

USASMDC/ARSTRAT BUILDING BRIDGES

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Over the past eight months, Soldiers from both the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) and the 1st Space Brigade have volunteered their time, skills, and knowledge to the future scientists and mathematicians of Galileo School of Math and Science. The association is part of a joint venture between Colorado Springs School District 11 and U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command's Operational hub here. The partnership has been in effect since March of this year, and has been an effort to build a bridge between the local military and the community. Little did the students realize this year they would also be bridging a gap that spans an ocean and continent farther than they could imagine.

The student's mission began back on Aug. 27, according to Eric Hamilton, the school's curriculum coordinator. The first quarter curriculum for the Galileo Sixth Graders, more affectionately known as the Bulldogs, centered on the theme "Change." Within core classes, various activities were undertaken to encourage students to explore ways to make positive "changes" in the world.

"We introduced the theme and the activities ... the students then blogged in their language arts classes, researched various types of bridges and structures in science, and learned the geography of Afghanistan in social studies," said Hamilton.





Photo by Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley

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GEN Stanley A. McChrystal,
Commander, U.S. Forces – Afghanistan/International
Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan

The Bulldogs were tasked as part of their Science class to erect miniature bridges, each one out of 20 clear plastic drinking straws, one meter of masking tape, two stacks of books (or wood blocks), and a yardstick. Here is where Army Space Soldiers entered into the picture. On the afternoon of Oct. 15, Soldiers from the command offered their expertise to assist in the bridge building effort.

“The way we fit into the bridge building is [the students] are corresponding with children in Afghanistan,” said 1st Space Brigade’s Capt. Gary Kelly.

“The Army is building bridges in Afghan villages. So as the kids build these bridges here with us, they are blogging [with] the Afghan children [about] bridges being built in their community. So they call it bridging the gap.”

Hamilton explained the students logged on as a class to www.ning.com.

“This is a social networking site similar to Facebook. However, it is highly monitored and membership must be approved by the owners. Students from Jalalabad had a group already set up. I joined, spoke with the director of the school, and we decided to get our students to connect. I set up a sub-group called Cultural Bridges. We have kept it friendly and mainly discuss what students do with free time, what their schools look like, how they perceive the elders ... topics that are safe and friendly.”

Much of this falls in line with recent comments from Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, commander, U.S. Forces – Afghanistan/International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan. In his



Commander’s Initial Assessment to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, McChrystal recommended a “change in the operational culture to connect with the people [of Afghanistan].”

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The efforts of the Bulldogs only prove that we can all assist in bridging the gap between the two very different cultures.

Col. Jeffrey Farnsworth, commander of the 1st Space Brigade went along with Kelly to aid some 60 students in the bridge building project.

Questions from Farnsworth came precise and orderly: “So, how do you build a suspension bridge? Can I use this drawing paper and you show me how you are going to make it? Where is the buttress? Where is it going to sit? How will that work? Is it holding up the base?”



Galileo School of Math and Science 6th Grade scholar Kaylee (center) blogs her counterpart in Afghanistan through Ning.com. Photo by Stacy Brisben



Ning.com is a social networking site much like Facebook. This site is helping the Galileo school build relationships with students in Afghanistan.



Kelly, a volunteer with the school since March, was easily sought out by the Bulldogs as they followed their objectives of categorizing the various types of bridges: suspension, beam and arch.

Wise to the subject matter he would come back with, "That would be an arch bridge wouldn't it?" to "Okay you guys. I'll come back and check on you later."

After over an hour of hands-on with the Bulldogs the Army Space Soldiers had to return to their real world mission – providing Space-based capabilities to the warfighter.

In a mini after action report walking down the school's hallways Kelly remarked, "The last team you were working with sir, are a pretty sharp group."

Farnsworth agreed. Kelly went on to say that one girl in particular seemed to stand out during the exercise utilizing the straws and tape.

"She made some samples and she said to her fellows students in her group 'watch this.' She made it like I had shown her. I want you (referring to her fellow classmates) to make three more and that is going to be our bridge deck. I'm going to make something else."

"She is a born leader," said Farnsworth.

As for the Bulldogs their assignment continued with a consensus being reached in each group on which final bridge design would be utilized in an overall competition during Community Night at the school on Oct. 19.

With the command still involved in the project, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) Commander, Col. Greg Bowen and Executive Officer, Maj. Kyle Zablocki served as judges for the competition.

"Being a guest judge for the bridge competition was heartwarming; the kids really put a lot of effort into their work. It was a valuable learning experience for them also, both in terms of the importance of math and science, as well as the symbolism of building bridges between people. It was a very enjoyable evening for me, and the kids had a great time," said Col. Greg Bowen, commander 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD).

This experience is definitive proof the partnership between the Galileo School of Math and Science and the command is a success story. Not only has a bridge been built between the military and the community, but this particular experience has produced a bridge that has far reaching effects around the globe.