

# South Dakota National Guard

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **842nd Soldiers improve base security, Afghan partnership**

Story and photos by 578th Engineer Battalion

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan – Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company have been making security improvements for bases in Afghanistan, as well as improving their partnership with Afghan National Army soldiers.

Since the Spearfish, Sturgis and Belle Fourche unit's deployment to Afghanistan in September, its 160 Soldiers have been conducting various engineering and construction projects throughout the country.

Most recently, a team of 842nd Soldiers made improvements to Forward Operating Base Salerno, located in the southeast province of Khowst, while in route to a different road engineering mission in the area. After an enemy attack in June at Salerno, members of the 842nd were requested to help to dig a tank ditch around the base as an increased security and protection measure.

"This mission really makes it feel like we are doing something with our skills, not just building and tearing down FOBs," said Spc. Justin Symonds, a heavy-equipment operator with the 842nd's 1st Platoon. "We got asked to come here and fix a problem that they found – to help with security and make it a safer base."

The mission was scheduled to take anywhere from 5-30 days, and the small team involved finished in just three days.

"The first words out of the major's mouth when we got it done way before he expected was, 'Wow!' which kind of made me feel like we were a big deal," said Symonds, of Sturgis.

Perhaps even more impressive than the quick construction of the ditch, was the unique opportunity to train Afghan National Army soldiers in engineering operations.

Throughout the year, the 842nd has been working alongside ANA; teaching them to run their equipment, work on their mechanical issues and train on standard military skills.

However, this mission was a first of many actually working outside the protection of the base walls with the ANA.

According to Spc. Marshall Sudlow, a heavy-equipment operator with the 842nd's 1st Platoon, this mission was one of the first of its kind.

"Out of every mission I have been a part of in this country, this one is by far my favorite," said Sudlow, of Deadwood. "This marks the first mission we have taken the ANA outside the wire on an engineer mission and to be part of that is a very special thing."

“Secondly, we get to insure the safety of allied forces on this FOB and make a statement to the Taliban, that the attack they made in early June will never happen again after our deployment,” said Sudlow.

The 842nd team had extra South Dakota National Guard uniform patches made while in Salerno and held a military patch ceremony for the ANA soldiers. The ANA soldiers were adopted into the “Dirthog - A Team,” a title Sudlow said they gave themselves along the way, because it showed the respect they had for each other and represented the bravery, commitment and teamwork throughout the mission.

After the tank ditch mission in Salerno, the team continued on to their original road engineering mission.

“Both missions were a huge success,” said Sgt. Joshua Diede, of Hulett, Wyo., noncommissioned officer in charge for the missions. “Working with the ANA was a huge challenge in itself, but everyone pulled together and we created our own joint team, with good stories and laughs for years to come.”

The unit motto “Consider It Done” continues to ring loud and clear for the 842nd Engineer Company. The team took the challenge thrown their way and proved once again the South Dakota National Guard leads the way.

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**120618-A-AB123-001** - Spc. Marshall Sudlow, of Deadwood, S.D., with the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 842nd Engineer Company, operates a dozer on a base security mission outside of Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan, June 18, 2012. After an enemy attack in early June at Salerno, members of the 842nd were requested to help to dig a tank ditch around the base as an increased security and protection measure. (U.S. Army photo courtesy 578th Engineer Battalion) (RELEASED)



**120618-A-AB123-002** - Spc. Justin Symonds, of Sturgis, S.D., with South Dakota Army National Guard’s 842nd Engineer Company, operates a dozer on a base security mission outside of Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan, June 18, 2012. After an enemy attack in early June at Salerno, members of the 842nd were requested to help to dig a tank ditch around the base as an increased security and protection measure. (U.S. Army photo courtesy 578th Engineer Battalion) (RELEASED)



**120616-A-AB123-001** – Spc. Joshua Marengo, with the Louisiana Army National Guard’s 3rd Platoon, 1022nd Engineer Company, attached to the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 842nd Engineer Company, runs a grader outside of Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan, June 16, 2012. After an enemy attack in early June at Salerno, members of the 842nd were requested to help to dig a tank ditch around the base as an increased security and protection measure. (U.S. Army photo courtesy 578th Engineer Battalion) (RELEASED)



**120617-A-AB123-001** – Spc. Anthony Reed, of Sioux Falls, S.D., with the South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company, provides security while an Afghan National Army soldier operates a hydraulic excavator outside of Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan, June 18, 2012. After an enemy attack in early June at Salerno, members of the 842nd were requested to help to dig a tank ditch around the base as an increased security and protection measure. (U.S. Army photo courtesy 578th Engineer Battalion) (RELEASED)

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