

FREEDOM

August 8, 2004

Watch



Combat engineers provide security for remote fire base
Cover Story Page 7

Teamwork makes CMA missions successful
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Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons

Keepsakes

Pfc. Tristan Mizer (left) and Spc. Cory Gober, from Company B., 27th Eng. Bn., purchase souvenirs from a local vendor at the bazaar just outside Forward Operating Site Carlson in southeastern Afghanistan. The local merchants set up the bazaar weekly to sell wares to those stationed at the remote FOS, who might not otherwise have an opportunity to buy local goods. Being able to sell their wares to the Coalition forces helps the locals boost the economy of the region. Some of the products available at the bazaar are DVDs, antique swords and jewelry.

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For their second deployment to Afghanistan, the Soldiers of the 27th Eng. Bn. have been tasked to provide security for FOS Carlson and its surrounding areas. The combat engineers, like the one seen here, often provide security during village assessments.

Cover photo by Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons

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By Mark Baker

Pvt. Murphy's Law

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'Operation Dragon Tree' takes root

Story and photos by

Sgt. Jeremy A. Clawson

105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Infantry Soldiers assaulted across the Argandab valley in south central Afghanistan, cordoning villages and seizing weapons to disable the enemy's ability to strike Coalition forces.

The light fighters of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, confiscated hundreds of weapons and assorted munitions, disrupting the efforts of Taliban and other anti-Coalition militants during Operation Dragon Tree.

Any time his team finds and destroys a stockpile of munitions it's "one less cache that anyone can use against the Coalition," said Company C Commander Capt. Mike Berdy.

Removing munitions and weapons stockpiles from villages not only deprives the enemy of firepower, but it also helps Afghan communities. "They don't want the Taliban here, but if they've got a cache the Taliban are using in their town, (the Taliban are) going to keep coming back to that town," he said. Once Coalition troops remove the weapons stockpile from the villages, the Taliban has less incentive to return.

These Soldiers, part of the 25th Infantry Division (Light), have conducted these types of operations in southern Afghanistan since April as part of a larger stabilization effort throughout the country. These operations provide essential security as developing local governments and municipal leaders prepare for upcoming elections.

Berdy said his men made the observation as they searched the villages in Zabol Province north of Kandahar, that "this



An infantryman from 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., hooks up a HMMWV to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter during Operation Dragon Tree. Troops conducted the 10-day operation to disrupt anti-Coalition militants and bring stability to the region.

country is one big cache. Just about any place we go we find stuff, and that's primarily (when we search) in the towns."

Depriving the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters a reason to enter the towns is a step toward pushing enemy forces out of villages. It's also one of the ways Coalition forces increase security across the country. Removing caches from the villages brings the stability the country needs for a promising future, said Berdy.

While Operation Dragon Tree focused on village caches, he said that a larger problem exists in an untold number of hidden weapons in the scarcely populated regions of Afghanistan.

"We don't know what's buried out in the mountains," said Berdy, adding that many caches are buried out in fields that only the Taliban know where they are located.

While there is a lot of work remaining, the Coalition efforts are making a dent. "The stuff we're finding has got to affect them some way. When you find 110 RPG rounds or a hundred 107mm rockets, that's got to put a dent in somebody's pocket," said Berdy.

As the infantry troops moved from village to village during the 10-day operation, the reception they received from the Afghan populous was a bit different from earlier missions.

Throughout Operation Dragon Tree, the Soldiers' missions moved them through a relatively isolated region, whose people appeared to have a strong connection to the former Taliban regime.

From Berdy's perspective, Afghan locals help the Taliban as a matter of necessity, a reality of life in a mountainous Afghan village. Some of the villagers are "probably 'pro-Taliban' ... whether it's through coercion or ... because that's all they know," he said.

After assaulting their first objective and confiscating a large variety of weapons and munitions, the Soldiers of Company C quickly found that moving large stockpiles of weapons creates its own set of logistical problems.

Dismounted troops conducting combat operations carry nearly 100 pounds of equipment, including body armor, weaponry and optics. Determined to continue with their mission, Company C purchased two donkeys from an Afghan villager to help transport the cache to the next village.

They carried the bulk of confiscated weapons and munitions until an Explosive Ordnance Disposal team destroyed the caches en masse after the troops cleared several villages.

Of the numerous caches discovered by Company C, one provided a bigger challenge than the rest.

Staff Sgt. Aaron Leiker, a combat engineer attached to Company C from the 65th Engineer Battalion, discovered a couple of AK-47s inside a hole during a village cordon and search. A fire team was called to crawl inside and clear it.



A Chinook slingloads a HMMWV during air assault operations in support of Operation Dragon Tree.

See *Dragon*, Page 14

Surgeon finds calling in Afghanistan

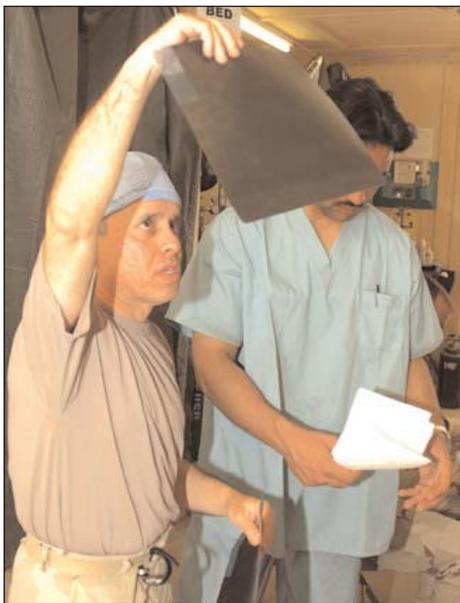
Story and photos by
Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — When Dr. (Col.) Richard Gonzales initially arrived in Afghanistan, his mission was to serve 90-days before he could return to his family and private practice in Puerto Rico. Now, six months later, his private practice is sold and he has signed on for an entire year. One of three surgeons at the Pfc. Jerrod Dennis Combat Hospital on Kandahar Airfield, Gonzales said he immediately found his calling when he came to Afghanistan.

“After I was here for just a month, it was obvious that this country needed a lot of training in all medical areas,” said Gonzales, an orthopedic surgeon. “With the projects I wanted to begin here, there was not much I could accomplish in 90 days.”

It was at this point that Gonzales volunteered to remain an entire year and follow through with a plan to bring modern orthopedic medicine to Afghanistan. He began with a young medical student he met within his first month of being here.

A recent graduate of Kandahar University of Medicine, Abdul Wali expressed an interest in orthopedic medicine. Now, five months later, he is a contracted medical assistant at the combat



Gonzales examines the X-ray of an Afghan man while treating patients at the Pfc. Jerrod Dennis Combat Hospital on Kandahar Airfield.



Dr. (Col.) Richard Gonzales, orthopedic surgeon, operates on an Afghan boy at the Pfc. Jerrod Dennis Combat Hospital on Kandahar Airfield. The boy suffered injuries to his elbow and wrist falling into a well.

hospital. He is also working as a resident, well on his way to learning methods and techniques common in the United States, but rare in Afghanistan.

“When I first arrived here they had no modern ways to treat fractures,” said Gonzales. “They were not using any surgical techniques – everything was being treated with traction.”

Taking Wali under his wing, Gonzales began teaching him modern orthopedic procedures. He even had his entire medical library sent from home to assist in Wali’s education. “He has required reading and completes assignments,” said Gonzales. “Even though this is somewhat of a crash course, because his education is being done with one-on-one mentoring, it can be done faster.”

Although the training is fast-paced, Gonzales feels it will be fruitful.

“I’m being very thorough with his training. ... I know in a few years he will be teaching other Afghans,” he said.

“There is only one other orthopedic surgeon I know of in Afghanistan,” said Wali. “This is a very good opportunity for me and my country.”

In addition to the mentoring, Gonzales also has other physicians come from Mier Weis, the local hospital in Kandahar.

Because they are attending physicians with years of experience, he said he is only trying to demonstrate procedures so they can eventually be used.

Gonzales doesn’t stop with just training doctors though. He also is taking time to train future doctors. With a small class of interpreters and service members he teaches a science class for college credit.

As Gonzales works tirelessly to educate, his efforts have not gone unnoticed. Cure International, a non-governmental organization, is assisting with his plight.

“Right now Cure International has pledged a 20-bed orthopedic facility in Kandahar city,” he said. “Cure International normally attends to the needs of children but is expanding its role in Afghanistan because of my commitment here.”

With six months still remaining on his current tour, Gonzales said he would not stop his efforts in bringing modern orthopedic medicine and education to Afghanistan. He is so committed to his efforts that he has already applied to return to active duty, with the eventual goal of returning to Afghanistan for another rotation. Gonzales said he didn’t expect to become so passionate when he initially came to the country, but there are many factors that encourage him.

Being from Puerto Rico he knows the positive effects that come from U.S. aid, and setting up educational programs is one of the best ways for Afghans to stand on their own two feet, he said. “In my contact with the people of this country (I’ve found) that they are very eager to learn,” he said. “I see that many of the younger generation here appreciate the importance of education.”

Wali affirms Gonzales’ efforts with his plan for his education. “When I finish my training here I want to remain in Afghanistan and serve my own people in my own country,” said Wali.

Gonzales said he is already very encouraged by the progress made in a short time. “There is a lot of fertile soil for education and growth here,” he said. “If you practice medicine for the sake of what it truly is, what I’m doing right now is the most pure form of medicine.”

Even with his full schedule, Gonzales is still canvassing the country for other doctors like Wali to come and train with him.

“Even after I retire I will return here with an NGO,” he said. “That is how strongly I feel about improving medicine for the Afghan people.”

Mujahedeen fighters trade weapons for jobs

Former AMF warriors begin new careers

Story and photo by Maj. Greg Park
Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan — A Kabul garment factory, Stara Sahar, is employing 18 former mujahedeen fighters who turned in their weapons and are now receiving training as tailors making women's garments.

The former fighters are participating in the weapons-for-jobs training plan called the Afghan New Beginnings Program. ANBP is a donor-funded initiative of the United Nations Development Program.

Gulmohed Mohammad, a former enlisted soldier in the 8th Division, Division "A," was happy to lay down his weapon.

"Life is better than being in the military – no fighting and more money," said Mohammad.

He was making \$13 per month while fighting the Taliban and now makes \$76 per month.

"I am very happy about the pay raise," he said.

When asked why he chose tailoring, Mohammad replied, "It is a good job, so I selected it. People always need clothes."

The pay raise has come in handy. He is a 27-year-old single man living with his family of 13. The added income helps pay

the family's monthly rent of \$115. He also helps his family pay for other expenses.

Mohammad Asif, a 22-year-old former mujahedeen fighter, plans on starting his own garment shop upon completion of the training program.

"Once I finish the training I will know how to do everything," said Asif.

Both Asif and Mohammad will receive six months of training paid for by the Afghan New Beginnings Program. Following the six months, they have an additional six months that is paid for by the owner of the business.

A contract is signed with ANBP and the owner prior to the start of training.

Shakib who is a civilian supervisor at the Stara Sahar garment factory said the 18 former soldiers are doing a great job.

The owner visits the factory once a week and is "very happy," said Shakib.

Many local shop keepers buy their



Gulmohed Mohammad sews clothing that will be sold in the Kabul area. He turned in his weapon for training and now works at the Stara Sahan garment factory in Kabul. Mohammad received the training of his choice after leaving the AMF.

clothes from the Stara Sahar garment factory and sell them to the public. Custom orders are also taken. Most of the clothes are sold in the Kabul area.

"They come to us because we do a good job and charge little money," said Sahan.

They have a workshop and a showroom, and employ five civilians besides the 18 former fighters.

Enduring Voices

What interests you most about Afghanistan?



Marine Capt. Greg Wenli
3rd Bn., 6th Marines
"The transformation of the government through the elections is interesting."



New Zealand Lance Cpl. Ashley Isheiwood
New Zealand PRT
"The history of the country is very interesting."



Slovak Capt. Milos Vybostok
Slovak Eng. Unit
"I am interested in how they live their day-to-day lives."



Sgt. 1st Class Steve Woodyard
125th Sig. Bn.
"I am interested in how we are helping the local economy."

Mullahs play vital role informing public

Story and photo by
Pfc. Chris Stump
17th Public Affairs Detachment

KHOGYANI, Afghanistan — In this predominately Islamic society, many Afghans look to their religious and civic leaders for information on everything from education to the upcoming elections.

Keeping people informed, as well as tending to their religious needs, is just one of the important roles mullahs, or religious leaders, have in this region.

Likewise, maliks, or elders, also keep locals informed by passing much of the information they learn from civic education events on to the people in their areas, said Maj. Louis Sand, 401st Civil Affairs Battalion, Civil Military Operations Center, team leader.

These two key figures immensely help spread the word of the many projects the PRT is accomplishing, and also spread news about the elections and their benefits under the new constitution, he said.

To help inform these leaders so they may inform others, the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team and United States Aid for International Development sponsor and fund many seminars where mullahs are invited to learn about aid programs, elections and what the Coalition is doing to assist the people of Afghanistan, said Sand.

One such event designed to get the

word out to the mullahs was a civic education conference here July 22, sponsored by the PRT and funded by USAID, he said.

Many Afghans gain much of their knowledge of ongoing events and upcoming events by word-of-mouth from these leaders, said Sand.

“The mullah is a key communicator and a person of great respect in the community,” he said.

“Afghanistan is almost 100 percent Islamic, and this is a conservative area,” said Sand. “People put a lot of credence into what mullahs say.”

“We say mullahs are religious scholars, because they are scholars and know about our religion. They are the people we will obey,” said Hamed, a citizen of Nangahar Province and an interpreter for the PRT.

“Mullahs are trustworthy to the Afghan people — people agree with the mullah,” he said.

Having people believe what a mullah says is a very important thing for an organization like the PRT, especially when the mullahs are putting out information on elections and the constitution, said Sand.

Although mullahs are first, and foremost, a religious influence, they see the benefits of a democratic society and most often pass the information on to their followers, said Hamed.

Mullahs have a long history in Afghanistan, he said. They have always had a strong leadership role, but their role in leading people toward freedom became more apparent during the Soviet occupation.

“Just like when the Russians were here, the mullahs are advising people what to do,” said Hamed.

Except the times are obviously different now, he added.

“In the days of the Russians, mullahs were the first to get up and say to fight them in the jihad,” said Hamed. “Now, instead of telling people to fight, they are telling of the benefits of democracy with the help of the Coalition.”

“A large majority of mullahs have been very supportive toward elections and security,” said Sand.

That support is something that definitely benefits the PRT and their mission of rebuilding and securing the area.

“When we were first fighting for our independence against the Russians, we didn’t know what real independence was,” said Mavlavi Mahammed Salaq, a mullah from Nangahar Province.

“Now that we know what real independence is, we realize how important it is, we must tell people about it. Now is the time to stop fighting,” he said. “We must be united to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. Every nation that is a successful nation is a united nation.”

One sign that these religious leaders are positively influencing the people of this eastern region is the large numbers of registered voters, said Sand.

Nangahar Province has one of the highest numbers of registered voters in the entire country, he said.

With leaders like Salaq spreading the word, things will only improve, said Hamed.

“Everybody will accept what a mullah says as long as he has good reasons to back it up,” he said.

During Salaq’s speech at the civic convention, he told the crowd of leaders, “Voting is one of the most important things we can do. Register everyone — wives, sisters and mothers.”

But mullahs aren’t the only ones telling of the benefits of a democratic country. The other key figure in telling Afghan society about the benefits of democracy is the malik.

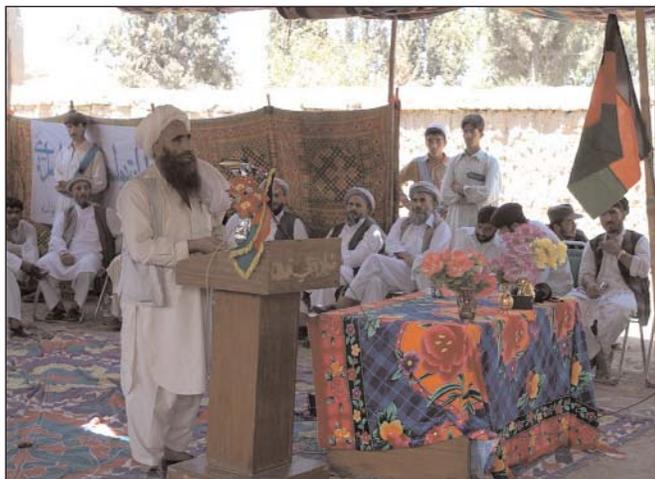
Maliks are the village elders, said Sand. People look to them for information and knowledge.

To help these maliks gain the knowledge to share with others, the PRT, in conjunction with USAID, sponsors civic education events focused on the constitution and voter registration.

“We’re mainly trying to prepare people for the elections,” said Sand.

At many of these events, both mullahs and maliks are present, each learning about the ways they, and the people they teach, can exercise their rights under the constitution and sustaining a legitimate government in Afghanistan, he said.

“If you’ve convinced and informed the mullah,” said Sand, “you’re likely to bring the rest of the population along with you.”



Mavlavi Mahammed Salaq, a mullah from Nangahar Province, speaks at a civic education conference sponsored by the Jalalabad PRT July 22. The PRT, in conjunction with USAID, sponsors and funds events to inform local leaders of events such as elections.

Engineers provide security at FOS Carlson

Story and photos by
Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING SITE CARLSON, Afghanistan — The staccato sound of automatic weapons firing fills the air at Forward Operating Site Carlson in southeastern Afghanistan. The combat engineers with the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) are conducting drills to remain proficient at securing the base camp and field landing strip.

“As a combat engineer I never thought I’d be doing security like this,” said Cpl. Aaron Doble, Company C, 27th Eng. Bn., combat engineer. “But you can’t just walk around the Army today saying, ‘I’m only going to do what my specific job is.’ You have to cross-train, doing other jobs to complete the mission.”

While security is just one part of their normal mission, the Soldiers realize just how important that mission is for those at FOS Carlson.

Combat engineers are usually tasked to perform demolitions and combat patrolling, said Sgt. Jesse Thietten, Co. B, 27th Eng. Bn. And although it was an



Soldiers from the 27th Eng. Bn. prepare explosives for detonation. Though they are responsible for security, they still have opportunities to perform engineer tasks as well.

unexpected task for these sappers, he realizes that security plays just as important a role to FOS Carlson.

Without the security presence given by the combat engineers, the structural engineers constructing the base and field landing strip would not be able to complete their mission.

Having Soldiers whose specific duty is security makes these operations run smoother.

“My Soldiers are pulling security and over-watch for the base camp and field landing strip,” said 1st Sgt. Johnny Hart, Co. C, 27th Eng. Bn., first sergeant. “They are providing protection for the personnel that work on the FLS, all the construction personnel, so they can focus on constructing (the airfield).”

The Soldiers of Company C have been on three deployments in as many years, each with a different focus. The first one was to Kosovo with a construction focus. “Then last year we came to Afghanistan to do mine clearing. Our company was the first specific mine clearance company since the Vietnam War. We were responsible for creating standard operating procedures for mine clearance in the country,” said Hart. “Now we’re back in Afghanistan, pulling security for the construction of a base camp and field landing strip.”

The different missions of the past deployments have made the Company C Soldiers more versatile and better Soldiers overall, said Capt. Drew White, 27th Eng. Bn. battle captain. “Everybody’s doing two or three jobs. We’ve been trained for all these different jobs. It’s always a challenge to do something that’s not necessarily your primary focus all the time. (It’s a tribute to) the ability, the flexibility of our Soldiers, of today’s Soldiers.”

For young Soldiers this deployment has developed their confidence.

“Soldiers have the reputation as being resourceful and versatile, said Spc. Charlie Koepnick, Co. C, 27th Eng. Bn., combat engineer. “I think this deployment has let me prove to myself that I can do that. That I can adapt and learn,



Soldiers from the 27th Eng. Bn. pull security for village assessments and convoys, as well as perimeter security at FOS Carlson.

even in a forward deployed environment.”

But security is not the only asset these combat engineers bring to the FOS. When local nationals turn munitions in to the Coalition forces, the sappers use their skills in demolitions to detonate the items.

Doctrinally, the combat engineer’s primary mission is to deal with explosives, said Hart. Being able to destroy munitions brought in by the local population is a way for the Soldiers to hone their skills.

“My guys are doing great. They are maintaining the focus for the mission itself, understanding the big picture and realizing they’re doing something outside their normal military occupational specialty,” said Hart. “And, because of how we’re structured right now, they have the ability to still do things within their MOS like exploding munitions. I see this as an opportunity for them to refine their (basic Soldiering) skills.”

Whether it’s providing security or blowing munitions, these Soldiers are prepared for anything that comes their way.

“Our company motto is ‘Rock Hard.’ And the Rock Hard Soldiers have proven to be very versatile in their ability to adapt from one mission to another in a very short amount of time,” said Hart. “No matter what the situation, these guys are able to, as we say, ‘Ruck up and tighten your bootlaces and move out and draw fire.’ And that’s good. It says something about the Soldiers of today.”

CMA mission success relies on teamwork

Story and photos by
Pfc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

LAGHMAN DISTRICT, Afghanistan — One of the many ways the Coalition is helping the Operation Enduring Freedom mission is by going into villages around the country and providing medical assistance to the Afghan people and their livestock.

Known as cooperative medical assistance projects, the events focus on the health and well-being of the locals and their animals.

But before a convoy ever moves out for a CMA mission, many people have been working hard for several weeks in preparation.

Preparing for a CMA involves much more than just arranging for the necessary personnel and rolling into a village, said Col. Steve Jones, Task Force Victory command surgeon.

“A month or so before the mission, the planning stages first begin,” he said.

The first step in a successful medical mission is good coordination between the civil affairs team and the members of the proposed village, said Maj. Louis Sand, 401st Civil Affairs Battalion, Civil Military Operations Center, team leader.

“We must first select a location for the team to set up the medical site,” he said. “The best way we have found to do that is to select a province and ask the provincial governor to speak with the leaders of each district to select villages they feel need the most medical support.”

Once the proposed villages are selected by the district leaders, the PRT takes a closer look at the needs of each of the villages that were suggested and makes a final decision, he said.

“With the village selected, a team of qualified nurses and doctors must be chosen for the mission,” said Sand. “The PRT that will be supporting the mission sends a request for a medical and veterinary mission to TF Victory surgeon cell with the suggested mission dates.”

When the surgeon cell receives the mission request, they do what they can to accommodate the mission on the requested dates, said Jones.

“When the surgeon cell receives the request form, they must compare the dates on the request with the dates of missions already scheduled,” said Jones. “If the dates are available we start making arrangements for force protection, transportation, interpreters and plenty of nurses and doctors.”

Since the surgeon cell is made up of a small number of Soldiers, the nurses and doctors are sometimes taken from other locations.

“Most of the doctors we use during the missions are from Task Force 325 Combat Support Hospital,” said Jones. “However, we have also been known to use Navy and Marine doctors and nurses for our missions. It really depends on who is available for what days.”

When selecting nurses and doctors, the surgeon cell has to be careful to make sure they have enough female nurses and doctors to accommodate the number of women they may



Capt. Cristal Horsch assesses a patient in Alingar village during a CMA July 22.

see in the villages, he said.

“Since Afghan women are only allowed to be seen by female doctors, we have to make sure we have enough female providers for the mission,” said Jones.

Along with providers, there also have to be enough interpreters to assist the providers in caring for the patients who come to the mission site, he said.

“There should be at least one interpreter for each provider,” said Jones. “Although we strive for that scenario, we aren’t always able to get enough female interpreters, but we always make the mission happen.”

Once the team is selected, Jones sits down with the medical staff and goes over the types of illnesses and diseases they can expect to see while on the mission.

Many of the illnesses and diseases here are very different from what nurses and doctors see with service members and civilians in the United States, he said.

“We have a lot of nurses and doctors who have never been on a CMA, and I like to know that they are prepared for the types of things they could encounter,” said Jones. “I also like to know that they are trained on how to treat the illnesses and diseases they will come across.”

Once the team has been briefed, the medical team goes through the medication



Master Sgt. Pat Pierson, TF Victory, treats an open wound on a cow’s face with a spray antibiotic during the CMA in Alingar village July 22.



1st Lt. Brian Corwin, TF 168, looks at an infection on Ghullam Sediq's face during the CMA in Pariana village July 23.

boxes to ensure they are fully stocked with all medications they might need during the mission.

"Since the medical missions include both human medical care and veterinary care, we have twice the number of boxes to check, but double checking is always worth it," said Jones. "When we come in from a mission, we refill all medications and make any changes that we feel are needed based on the previous mission. But we always check again, just to make sure we didn't miss anything."

While the doctors, nurses and veterinarians prepare the medications for the mission, other members of the team arrange transportation to and from the village for everyone involved, said Jones.

"Each mission can include upwards of 15 to 20 people who need to know how and when they are traveling," he said. "Although some of the members of the team come from the PRT and don't have to travel as far as the team coming from (Bagram Air Base), they still need to know the plan and be included in the travel arrangements during the mission."

While the personnel from the surgeon cell work on getting everything ready for the trip to the mission site, the personnel at the PRT work with the sub-governor in the village to make sure everyone knows the Coalition members are coming, said Sand.

"One of the most important things we do, that almost always guarantees a successful mission, is work with the locals in the village," he said. "We find out if there is a clinic in the village and ask the local doctors and veterinarian if they would like to work with us during the mission to help treat the people and animals."

Along with asking the doctors and vets to help with the medical part of the mis-

sion, the sub-governor and local police are also asked to help with security for both the CMA team and the local people.

"Even though we generally know the threat level in the area before we arrive, the village is given prior notice of when we are coming so we have to be prepared for anything," said Sand. "And by helping us with both the medical mission and security, it shows the local police and doctors how they can improve the work they are already doing."

When all coordination has been made with the village, the PRT is ready for the Bagram unit to arrive.

Upon arrival in the village, three sub-sites are set up and Soldiers provide security around the perimeter, said Jones. The sub-sites are a women's clinic, a men's clinic and an area for the vets to treat livestock.

Due to cultural norms of Afghan society, separate male and female treatment areas are set up with only male and female providers and interpreters in each room, said Jones.

During the mission, the providers are careful to make sure they record what types of illnesses and diseases they see so that they will know which medicines or amounts of medicine need to be adjusted for the next mission, he said.

On average, the medical team treats between 400 to 500 men and women in each village, said Jones. The patients come from several villages and travel long distances to receive the type of medical care they could not otherwise receive.

"The type of care we can give the patients in the clinics isn't the same as what the Coalition can provide, because we don't have the means to provide all the necessary medications," said Fahima, head of the emergency obstetrics clinic in Alingar village. "We are only able to give out three to five days worth of medications to the patients. The Coalition is able to provide closer to what the patients really need."

Once the mission is complete and the Bagram and PRT



Spc. Jason Litteer, 551st MP Co., searches male patients before they entered the clinic at a CMA in Bamian Province June 19.

teams are back to their respective locations, all equipment is cleaned and the medicine boxes are refilled.

When recovery is complete, an after action report is conducted to see if there were any lessons learned or necessary changes that everyone should be aware of, said Jones.

These end-of-mission tasks ensure that each mission is better than the last, truly making the event a team effort.

Without the combined effort of everyone involved, CMAs would never be successful, he said. "When everyone works as a team, the (weight) is never left on any one person's shoulders."



Soldiers work with the local police in Haji Kheil to ensure the perimeter is secured before the CMA began April 22.

Afghan returns to homeland as interpreter

Story and photo by
Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING SITE CARLSON, Afghanistan — When a young Abdul Basir Kadirzada tried to return home to Kabul, Afghanistan, he found his country in the midst of a Soviet invasion, and the violence kept him away. Kadirzada had left Afghanistan for Czechoslovakia where he earned an engineering degree.

After working as an interpreter for many relief agencies throughout Europe, Kadirzada went to America, where he has lived and worked as a civil engineer in California ever since. He became a naturalized citizen and loves his new country.

“America is my country and my home,” said Kadirzada. “I have a responsibility to (the American) Constitution and our policies. I also have a responsibility to this country where I was born and raised.”

And he was offered a unique opportunity to serve both countries he loves. The U.S. government contacted him and asked him to come to Afghanistan and be an interpreter for U.S. forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom.

After more than 30 years, Kadirzada finally returned to his homeland.

“I’m honored to support our troops and come help,” he said. “Especially in this country. There’s a lot of problems for kids, for people, for security and safety.”

Kadirzada works with the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) and Civil Affairs Soldiers in southeastern Paktika Province. He’s an interpreter and cultural advisor for the Coalition forces.

“I speak all the dialects in the Paktika Province, and it’s very easy communication for me,” said Kadirzada.

It’s important for those working with the people to understand the traditional customs of the region, he said.

“He is a great interpreter,” said Capt. Drew White, 27th Eng. Bn. battle captain. “He has the background to communicate between these different groups of people.”

He knows American idiosyncrasies and he understands the Afghan behavior, said White. “He makes sure that we communicate, and we don’t alienate while we’re at it by misspeaking or saying the wrong thing.”

Being back in Afghanistan after all



Abdul Basir Kadirzada (right) shares a laugh with a village elder during a village assessment. Kadirzada helps civil affairs teams and members of the 27th Eng. Bn. communicate with residents throughout southeastern Afghanistan.

these years is emotional for Kadirzada.

“I’ve been absent from this country for 30 years,” said Kadirzada. “There is such a big change, I almost cannot believe it. The infrastructure is destroyed. The culture is destroyed. And, because of the drought, the climate has changed.”

The destruction from decades of war has left his people in great need.

“We have a lot of problems. The people are distracted and we need to work with them to show them the path and bring this country back to civilization. They need help to reconstruct the country.”

Kadirzada believes reconstruction is more than building schools and clinics.

“When you talk about the reconstruction of the country, I say you need to talk about the reconstruction of the minds of the people. If (the Afghan people) are going to reconstruct this country, they need to be in total unity.”

Kadirzada explained that the years of war have caused many problems for the country.

Because of limited educational opportunities, poverty, a high population and lack of industry, “the country is suffering,” he said.

But many nations of the world are ready to help this country. “This is a unique opportunity for this country to use all this positive help for the future. We’re here to be of service to this country so the people can live as happy,

healthy people.

Kadirzada’s sacrifice and dedication has made an impact on those serving around him.

“It’s wonderful that he felt compelled to come back and help with the effort here,” said Capt. Nathan Reynolds, civil affairs team leader. “He’s true and true American, but he’s also Afghan, so he gets to balance the best of both worlds and come back and help his people.”

Like everyone deployed away from home, he misses his family, but they are supportive.

“My wife is very beautiful and a reasonable person, that understands why I’m here,” he said. “We discussed it and she said, ‘Yes, it is okay.’ I also have three young kids. We discussed it as well and they understand that I’m here for the betterment of this country and the innocent people.

“It’s not easy for them. My youngest daughter is 7 and she asks for me to come home. Then I tell her about the children in poverty over here and she tells me to stay and help the kids.”

Until the day that he returns home to his family, he will keep in his mind their support as he continues to do his part in the war on terror.

“I pray that God bless America and all the men and women serving and working with these people,” he said, “so they can be free and have a good and enjoyable life.”

'Living Room' officially opens chapel doors

Story and photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Darren D. Heusel
105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KABUL, Afghanistan — When U.S. Navy Capt. Steve Evans became the first chaplain assigned to Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan Headquarters April 18, he arrived in Kabul with nothing more than a burning desire to spread “the Good News.”

Soon, his passion for spreading the gospel began to catch fire and it wasn't long before he would have a brand new chapel in which he could call home.

The Kabul chapel officially opened July 9, with a two-hour event called “The Living Room” coffee house ministry – a time when people can come together in fellowship and to worship in a low-key environment complete with live music, food, games and more.

“With The Living Room ministry ... we're basically starting from scratch,” said Evans. “A lot of volunteers have come out of the wood work and worked toward improving the ministry and providing better services here.

“I kind of feel like I'm on top of a big wave and I'm just trying to stay on top of that wave. I've gotten outstanding support from the leadership. This chapel is a great success story and the result of a team effort.”

The first hour of the contemporary service is devoted to music and worship, or as Evans put it, “a time when the Holy Spirit will lovingly and gently work in people's lives.”

The second half of the program is

devoted to just hanging out and enjoying one another's fellowship.

“We intentionally scheduled this time for people to mingle, munch, sip and casually talk,” said Evans. “It's also a time where we as leaders can observe someone's demeanor. ...

“Sometimes people just need someone to lovingly listen to their story and we as leaders need to have patient ears. We need to listen to their felt-need at the moment with unconditional love.”

Evans said this is actually the second generation of The Living Room ministry, the first of which was started in 1973 when he was a 19-year-old Navy Corpsman stationed at Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Va.

“Chaplain Stan Beach, a commander and Vietnam veteran who was stationed at the hospital there, began this coffee house ministry, and within a matter of six months it grew from six people the first night to an average of about 60 to 70 each week thereafter,” he said.

Evans already has a leg up on the first generation of The Living Room ministry, with 23 people showing up for opening night at Kabul Compound.

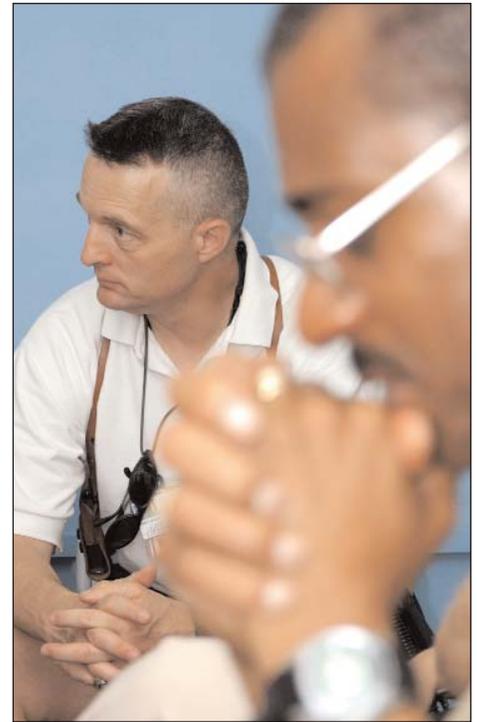
“Looking at the model of the original Living Room ministry, once the word got out it just spread like wildfire,” he said. “Hopefully, this will continue to grow and provide a meaningful, purposeful and rewarding time for the troops while they serve here in Afghanistan.”

Tim Huggins, a resident of Gilbert, Ariz., who works as a contractor with International Telegraph and Telephone in Kabul, took on the responsibility of heading up The Living Room ministry and said he was pleased with the way things turned out.

“I think we had a pretty exciting night,” he said. “We had some music, some videos and some folks giving testimony. ... We're definitely reaching people. It's a way to get to hear about God's word in a casual atmosphere. It's entertainment with a message that can change your life.”

Sgt. Jessica Pennington, an individual mobilization augmentee with the 210th Aviation Regiment from Fort Rucker, Ala., said The Living Room ministry reminded her of her church back home.

“It's real low-key and I like a



Maj. Darrell Harris (foreground) prays as Col. Jon Lopey takes in the sights and sounds during the grand opening of The Living Room coffee house ministry July 9 at Kabul Compound.

contemporary service,” said Pennington, who conducts video teleconferences and provides support to the help desk at Kabul. “We do a lot of singing at my church back home, so I really enjoy it.”

Sgt. 1st Class E. Gerald Cooper, a communications noncommissioned officer from Fort Bliss, Texas, said he feels the Friday night service “is a step in the right direction.”

“It's like planting something that's really going to flourish,” added Cooper, who serves as the NCO in charge of the strategic planning section of the civil affairs cell in Kabul. “I'd love to be around to see how this evolves.”

Staff Sgt. Phillip Witzke, a print journalist with the Kansas Army National Guard, and leader of the five-piece religious musical group “Refuge,” said, “What this really means is we have another avenue to not only play music but to minister to service members, because that's what it's all about.

“We wanted to provide a refuge for the service members and bring them back home a little bit – a place other than the barracks or work where they can come to relax, socialize and just have fun.”



Staff Sgt. Phillip Witzke, leader of the five-piece religious band “Refuge,” sings as he plays the guitar during the grand opening of The Living Room coffee house ministry July 9.

REF adds technological advantage to troops

Story and photos by
Spc. Claudia K. Bullard
105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — For Soldiers patrolling the remote terrain of southeastern Afghanistan, having cutting-edge equipment designed specifically to mission standards becomes more than “nice-to-have.” For battlefield commanders it means chances for mission success are greatly increased. More importantly, it increases the chances for a Soldier’s safe return.

Located in a modest workshop on Kandahar Airfield, a unique group of individuals is bringing such modern technology directly to battlefield commanders. A mix of Soldiers and civilians, the team brings together conventional knowledge, military skill and creative genius to add an unconventional twist to the military acquisition process. Known as Rapid Equipping Force, this team is dedicated to getting equipment to the Soldiers in a fraction of the four to five years it normally takes by building, buying and fielding equipment outside the normal military process.

REF’s inventory of fielded items runs the gamut from sophisticated to simple. Located on the lab’s first floor, REF Engineer Ken Zemach is eager to show off examples of REF’s success. One item is the Well-Cam, REF’s premier design. Designed by Zemach, it looks similar to a small Coleman lantern on a fishing pole. When lowered into a well, it transmits a 360-degree view to a handheld monitor.



Soldiers use the RAMP-25, an REF-acquired item that boosts radio range from 5 to 25 kilometers.



REF Lab Technician Al Qualls tests a Pocket Terp, REF’s answer to the shortage of interpreters in field situations. Soldiers can pull up a variety of pre-programmed text and voice messages and translate them into the local language.

Using the Well-Cam as an example, Zemach explained how technology can change the way Soldiers operate in the field.

“Prior to the Well-Cam, units weren’t always searching the wells as thoroughly as they needed to,” said Zemach. “A Special Forces unit that was out on a mission shined a regular Army flashlight down a well and didn’t see anything. After they left, they got more information and came back with the Well-Cam.”

On this, its first mission, the Well-Cam enabled the SF unit to uncover “a substantial cache” of rocket-propelled grenades, AK-47s and improvised explosive devices in a tunnel approximately 40 feet inside the well, he said. “That’s big.”

Zemach said the Well-Cam — an idea that came from a first sergeant seeking a safer alternative to lowering Soldiers down into unexplored wells — was “designed and out in 12 hours. I whipped together a prototype and dropped it down a

well on post. Six hours later we were out (using it) on a mission.”

The REF team doesn’t just create new items — they also find alternate uses for existing products. One example is the application of a mesh fabric currently used in hospitals for burn victims. When placed beneath a patient it keeps healing burns from sticking to bed sheets. When made into a vest and worn under a mounted Soldier’s body armor, it enables a steady breeze to circulate around the torso,” said Zemach. So far 5,000 vests have been shipped for use by Soldiers in a Stryker brigade.

Some of the most necessary items fielded are what Zemach calls a “low tech solution to an ongoing problem.” Though Zemach actively holds a degree from MIT, he said what team members rely on most is creative thinking and a few basic building skills.

“Sometimes an idea comes up in your head or you observe a need you see out on a mission,” said Zemach. “Or sometimes a Soldier has a good idea but no way to purchase parts or nowhere to make the idea.”

In that case, REF allows Soldiers to use the lab and gives them some help with the prototype. “We have guys doing self help a lot,” he said.

New environment means new animal dangers

Safeguarding the Coalition

Story by Pfc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — Leaders here continuously emphasize the avoidance of the known perils of being deployed to a combat zone. However, often overlooked are the dangers presented by animals and insects in a new and unfamiliar environment.

Deciphering between the animals that can get you sick and the ones that don't have parasites and communicable diseases is not necessarily an easy task.

While most animals may look harmless enough, many of them could be carrying diseases that can be passed to humans, said Maj. Trudy Salerno, Task Force Victory, veterinarian.

"Most diseases that animals have are species specific. However, there are some that can be transferred (to humans)," she said. "Also, even if the diseases they have aren't able to be transferred to humans, they can still bite and harm humans."

Some animal bites are worse than others, said Col. John Belfrage, 993rd Medical Detachment, veterinarian services, U.S. Army Reserve, Denver, Colo.

"For instance, if you get bit by a snake, it will do more damage than if you get bit by a lizard, but the lizard can still carry diseases such as salmonella," he said.

The threat from animals varies by location throughout Afghanistan. The animals found here range from common cattle and donkeys, to monkeys and viper snakes, said Belfrage.

One of the best known disease carriers encountered is the mosquito, said Capt. Robert Lowen, 172nd Medical Detachment executive officer.

"The mosquitoes in Afghanistan are known for carrying malaria, dengue and filaria (ringworm)," he said.

The best way to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes is to wear some form of repellent, he said. "Also to prevent malaria, everyone should be taking either Doxycycline or Mefloquine."

Along with the mosquitoes, other things to watch for are snakes, scorpions and spiders.

"Not all the snakes in Afghanistan are poisonous, however, it is sometimes hard to differentiate between the poisonous and



Courtesy Photo

Most scorpions reported in Afghanistan belong to the Buthidae family of scorpions, and have quite strong venom. Stings are very painful, and infection is the number one risk after a sting occurs. Though not all species are venomous, they should all be treated as potentially dangerous.

non-poisonous," said Lowen. "So all snakes should be treated as if they are highly poisonous."

The easiest way to keep snakes away from living and working areas is by keeping their food away from those areas, he said.

"If you have food left around, it will draw in the mice and rats," he said. "If you don't have anything drawing (mice and rats) in, the snakes won't come around. ..."

Keeping areas clean is also a good idea for keeping spiders away, said Lowen.

"One of the best ways to tell if spiders are around is by seeing spider webs," he said. "By making sure your areas are clean and free of webs you are less likely to be bitten by a spider."

Lowen said the spiders in Afghanistan, for the most part, are the same as in the United States.

"The spiders that can be seen in Afghanistan should be somewhat familiar," said Lowen. "The most common spiders are widows (spiders with shiny black coloration and red markings) and one (similar to) the recluse."

Scorpions are another arachnid that everyone should look out for, he said. "Some of the most dangerous scorpions are found in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

"Most scorpion stings feel similar to the sting from a wasp, but others can be more lethal," he said. "Service members who will be sleeping outside should check their sleeping bags before getting in at night and check their boots before putting them on in the morning, to make sure no scorpions crawled in when they weren't looking."

While many bites are non-lethal, they all pose the threat of infection. All bites that don't go away after a short period of time

should be checked by medical personnel to prevent further damage.

While they are more approachable, domestic-type animals are also something to watch out for.

"Many times cats and dogs will wander into installations and people will want to pet them and keep them as unit mascots," said Lowen. "However, aside from mascots and pets being against (Central Command) general order number one, the animals could also be carrying diseases or parasites that could be transferred to humans."

The number one disease that can be contracted from the animals is rabies, he said.

"Aside from rabies, dogs and cats also carry fleas and ticks," said Lowen. "If humans are bitten by either fleas or ticks, they run the chance of contracting a disease that causes relapsing fever or hemorrhagic fever, which is similar to ebola."

Livestock are another threat to service members' health. Do not attempt to make contact with them during missions, unless you are there to treat the animals and have to handle them.

"The livestock in this country are the livelihood of the people and the last thing we want to do is mess with someone's livelihood, but also because there could be parasites on the animals that could be transferred to humans," said Lowen.

In the end, it is best to simply leave all animals alone, just in case they have a disease or parasite that can be contracted.

"Having sick Soldiers lowers the unit's readiness," he said. "But having a sick Soldier because they were messing with something they shouldn't have, is something no unit should have to carry the weight for."

Crew chiefs care for Warthogs in ‘pen’

Story and photo by
Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt IIs, affectionately known as Warthogs, fly in the skies over Afghanistan around the clock.

In the air, the pilot is responsible for taking care of the aircraft – but once the Warthog comes back to the “pen,” its care and feeding is the responsibility of its crew chiefs.

The crew chiefs “prepare the aircraft for take-off, recover it once it lands and make sure it’s ready to take off again when it’s needed,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Justian Martelle, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron dedicated crew chief. That can include repairing, reloading and any one

of a hundred other tasks to ready the jet for the next launch.

Martelle is a dedicated crew chief, which means he is assigned responsibility for a specific aircraft at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. Since his plane remained in Alaska, he “floats” – taking care of any required tasks during his shift. The 25 crew chiefs deployed to Bagram each launch and recover a half-dozen aircraft in a 12-hour shift.

“Being a crew chief is a frame of mind,” said Air Force 1st Lt. Joseph Toup, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron maintenance operations officer. “It takes more than an expert to get an aircraft ready for flight – it takes knowing how to do it better than anyone else on the flight line. That’s where crew chiefs make the difference.”

“There really isn’t a dramatic difference between launching here and launching aircraft at home,” said Martelle. “Here, the pace is a little bit higher, and we know we’re launching aircraft for real missions, not training sorties. We are constantly busy – when we’re working, we don’t have a lot of time to do anything but focus on the job.”

A typical day for a crew chief means arriving at work about 2:30 a.m. to start the shift, said Martelle. After the morning brief, the crew chief finds out which aircraft he or she will

work on that day. A crew chief on the opposite shift will pass on appropriate information on the aircraft. Then the crew chief launches the aircraft and recovers it as needed.

When an aircraft lands, the crew chief turns it – ensuring the craft has fuel, ammunition and is ready for the next launch. “If something needs to be fixed, you take care of it,” said Martelle. “If you can’t fix it, you get someone who can help you.”

Helping each other is key to success in maintenance, as one person can’t do the job alone. For instance, two Airmen usually work together to fix an aircraft. “In many cases, you can’t put too many people inside a jet,” said the crew chief. “We use two people for a few reasons.”

The main reason is so someone can reference the technical data to make sure the repairs are done accurately and safely. “That second person also provides some knowledge. Usually, one person has more knowledge on fixing a particular problem than the other team member. That way, we can train on repairing the aircraft while we are getting it ready to go.”

The challenge of preparing and maintaining the aircraft makes the job worthwhile. “Maintaining the jet is the best part of the job,” said Martelle. “I would much rather do maintenance than launch.”

And when the plane launches, Martelle said he takes pride in knowing that it will provide protection to service members on the ground. “It’s good knowing that these aircraft are giving those Marines and Army folks out there some overhead protection. I know I would like having an A-10 overhead if I were out there.”



Airman 1st Class Jesus Rodriguez, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief, prepares an A-10 Thunderbolt II for take-off.

Dragon: Infantrymen find caches, disrupt ACM efforts

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After crawling inside, about 700 meters inside what was an underground cistern tunnel system, the Soldiers found a large cache. The team did not have the capabilities to clear the cache on their own. Instead, they secured and mapped the tunnel. They passed this on to an EOD team and a team of Afghan National Army soldiers, who removed the stockpile.

The EOD team inventoried hundreds of rocket-propelled grenades, 60 rocket boosters, sealed boxes of

Soviet AK-47 rounds and an 82mm mortar tube, which they destroyed in place with C4.

During Operation Dragon Tree the 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., removed not only the weapons from the hands of the enemy, but also removed a major incentive for Taliban, al-Qaeda and anti-Coalition militants to return to these remote mountain villages. For the community of Afghan villages in the Argandab valley, the security situation improves as stabilization operations continue throughout southern Afghanistan.



Sgt. 1st Class Billy Chaney, HHC, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., Air Ops NCO, directs air movement and pathfinder operations.

TF 2-27 provides assistance to Paktika

Story by
Master Sgt. Terry Anderson
CJTF-76 Public Affairs

PAKTIKA PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Soldiers from Task Force 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment escorted Paktika Province Governor Mangal through six district capitals, providing security while spreading material and humanitarian assistance throughout the region during Operation Verendrye.

The “Wolfhounds,” based near the Afghan-Pakistan border, deal with daily attacks on their bases, and this mission was no different.

“Suspected Taliban insurgents made an attempt to stop Task Force 2-27’s mission to spread good will in Paktika Province,” said Capt. Todd Schmidt from Task Force Bronco. “A civilian convoy, escorted by Coalition forces was fired on by insurgents and we returned fire. The insurgents then fled the area.”

That incident didn’t dampen the spirit of the governor’s visit to 30 Afghan vil-

lages within the Gomal District. During the visits, a group of village elders held a shura, or meeting, with Mangal and military leaders from the Coalition. Coalition forces offered to reconstruct a local mosque, a medical clinic and 17 schools. An additional 24 irrigation ditches and wells were proposed by district leaders and approved at the shura.

“The Afghan citizens were very grateful for the medical care.”

Capt. Todd Schmidt
Task Force Bronco

The investment in the local villages is estimated to be \$1.2 million.

Coalition troops also distributed six tractors, 30 generators, 32 vehicles and numerous boxes of school supplies. The material gifts satisfied many of the villagers’ needs, but Schmidt said there was

a more immediate area to be covered.

“The Task Force 2-27 medics treated more than 1,000 villagers for minor medical and dental procedures,” said Schmidt. “The Afghan citizens were very grateful for the medical care.”

Many Afghans brought up concerns with the Coalition about weapons caches in their villages, and said they are concerned about Taliban who operate within the area. The villagers also said the Taliban store dangerous weapons in the area. Two sizable weapons caches were later found and destroyed by local police.

The two-week operation also supported the voter registration process. The local district leaders were thankful for the visits and expressed a sincere concern in the success of the October presidential

elections.

Schmidt said every local leader the Soldiers talked to not only wanted to know about the progress of the voter registration initiative, but also had a very strong interest in the upcoming elections.

REF: Providing technology for the fighting Soldier

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For example, Soldiers from a Long Range Surveillance Detachment created a way for their Multi-Band Team radios to be powered by a battery pack with the use of an adapter. A vast improvement for Soldiers on the go.

Once the team is ready to field a piece of equipment, they go out with a unit to troubleshoot. “Being out and seeing with your own eyes is critical,” said REF Lab Technician Al Qualls who emphasizes that observing how Soldiers actually use equipment, what the terrain and other environmental factors are like can affect the design. REF Afghanistan’s Officer-in-Charge, Lt. Col. Robert Williams, agrees. “Having people sit back and observe the soldiers using the equipment means a lot. The Soldiers out there are too busy for that.”

Before REF fields a piece of equipment they do their own risk assessment, said Sgt. 1st Class James Whitfield, REF operations noncommissioned officer in-charge, who is often the observing team member. “If the risk is high, we won’t even bother because we don’t want to put Soldiers in harm’s way,” he said. “But if the risk assessment is low, we will let the field commander know and he has the final authority to say ‘I want to utilize this or not.’”

REF can stop a project just as quickly as they start one.



Staff Sgt. Victoria Cooper, REF’s supply sergeant, prepares weapons sights for delivery to troops in the field.

Whitfield said there is no need to spend money when the equipment doesn’t fit the need. Though he is embedded most often with the unit leadership, the most important feedback comes from the line Soldiers. “If you go down on the line and talk to Soldiers, it’s the private that comes up with ‘this is good, but if you add this to it, it could be done a little bit better.’”

REF considers Soldier feedback important. “If a Soldier says ‘We don’t need it,’ we don’t continue try to push something out there that there is no real need for,” he said.

Staff Sgt. Victoria Cooper, REF’s supply sergeant, says usual methods for getting new technology into the field involve long processes of testing, approval and funding, but the REF process is “totally different.” There are no hand receipt holders — only the installation property book — and if the equipment doesn’t do what the battlefield commanders need it to do “then we take it back.”

The REF team is authorized to purchase trial equipment to determine if it meets the operational needs of the commanders. If it does, they can purchase the equipment directly from the manufacturer.

REF’s streamlined procedure allows commanders to put mission specific equipment into the hands of the Soldiers who need it long before it would otherwise be available, and bringing the Soldiers safely home.

Safety First: Teamwork is the key to success

