative in Morón Air Base, alternates between his Army Corps hardhat and his NAVFAC hardhat while conducting quality assurance work on various projects on the base.



The Corps’ Pete Corona watches a local welder repair damage to an elevated water tower on Morón Air Base. In addition to overseeing the safety and quality standards of the housing renovations on the installation, Corona provides engineering and safety support to the base on many other projects.

the work go much smoother. The communication is very important.”

Because of the tight partnership, progress has been smooth, officials say. They expect the project will continue to stay on time, on budget, and on scope.

“Between Pete and myself, we’ll turn over a quality end product to the customer,” said Hightower. “I’m always pleased with the cleanliness of the site, the safety standards on the site, [and] the level of quality that we have. Pete and I have been working well together to ensure that the Air Force is going to get a quality end product.”

Moving in

In late March, Air Force Staff Sgt. Kory Henry, a security forces airman, and his family –wife, Yasemin, and four-month-old daughter, Samantha – became the first family to move into a newly renovated duplex – the model home for the neighborhood.

Henry, stationed in Morón once before as a single servicemember, said he knows firsthand the difference between off-base and on-base housing – and said he prefers living on base.

“I’ve lived in Seville, Los Molares, Utrera, and La Ramira ... but compared to the four previous locations I’ve lived, it’s definitely worth it,” said Henry about his move on base. “It’s a big jump in comfortability. And being able to have the luxuries provided by [the base] – easy-access laundry, dual voltage in the house, dishwasher, other appliances, hot water all the time, no language barriers – you kind of feel at home. Kind of like living Stateside. It’s definitely a plus.”



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The extensive neighborhood renovations will continue in phases until the project finishes in spring 2009, officials say. Phase I, to be completed early 2009, anticipates the turnover of 12 renovated units in August to accommodate the housing office’s needs.

“We devised a smaller section of the area to assist some residents to be able to move in a little bit earlier,” said Hightower of Phase I. “That area in itself will look like a small neighborhood. All the work that’s required of the project – from the sidewalks to the landscaping to the renovation of the house, streetlights, will all be done; residents will be able to move in there and we’ll get all the construction equipment away from them so they’ll have their own family neighborhood unit.”

When all phases are completed, the renovations will have delivered significant floor-plan improvements – such as completely new layouts, flooring, and bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry rooms – as well as utility improvements – such as new water and sewer lines and new curbs and sidewalks.

“There’s also some new street lighting so it’ll be safer to walk at night through the neighborhood here,” said Hightower.

Additionally, the renovations make the neighborhood more energy efficient; improve the buildings’ patios, carports, and exteriors; and enhance the Amigo Park and Playground areas next to the neighborhood.

“We’ve been very satisfied,” Henry said. “No complaints.”

The push for the renovation was to improve the quality of life for the airmen and their families, said Gallagher.

“I think quality of life is a big issue for us here in Morón,” Gallagher said. “We’re not a main operating base – so there’s certain things we just don’t have here. But the renovated housing will provide some of the best housing the Air Force has to offer.”

Corona, a retired Air Force master sergeant, said he, too, understands the importance of providing quality facilities for the warfighter.

“The only reason I’m here and that the Navy is here is for the people,” Corona said. “It is a fulfillment in one’s career, doing a job directly for the warfighter. And I’m proud to do it.”

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