



U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

## From ashes, rubble rose a school



U.S. Air Force photos by Capt. Mark Gibson



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**(Top) Afghanistan school boys enjoy the sunshine outside their new school. (Bottom left) Class is held in the rubble that was once a school. (Bottom right) Behind the bombed-out school stands the new Noman High School.**

**By Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.**  
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PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Most of the students don't speak English, but their smiles said it all.

Happiness is hard to find in this country at war. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and in 1980 Noman High School became a casualty of war after it was bombed.

The school, located in the Parwan Province near here, had a proud past.

It was built in 1921, and through the years some of the country's top doctors, engineers and government officials walked through its doors.

When the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, the Taliban took over until 2001, when America waged war against terrorism and ousted the extremists. Still, the school remained in tatters.

In 2005, behind the rubble, rose a new school.

Bagram's Provincial Reconstruction Team worked with the local school district

and government to champion the project of re-building a new school. The team helped find funding and worked with a local contractor to build the school.

The Bagram PRT is a blend of Air Force, Army and Republic of Korea forces who work with the local government to construct schools, roads and bridges. The team's mission is to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security and promote reconstruction.

Meanwhile, despite having no roof or walls to speak of, teachers and students continued to attend classes in the crumbled, blown-apart building that was once a school. A swath of canvas overhead kept the rain off the students. Chalk marks on shrapnel-pitted walls are proof of recent classes.

On May 26, the Parwan governor officially cut the ribbon to the new school, which will teach students from seventh to 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The school now has 20 classrooms, administrative offices and a library.

"You can judge by the smiles of our children how important it was to open this new school," said Jabar Taqwa, the gover-

nor of the Parwan Province. "Although the old school had a rich tradition, this new school will be good for our future and I hope all our students study hard."

Lt. Col. Donald Koehler, PRT commander, said the ruins were a testament to the determination of the people of the village of Charikar and the province.

"The dream that was Noman school refused to fade," Colonel Koehler said. "It's a school that will once again take its rightful place among the finest in Afghanistan and will once again provide the nation of Afghanistan with its future leaders."

Toward the end of the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a boys' choir sang a song they wrote. The chorus line included, "PRT we thank you, America we thank you."

Through the assistance of volunteers and the PRT, the governor announced his new Academic Excellence Achievement Award for the province by awarding mountain bikes to top students.

Before the winners tore off on their bikes at the end of the ceremony, the last thing the audience saw were the large grins on their faces.