

# CG's secretary goes to Afghanistan

Article and Photo  
By Katrin Eun-Myo Park

Sitting at her desk in the U.S. Embassy's new compound in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, Susan Murphy looks much too young to be a grandmother, and not like someone you would find in a country that is recovering from war.

Murphy, now 46, joined the Army at the age of 18 because she liked the idea of "being able to go on one's own." After a tour of duty as a Soldier, 28 years, and two granddaughters later, Murphy became the secretary for Lt. Gen. Carl Strock, the Chief of Engineers.

A high-level job like that would have earned her a "pass" from volunteering for duty in Iraq or Afghanistan, but "I just had to come," Murphy said.

It's not the first time she's felt like that. Murphy once visited her mother two weeks earlier than she planned because she felt compelled to. Murphy's daughter also joined her, and the three of them had a wonderful time. Her mother died two weeks later, on the day that Murphy had initially planned to visit.

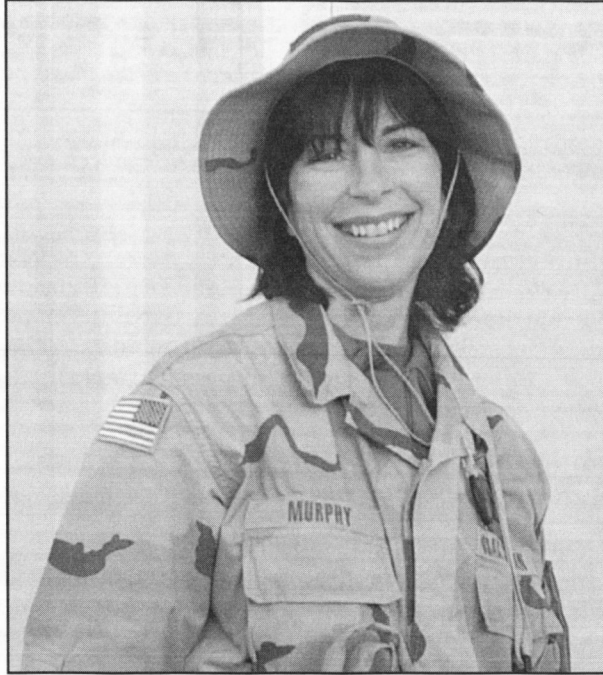
"Coming here was just like that," she said.

Murphy deployed to Afghanistan, and in Kabul she became the office manager of the Office of Infrastructure, Energy and Engineering (OIEE), the engineering arm of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

OIEE represents the joint efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and USAID to rehabilitate Afghanistan. The agreement between them to rebuild the war-torn country was first reached in 2003 and is testament to the commitment of the partnership to provide support to developing countries around the globe.

With the Corps' technical services (design review, construction management, and quality assurance), USAID has completed the highway linking Kabul to the southern province of Kandahar, contributing to economic development and national unity. Another primary road and five secondary roads are on the way.

The team also monitors the construction and rehabilitation of more than 500 schools and clinics, as well



Susan Murphy, secretary to Lt. Gen. Carl Strock, Chief of Engineers, volunteered for a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

as power, irrigation, and removing land mines.

Most of all, OIEE assists various Afghan ministries, ranging from the Ministry of Public Works to the Ministry of Education, with programming and planning to build the capability of those ministries.

Murphy's day starts early. She is usually at her desk by 7 a.m. There are meetings to attend, papers to distribute, and national staffs to work with.

"People here work incredibly hard," Murphy said of her present work family. "And no one is grouchy, either, despite the long working hours and pressure."

She also has enormous respect for the Afghan nationals working in the U.S. Embassy compound. "They are a gracious and brilliant people," she said.

She also believes her decision to leave a comfortable

job at Corps Headquarters to join those in harm's way will encourage others back home. If a civilian woman went to Afghanistan, they, too, could probably go and help those in need anywhere in the world.

"Everyone has a gift," Murphy said. She does not believe that one has to have special skills to help the people of Afghanistan. "I'd move rocks from one side of the road to the other if that'll help the people of this country. There's nothing I won't do that I can do."

The dire living situation of most Afghans Murphy witnessed upon arrival broke her heart. She is especially saddened for children who play in mud without any adult to watch over them.

According to the United Nation's "Human Development Index," about 70 percent of the total population of 22 million Afghans are undernourished. Only 13 percent of the population has sustainable access to an improved water source. Life expectancy at birth is 43 years, and the adult literacy rate is 36 percent.

"Too many people take for granted what we have — families, cars, and Starbucks," said Murphy. "It seemed right that we share our wealth with others."

Murphy stays in touch with her family with e-mail and phone. Her daughter, who was once a medic in the Air Force, now lives in Maryland with her husband and two daughters — Shayla, 6, and Nicole, 3. Murphy's son is in Germany with the Air Force.

Her daughter initially did not like the idea of her mother coming to Afghanistan, but she eventually understood that it was something she had to do. Her son supported the decision immediately.

Shayla understands that grandma has gone to a far away place that she could see only on television. "I'll look for you on TV," she told Murphy on the phone. Nicole does not know that grandma has flown to the other side of the world. "I'll come over to your house," she says every time they talk on the phone.

Murphy's optimistic about Afghanistan, and sees their future like she sees Shayla and Nicole. "If we help them, they'll grow up to take care of themselves."

(Katrin Eun-Myo Park is with U.S. Agency for International Development.)

# Cancer survivor has the courage for Iraq

By Capt. Frank Myers  
Gulf Region Division

Linda Tompkins says that being a breast cancer survivor gave her the courage to volunteer for Iraq.

Leaving Portland, Ore., to serve as a civilian in Baghdad was a sacrifice for Tompkins in a number of ways. Besides her absence from friends and family during the holidays, she also gave up her five-year streak of raising money for breast cancer research in the Portland to Coast charity walk.

"I've loved being involved in raising awareness and money for breast cancer. But as important as that has been to me, coming to Baghdad has been even more important," said Tompkins. "I really know we're making a difference in the lives of the Iraqi people. The Corps of Engineers is building schools and roads and power plants. We're building the whole infrastructure of a new democracy."

For five years Tompkins has raised money in the Portland to Coast charity walk. She is a walker and coordinator for "Christine's Dream Team," a team of 28 walkers who all were breast cancer survivors.

Eight years ago, Tompkins discovered she had breast cancer when her doctor called her at her office. She cried the entire 25-mile trip to her Portland home, sure she was going to die.

When she got home her husband Jim looked down from repairing a roof to see Tompkins in the backyard with tears streaming down her face. He could hear her sobbing and knew the mammogram result.

Only six years into their marriage, the couple faced a life-or-death obstacle. But they faced it together.



Linda Tompkins of Portland District credits surviving cancer with giving her the courage to volunteer for Iraq. (Photo courtesy of GRD)

"Jim was unbelievably supportive," said Tompkins. "Would you believe, no matter the sacrifice, he went with me to every single doctor's appointment."

Only a month after her doctor called Tompkins with the disturbing news, she went into surgery for a double mastectomy with reconstruction. The operation was a success. She has had no further signs of cancer.

"I only got the initial exam because my sister had just had her own breast cancer surgery, but I was five years younger and never thought I would get cancer," said Tompkins. "I changed a lot from the experience. Before my breast cancer I was a real wallflower,

very shy. After that, I felt free."

Meeting Tompkins now, you would never know she was once a wallflower; she is now a gregarious, outgoing redhead. But to meet her now, you would have to fly halfway around the world to a war zone.

"I went to work for the Corps of Engineers in 1999," said Tompkins. "Until coming here to Baghdad, I worked in the Portland District at the Hydroelectric Design Center. I started working on the paperwork last summer knowing that the Army needed volunteers to help rebuild Iraq. It took me three months of making arrangements, but last August I flew into this great adventure."

When asked about the hardest part of being here, Tompkins said, "It's hard being here, but the hardest part isn't the scary rockets or mortars or car bombs. I just spent Christmas without my family, and I have two little granddaughters at home who miss their grandmother terribly."

Tompkins has spent three major holidays away from her family — Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year. Originally, she was supposed to go home in time for Christmas because her original volunteer tour was only for four months.

"But once I got here and got to know some of the local Iraqis, I could see how much our work meant here," said Tompkins. "That's why I volunteered to stay two more months."

"If I hadn't had my breast cancer, I would never have had the inner strength to come to this war," she said. "I know I'm a stronger person for what I've survived. Now I'm able to use that strength to help in this struggle. I have so much to be thankful for."