



The Fighting 48th

January 2010

2010 A New Year...New Challenges

The Deployment Journal of the Volunteer Brigade



Greetings Soldiers of the 48th IBCT. I hope this issue of the Fighting 48th finds you all doing well and recovering from the holidays. For those who don't know me, my name is LTC Smith and I am the Commander of Task Force Dahlonga. Our team primarily consists of 1-121 Infantry, and also includes B Co, 2-121, a fuel section from A Co, 148th BSB, and various other individual Soldiers who joined us from HHC Brigade and the BSTB. My thanks go out to all of you for your contribution to our mission in Paktya province.

To everyone, Happy New Year! That is a moderate understatement...this will be a GREAT new year because it is the year we will all return home to our family and friends! That said we still have a lot of work to do. Like all of you, I am eager to get home to my family and the comfort of our home. But there are still a few months to go, and for some, these can be very dangerous months if you don't stay focused on the mission at hand. For our team in Paktya, we continue to develop the ANSF, engage with local leaders, work on projects throughout the province, and hunt down the bad guys. All of which requires us to leave the relative safety of our COP's and FOB's. Many of you have MOS' that can be dangerous even when not in a combat zone. In closing I will again say "Happy New Year", but stay focused and we will all be home safely, soon. *"Volunteers.....Send Me!"*

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Commander's Column



Lt. Col. Matt Smith, Spartan 6
Commander
1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment

THE FIGHTING 48th

"The Fighting 48th" is the command newsletter of 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. It is produced by the Public Affairs Office on behalf of the 48th IBCT commander and is intended to inform the members of the 48th IBCT of the activities of the brigade and the command messages of the leadership team.

48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

Commander

Col. Lee K. Durham

Command Sergeant Major

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael B. Hurndon

THE FIGHTING 48th STAFF

Public Affairs Officer

Capt. David Suttles

Deputy Public Affairs Officer/Editor

MCCS Donald Elliott

Public Affairs NCOIC/Assistant Editor

MCC Rodney Furry

Media Relations/JVB NCO

Staff Sgt. David Bill

Journalists

Sgt. Tracy Smith

MC2 Donisha Burns

Sgt. Danny Durham

Sgt. Ryan D'Agostino

Spc. Jennifer Eddy

MC3 Jeffrey Richardson

ON THE COVER: U.S. Army Major Andrew B. McDonald, 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment operations officer, opens the floor for discussion during the first Security Shura at FOB Hughie in Nangarhar province. The key leaders meeting, organized by McDonald, was an initial step in bringing the ANSF of the 24 districts together to reinforce security in the border region. Bringing ANA, ABP, ANP and intelligence together will be a foundation towards autonomy for the Afghan government. (U. S. Army photo by Sgt. Tracy J. Smith)

1-108th Cavalry and Afghan National Security Forces hold security Shura in Nagarhar

Story and photos by U.S. Army Sgt. Tracy Smith
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

FOB HUGHIE, Nangarhar, Afghanistan – The warriors of 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment have found the most effective tool in the counter insurgency toolbox is the art of conversation. Assisting Afghan National Security Forces with their Key Leader Engagements, or traditional Shura's has helped build relationships and open lines of communication with provincial and district community leaders in eastern Afghanistan.

Georgia Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment, assigned to 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division are refining the shura for the Afghan National Army, Police, Border Patrol and Intelligence by giving them their own voice within their military community. U. S. Army Major Andrew McDonald, the Rough Riders' operations officer, coordinated the inaugural meeting in Jalalabad to show the Afghan military and community leadership they could accomplish more through the development of morale and vision-focused governance.

The first step for the 24 district representatives of Nangarhar province was to overcome the biggest obstacle facing progress - trust.

"We have 18 months to sway this fight," McDonald said to the assemblage. "None of us can do this alone. If we want to make a difference, we must, as a collective force, look at practical ways, those small opportunities, to help each other. This gives us a solid base, a foundation, for the larger opportunities that will arise."

Addressing the ANSF leaders, Afghanistan Army Major Tarrado, 2nd Khandak, 201st Corps Executive Officer, embraced the possibilities spotlighting a team effort.

"We have two tasks; one is to fight against our common enemy and the other is to provide security and serve our people. This is the perfect place to discuss how to serve our people and take care of their needs," Tarrado said. "With different tasks and different jobs, we know there are situations when we are unable to work independently. Because of these situations, we need to talk with each other to know where our resources are and help each other."

The varying uniforms differentiated Afghanistan and coalition military but the synchronous nodding of heads validated the forum, intent to achieve success as a unit with a single purpose.

"As a military, we all have a common goal and that is to defeat the enemy and win this war," said Colonel Niazy, Commanding Officer of 6th Khandak, 201st Corps.

Niazy identified three points of focus for the discussion, and for operational cohesion; good morals and faith, being well equipped, and being proficient in using the equipment.

"So far, we have exercised good faith in our country and want to do our jobs honestly," Niazy continued. "We also have an understanding of how to use what we have but, unfortunately, we do not have enough equipment."

The shura's focus on communication brought Niazy's equipment concerns home. He pointed out that shortages of radios could enable operational failure. He also stressed that radios would allow the various forces "to reach out to our partners in the security of our country." He added, "We need to be able have open lines of communications to contact our resources when that need is identified."

Working on homeland security relationships also spotlighted a desire to reach across the borders. Improving relations with Pakistani forces would bolster border security. By pushing the enemy to the opposite side of the mountains, the ANSF would then have a military buttress to fight in Afghanistan and defeat any disruptive factions.

"Reinforcing our intelligence gathering with good information sources will make discovering them easier," Niazy concluded.

Major Tarrado challenged his partners to take away a renewed determination. He called on them to reach out and find strength in each other while navigating the path of transition.

"As we know, the coalition and training forces have done much to help build our military," he said. "But this is our country, and we have to take steps to improve on what we have built and make this work."



An Afghan Army leader embraces his partner-in-the-fight, an ANP chief at the conclusion of the first Security Shura at FOB Hughie, Torkham, Afghanistan, Dec. 12, 2009. The show of trust was symbolic for the key leaders meeting, as it is an initial step in bringing the ANSF of the 24 border districts to reinforce security in the region bringing ANA, ABP, ANP and intelligence together to build autonomy for the Afghanistan government.

Women's Police Corps Training Center opens doors of opportunity

Story and photos by U.S. Army Sgt. Tracy Smith
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

JALALABAD, Nangarhar, Afghanistan – Lt. Col. Malalai Kakar dedicated her life to fighting crime, and in the process became an advocate for women's rights in Afghanistan. Her ferocious spirit and dedication to law enforcement made her an example to all women. Unfortunately, it also made her a target for the Taliban. She was assassinated in September, 2008 as she left her home for her job as Kandahar's deputy police commander, and became a martyr for her people.

Kakar's spirit and commitment as a pioneer for women's freedoms in Afghanistan fostered the foundation of the ANP's first Women's Police Corps Training Center in the heart of Jalalabad. A special ceremony December 5, attended by her father and sister, celebrated the bravery of Kakar and applauded the women who answered the call to play an active role in rebuilding Afghanistan.

"She was our sister and a martyr in the police forces," said Margun, a new recruit at the WPC. She and the seven other recruits wore *burqas* to the camp gate when they reported for training. Now, dressed in new uniforms, the folds from packaging still prominent, and the *hijab* Muslim head covering, they paid homage to their beliefs. "Kakar was the example for us all and I hope to recruit as well as serve as honorably for the future of my people."

Currently women joining the Afghan National Police forces train in shared facilities throughout the country. The WPC's exclusivity will serve as a model and support element in strengthening the Afghanistan Police Force.

Afghanistan's Assistant Ambassador, E. Anthony Wayne, who is also Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs, made it clear in his remarks that the goal of the training center echoes the nation's goal of giving security forces operational autonomy.

"Strengthening the Afghanistan National Police is even more important for Afghanistan today, as well as for its international partners. It will be clear to the Afghan government, but more important to the Afghan people, that they will ultimately be responsible for their own country."

The WPC opening also highlighted the force's need to recruit. With a goal of 650 women to be added to the ANP's ranks over the next 24 months, each speaker identified that even more were needed to assist Afghan women in exercising their rights under the Afghan law. For at least one of the recruits it was an extension of a law enforcement career. Margun came with her own veiled credentials.



The father of Malalai Kakar, retired ANP officer Gul Muhammad Kakar, is applauded by Brig. Gen. Anne MacDonald, Deputy to the Commanding General, Afghan National Police Development, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan and the Chief of Training and Education for Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior, Maj. Gen. Ahmad Zai, as the first to officially enter Afghanistan's first female exclusive ANP training center located in Jalalabad.



U.S. Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne, Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs in Afghanistan, is welcomed to the opening of the first female exclusive Afghan National Police training center in Jalalabad by Robin Brooks, a mentor trainer with the International Narcotics Law Enforcement Agency.

Opportunity continued on page six

48th Brigade and Afghan National Army validate training

Story and photos by U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Donisha Burns
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CAMP BLACKHORSE, Kabul, Afghanistan—Camp Blackhorse may very well be the birthplace of a safer, more secure Afghanistan. The cadre of 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Soldiers working here have been filling long days in the shadow of Gharib Ghar mountain evaluating the progress of Afghan National Army recruits destined for the front lines against insurgency.

During a recent scheduled assessment, the Validation Transition Team and Consolidation Fielding Center put a group of over 400 Afghan Soldiers through their final examination prior to their first permanent assignment in Logar province.

After completing basic training, new ANA Soldiers are put through eight weeks of transition training with the Permanent Transition Team at CFC where they are introduced to the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of their Kandak. In addition to basic infantry tactics, the center also trains Soldiers in hygiene, first aid, inventory and accountability.

“The purpose of this training is to see how well the Soldiers deal with real-life scenarios,” said Sgt. Maurio Tiller, a 48th Brigade Special Troops Battalion Soldier assigned to the center.

During the day of evaluation, Soldiers are sent through four intensive lanes. First, they are subjected to ambushes and improvised explosive devices. They are then tested in their practice of recognizing and countering IED’s and conducting vehicle check points. They must demonstrate the proper way to react in each event before receiving a passing grade. The assessors look for efficiency and confidence in the Soldiers’ shooting, movement and communication during the assessment.

“There has been a lot of progress made, but we still have things to improve,” said 1st Lt. Michael Freeman, a VTT mentor. “It’s a cultural thing. We have to find a way that works for them to take charge, not impress our ways on them.”

Freeman added, “This training is enabling Soldiers with the skill sets they need to train future Soldiers for the future of Afghanistan.”



Afghanistan National Army Soldiers conduct personnel search at the vehicle check point as the final stage of the validation transition team’s evaluation process December 20, 2009.



An Afghanistan National Army Soldier demonstrates the detainee process during the validation transition team’s evaluation process December 20, 2009.

Soldiers celebrate National Guard's 373rd Birthday

Story and photos by U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Donisha Burns
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CAMP PHOENIX, Kabul, Afghanistan— The Volunteers of Georgia's 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team celebrated the National Guard's 373rd birthday here with a speech celebrating the service's history followed by a cake cutting ceremony December 13th.

At 19, the youngest Soldier in attendance, Pfc. Shanqueta Bradford assisted in the cake-cutting with Master Sgt. Frank Hood, 58, the oldest Soldier present. The two Soldiers symbolically represented the past and the future of the National Guard.

In addition to the traditional youngest and oldest Soldier present cutting the cake, Staff Sgt. Luther Lewis, who was celebrating his birthday, joined in the celebration.

During the ceremony, CSM Michael Hurndon pointed out "It's an honor to be able to serve your country and state at the same time, HOOAH!"

The National Guard considers December 13th as its birthday. On that day in 1636, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a bill regulating the colonial military and assigning the local volunteers to three regiments.



CSM Michael Hurndon, 48th IBCT Command Sergeant Major, speaks during the National Guard 373rd birthday celebration, Dec. 13, 2009.



SSG Luther Lewis, MSG Frank Hood, and PFC Shanqueta Bradford cuts the cake during the National Guard 373rd birthday celebration.

Opportunity from page four

For the past seven years she has worked in state government under the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, and is skilled in investigative law enforcement. Margun also crossed paths with Kakar in solving crimes against women.

Tonya Joseph, one of two mentor-trainers assigned to the center by Dyn-Corp, Intl, will work to refine future trainers. They were assigned here under the International Narcotics Law Enforcement Agency. Joseph says that as a plank holder for the Kakar WPC, she has a tremendous stake in the recruits' growth and is ready for the challenge of nurturing their empowerment.

"There are no challenges here, just opportunity," said Joseph, a McDonough, Ga. resident and 17-year DeKalb Police veteran detective. "We actually have a hand in their progress, watch them grow stronger and be successful. They can be empowered to show what they can bring to the table and this academy is a step in the right direction."

The Taliban took responsibility for the murder of Kakar in 2009 but the people of Afghanistan look to this occasion as a new step, with the strength of their sisters, in securing their borders and communities.



Brig. Gen. Anne MacDonald, Deputy to the Commanding General, Afghan National Police Development, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan congratulates new recruits at Afghanistan's first female exclusive ANP training center located in Jalalabad. MacDonald attended the grand opening to celebrate a new evolution in security for the country.

Shaheen Children's Park Opening

Story and photos by U.S. Army Spc. Jennifer C. Eddy
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CAMP SPANN, Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan – A large group of Afghan children crowded around a group of Afghan and American Soldiers in a soccer field November 26th. Not to beg for money, or warm winter clothing, but to release a rainbow of brightly colored balloons into the sky in celebration of the grand opening of the Shaheen Children's Park in Dehdadi, Balkh province.

Construction of the park, and its grand opening, was organized by the Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and the Afghan National Army's 209th Corps.

Since the opening, children have flocked to the basketball court, merry-go-rounds, volleyball court and soccer field. Meanwhile, more play-ground equipment and a store are under construction to continue improvements.

Spanning over 15 acres, the park has quickly become the jewel of this remote region, and the pride of the Afghan and American Soldiers who raised \$260,000 to build it.

"Every day, I passed this area and there were kids playing in the dirt and ditches. It weighed heavily on me to think of it as a park," said Corps Commander, Maj. Gen. Murad Ali. After some preliminary planning with 2-121 Commander, Lt. Col. Louie K. Payne and Project Manager, 1st Lt. Russell L. Bartholow, Maj. Gen. Murad Ali sealed the deal with a donation of ANA land. But the saving grace for the Soldiers' inspiration was the local business community.



(l to r) Col. Ahmed Shah, Lt. Col. Louie K. Payne, Brig. Gen. Gulam Sakhi and Wali Shah cut a ribbon to open the Shaheen Park to the families of Dehdadi on Nov. 26, 2009.

"The project idea came from the 209th Corps Command of the ANA five months ago, but funding was a problem," said Ali. "We decided to ask local businessmen to meet and discuss coming together to pay for it." The meetings organized by the ANA and Coalition Forces with local businesses and residents succeeded in gaining community support.

"This is not a government project. It is being funded by local businesses and contractors. The park will be a symbol of friendship between the ANA, coalition forces and the people," said Ali.

"This park would not be possible without the ANA and local business leaders. It's definitely a sign of progress for the Afghan community," said Bartholow. "This park provides the children of Afghanistan with hope by setting a standard of what to expect from their leaders while expanding their perception of life in Afghanistan."

Children scramble to gather toys and blankets, handed out in conjunction with the grand opening of Shaheen Park in Dehdadi on Nov. 29, 2009.



Afghan Soldiers host Key Leader Engagement with assistance from 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

By U.S. Army Sergeant Danny Durham
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

ZARMOT, Afghanistan- The Afghanistan National Army, under the mentorship of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, hosted a key leader engagement in the village of Tदनak, December 23rd. The meeting gave village elders an opportunity to voice the concerns and needs of their respective villages.

Alpha Company's mission since their arrival last October has been to mentor the ANA Soldiers and Afghan national policemen here and support their mission of protecting civilians and defeating Anti-Afghanistan Forces.

Alpha Company has inherited a great deal of obstacles; cultural differences being among the largest. These differences make the learning process a tough effort, but the Afghan forces' eagerness for learning and dedication to winning the fight motivates the Americans. Alpha Company focuses on an aspect of training that enables the Soldiers and policemen to conduct meetings with elders in the villages, strengthening their mutual trust for positive and long-lasting results.

Other target areas of training cover supply, logistics and operational planning. These are skills that will enable the ANA and the ANP to run their own day-to-day operations and conduct their own meetings with their countrymen. Alpha Company is also responsible for Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment enrollment, and the security of their own combat operating post.

Overall, the training has been going well. The ANA are now conducting their own missions, and Alpha Company has moved on to simply providing security for the ANA missions and evaluating their performance. After the missions are complete, the mentors sit down with their Afghan partners and replay the previous task to make necessary corrections.

"They are doing very well," explained 1st Lt. Matthew Lynch, leader of 1st Platoon. The efforts of the Soldiers and their Afghan counterparts are apparent, as the Afghans are conducting their missions and reacting to situations on their own with very little guidance from their American counterparts.



First Lt. Mohammed Jan of the Afghanistan National Army conducts a Key Leader Engagement in the village of Tदनak.



Sgt. William Oliver records the villagers biometrics, including retinal scan, fingerprints, height and weight and any other useful information using the Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment.

48th IBCT Soldier earns second combat badge

By Sgt. Tracy J. Smith
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan— When Sgt. 1st Class Wesley R. Hawk took the oath to protect and defend 20 years ago, he found himself going to war.

Hawk, and his brother Rick, were assigned to ‘Too-Tuff Echo’; Company E, 2nd Bn., 2nd Brigade, 24th Infantry Division based at Ft. Stewart, Ga. An activation notification sent them to Saudi Arabia, then on to Iraq for Operation Desert Storm. Captain Kenneth C. Braddock, Company E’s commander, would lead them to battle.

“I remember it as if it were yesterday,” recalled Braddock, now a Colonel, and the 202nd Combined Action Team Chief at Camp Dubs. “In 1990, young Specialist Hawk was my gunner, and his brother was my driver. I was his first company commander, just out of basic infantry school. He was one of my best.”

After seven months of fighting, the Soldiers found themselves at the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia where Braddock pinned the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) on the brothers.

“It’s an honor to pin the CIB on a Soldier the first time. I have one myself, and I can tell you it is one of the few military awards that I will always wear - no matter what.”

When the two men met at FOB Fenty airfield in Jalalabad 19 years later, it was to repeat an infantryman’s most privileged moment. This time, Braddock would pin a CIB on Hawk’s chest with a star, designating a second award.

“It’s a big honor to be awarded the badge a second time, and better to have the same person pin it on me,” Hawk said. In an uncharacteristically emotional moment, he added, “There is a lot of history between me and Col. Braddock, and I really appreciate him being able to do this. A lot of the leader I am today, I attribute to my first-line leaders at the beginning of my career.”



Col. Kenneth C. Braddock, team chief for the 202nd Combined Action Team, pins his former gunner, Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Hawk with his second Combat Infantry Badge at Jalalabad’s FOB Fenty airfield.



Col. Kenneth C. Braddock, left, team chief for the 202nd Combined Action Team, listens as Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Hawk addresses his troops after presenting Hawk his second Combat Infantry Badge in Jalalabad’s FOB Fenty airfield.

As a platoon leader for Troop C, 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment, Hawk emulates the managing style of Braddock and his first platoon sergeant. The lesson he has always carried is that a good leader reflects the personality of his team. “Good leaders are made from their men. It reflects directly on the leader,” Hawk stated. “Your responsibility is to know your individual Soldier and bring those different personalities together. Your men make you a good leader, and I rely heavily on my men.”

“Only in the military can you see this level of devotion,” Braddock said. “It’s tough to be in the military. Especially in the case of Sgt. Hawk, as a National Guardsman, taking time out of his civilian life and his civilian career to serve his country and his fellow Soldiers. That’s something very special.”



Georgia Air Guard teams with Fighting 48th in Afghanistan

By Sgt. Tracy J. Smith
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Georgia Air National Guardsmen assigned to the 165th Air Support Operations Squadron, based in Brunswick, Ga., have teamed with the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Afghanistan.

The Joint Terminal Attack Controllers are responsible for combat air support for the 48th fighters in the field, “and however we can support the war-fighters in our area of operations,” said Capt. Roger Brooks IV, Commander of the Georgia JTAC’s. Brooks describes his team as an ‘in-case-of-emergency-break-glass’ option for the ground troops in the field.

“We are part of the lead advancing infantry, assessing the situation alongside our war-fighters. If the situation dictates, we call in air punishment on the insurgent strongholds no matter where they are.”

Georgia’s JTAC’s will be divided into three man teams fortifying the four battalions conducting battlefield operations throughout the country. Air Force Master Sergeant James F. Harnisch is the senior non-commissioned officer on Brooks’ team assigned to the 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment under 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division.

Harnisch has been a support member of the 48th Brigade for nearly six years. He and his fellow airmen have trained for deployment, and served with the 48th IBCT on various operations. Harnisch found familiar faces in Camp Hughie, where 1-108th is based. Many of the Georgians were assigned to 48th Brigade’s former 108th Armor Regiment in Mahmudiyah, Iraq.

He said, “Because of that history, they know what they can expect from us and what we can provide them.”

He described how communication is the key to Air Force blue and Army green blending seamlessly in combat scenarios, and how reading the operational tempo in the field maximizes accuracy.

“Information flow can be slow, and you could miss your opportunity to have an effect on the battlefield if something were to happen,” Harnisch said. “If we have the right information, we can act properly, allowing us to provide a lot more than just close-air support.”

The JTAC’s keen sense of situational awareness allows them to assist with intelligence gathering and give input

based on what they call ‘patterns of life observations.’ These traits are invaluable to the cavalry scouts who patrol the mountains bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Missions are conducted in spite of unpredictable weather and questionable terrain that can hinder ground evacuation. Additionally, Georgia’s home-grown JTAC’s give the mission a welcome layer of contingency planning.

“The camaraderie is appreciated. Their being from the same state makes them more valuable because we sort of speak the same language,” Staff Sgt. Stephen Warren, Troop A, 1-108th, platoon leader said. “But we are all here to do the same job for the same purpose, so it’s good to have fellow airmen from the same state.”

Major General Scott Hammond, Georgia Air National Guard Commander, will be visiting with Soldiers and Airmen in Afghanistan. During joint training exercises prior to the 48th’s departure, he reiterated the need to speak the same language and work in concert.

“There should be no delineation as to uniform or branch of service. The primary focus is to make sure the 48th Brigade is successful during this deployment, and we will do everything we can to make sure that they are successful.”



Air Force Capt. Roger M. Brooks IV, commander of a twelve-man Joint Terminal Attack Controllers team, takes note of mission air capabilities as Spc. Brett Bentley, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment, provides over watch security during a mission in the Achin District of Nangarhar



Maj. Gen. Scott Hammond, (left) Commander Georgia Air National Guard listens as (then) Tech. Sgt. James F. Harnisch, a joint terminal attack controller with the 165th Air Support Operations Squadron explains a plotting device that coordinates air/ground targeting in-sync with real-time battle operations. Hammond describes the systems synchronization as ‘an invaluable metamorphosis in our war fighting capability.’

2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment Task Force warriors visit historic muslim site

Story and photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Steven Goetsch
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

MAZAR-e-SHARIF, Afghanistan-- It was just another peaceful day in Mazar-e-Sharif. Bustling crowds, commuters and vendors were making their way to work, school and running their daily errands with the majestic Blue Mosque in the background. What was different about the landscape this day were four Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles parked in front of the mosque.

It was an unusual sight indeed. Not in the mosque's 500-year history, have there ever been U.S. service members at the holy site. What brought the small contingent of Americans to the mosque was an invitation by Mir Abdul Majid Ansari, the Blue Mosque Mullah and the American's own curiosity.

"There was war in Afghanistan for 30 years, but the Americans came and brought peace," said Mullah Ansari. His invitation was gracious, and came with one condition, "If you respect the religion of the Afghan people, they will accept visits by the Americans."

The Task Force Warrior guests were more than happy to oblige the request as they removed their boots before entering. The Americans were given a tour of the mosque and grounds which get their name from the thousands of hand-painted blue tiles that adorn its facade.

The visiting soldiers were honored to take part in this cultural event.

"It's nice to know that the atmosphere is starting to open up enough to allow the Americans an opportunity to come to a historic place like the Blue Mosque," said Maj. James McNair, Executive Officer, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment.

The idea for the visit was born from the relationship Camp Spann has with its neighbors, the Afghan National Army soldiers stationed at Camp Shaheen.

"One of the important things for Americans to see is that Muslims are peaceful," said 209th Corps Religious and Cultural Advisor, Col. Amad Shah.

The site is very popular with local Afghans, who often use it to hold wedding celebrations, and to enjoy the beautiful park area surrounding the mosque. Colonel Shah said it is important for Americans to get out and experience it for themselves. He wants them to realize that not only is it a treasure of Islam, it is also a great example of Afghan culture and engineering.

The trip to the mosque not only gave the Americans a firsthand experience of Islam, but Afghan culture as they were greeted and posed for photos with local wedding parties.

"I am very thankful that this opportunity was given to me," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Randy Griggs. "It is one that I will treasure for the rest of my life."

Several members of the visiting American contingent receive a cultural briefing prior to entering the Blue Mosque in Mazar-e-Sharif, Oct. 24, 2009. The Americans received historical insight, and even made a few friends as they talked and took photos with the local Afghans.



1-118th FAR assists ANA with humanitarian aid

Story and photos by U.S. Navy Mass Communications Specialist 3rd Class Jeffrey Richardson
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CAMP PHOENIX, Kabul, Afghanistan – Soldiers from the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and their Afghan National Police partners journeyed into the community around Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan Dec. 2, 2009 to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to the people of Kabul city.

“My mentors from the U.S. Army provided me with tickets, which I stamped and signed and handed out to some of the elders in the area to give to poor people,” said Colonel Abdul Mohammad, Commander of Police District 2. “Today we are very lucky that we got the aid here.”

The tickets were handed out to the poorer people in the area, and then redeemed for a bundle of free supplies handed out by local Afghan National Police.

“In each bundle there is flour, rice, beans, tea, oil, a blanket and some clothes,” said Mohammad.

Though they were only able to give out the bare essentials, it was highly appreciated by the people who receive them.

“It is very good and we are very happy,” said Yasin, a Kabul resident. “This kind of stuff is going to help us.”

“It builds the trust of the people, it helps the people out,” said Staff Sergeant Joshua Heaton, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 118th Field Artillery Regiment. “It helps them to trust the ANP. We put the ANP out front and the people who see them giving supplies know that they are trying to help, and it builds

confidence in their security forces. It’s probably one of the more rewarding things that we do, because you are going out there and you are seeing the poor people who don’t have anything and you’re giving clothes and food and they are happy,” said Heaton.

The policemen, with the assistance of the 48th Brigade were able to give supplies to approximately 300 needy families in the area.



A Kabul woman carries away a bundle of supplies handed out by Afghan National Police during a humanitarian assistance mission in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan Dec. 2, 2009. The bundles were prepared by 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Soldiers, Camp Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan.



A Kabul resident receives a bundle of rice, flour, cooking oil and beans from Afghan National Police during a humanitarian assistance mission in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan Dec. 2, 2009. The bundles were prepared by 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Soldiers, Camp Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan.

Notes for Your Safety

CPT Andrew Lane, 48th IBCT Safety Officer

As we celebrate the Holidays, redeployment fast approaches us. Though it seems as though we just got here, shortly after the New Year we will have about 90 days until all 48th Brigade redeploys. That being said we must all be sure to stem the temptation to become complacent. As we all know Complacency Kills! Historically many fatal or serious accidents occur in the first 60 days as well as the last 60 days of deployment. As the barn door approaches we must be extra cautious not to become the victim of a preventable accident.

Every last one of us carries a deadly weapon on our side nearly everywhere we go. Our firearms are made for one purpose, and one purpose only. That is to kill another person. If you let your guard down, or treat it as a toy, or use it as a prop it may be you or a battle buddy that it kills. Remember weapons safety. Point it only at what you want to destroy. Make sure there is no brass in the chamber unless you want to fire the weapon.

Just because you have driven down that road 500 times does not mean you are immune from tragedy. You need to stay vigilant for both the enemy and accidents. Either one can jump up and take you out if given half a chance. Take a look around your room or building. Just because you have slept there now for over 200 nights doesn't mean it is good to go. Is there a fire extinguisher present? It is charged and ready for use? Does it have a smoke detector? Does the smoke detector work? They should all have a test button to double check. Here at Phoenix and other much smaller bases such as Rushmore we have KBR staff whose job it is to maintain these things. Here at Camp Phoenix I can tell you they are on it. Just last week I found a new residence building that had no smoke detector. I told the KBR Fire Safety Office and before the sun set that day the smoke detectors were in place.



Every day all of us interact with potentially deadly equipment. With all varieties of motor vehicles from Gators to MRAPs to Chinooks the potential is there for disaster. Using forklifts, cranes, and other heavy machinery is inherently dangerous. Recently on a trip to Bagram I noted that Disney Drive is not named after Walt Disney at all. It is named after Specialist Disney who was killed in an industrial welding accident in February 2002. Many of the tools we use every day and have become accustomed to can inflict serious injury if left unchecked or used improperly. There are safety procedures in place that if followed will protect us from accidental catastrophe, but we must follow them. We all know right from wrong and many Soldiers know down deep inside when they are doing something inherently wrong even if no leader is there to correct them.

Many Soldiers know that they have had a near miss, and they are lucky. For every 600 near misses the odds are that unit will have one serious catastrophic incident. It is our job to make sure we do our best to eliminate these accidents before one of us is sent to Dover Air Base for something that could have been easily prevented. In the 2005-2006 deployment to Iraq the 48th Brigade lost 26 brothers and sisters with 11 of them being fatal accidents. Here so far we have only lost one brother to a fatal accident. Though one is too many, what's done is done. Going forward if we keep our heads in the game we should be able to prevent further needless loss.

Commander, International Security Assistance Forces visits the fighting 48th

By U.S. Army Sergeant Danny Durham
48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

ZARMOT, Afghanistan – General Stanley A. McChrystal, Commander, International Security Assistance Forces and United States Forces, Afghanistan surprised the Soldiers of the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team with a Christmas Eve visit to Combat Operating Post Zarmot. He personally congratulated and pinned five Soldiers with the Combat Infantryman Badge.

The Soldiers were awarded the CIB for engaging in ground combat with the enemy. Among the awardees from 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment were Private First Class Colby Peacock and Specialist Micah Clark, both from Buford, Ga. He also awarded Private First Class Aodhan McCoy of Atlanta, Ga., and Staff Sergeant Timothy Etterling of Snellville, Ga. In addition, he awarded Specialist Jamar Johnson of Alabaster, Al. Assigned to 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment from Ft. Richardson, Ak.

General McChrystal also gave several Soldiers the General's coin, an on-the-spot award for exceptional performance. As the troops gathered around him, he explained how important their mission is in the grand scheme of things. He also assured them that all their hard work is not going unnoticed, and that he and everyone in the chain of command are extremely proud of the hard work, dedication and sacrifice they are making.

"The General made a very good impression on us all," explained Specialist Henri Kimbro of Riverdale, Ga. We know he has a lot on his plate. For him to come all the way over here, especially on Christmas Eve, is very special. His presence says a lot about his respect for us. He really motivated the troops,"

"You all should be very proud of what you've done here," said General McChrystal. "I know it's hard to see what you've accomplished right now. When you leave here, and you get home, you will be proud that you were a part of something special. I am extraordinarily proud of what you've been doing. The last thing I want to do is wish you all a very special Christmas."



First Lieutenant Carl A. Anderson, right, Company Commander of Alpha Company, 1-121 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team greets General McChrystal at COP. Zarmot.



General McChrystal, right, pins the Combat Infantryman Badge on Private First Class Colby Peacock for engaging in ground combat with the enemy.

Zarmot is known to be infested with anti-Afghan forces, and Alpha Company has one of the most dangerous missions in Afghanistan. They continue to experience frequent acts of aggression from the enemy. Despite the violence and the obstacles they face, the Soldiers of Alpha Company continue to mentor and train the Afghanistan National Police and the Afghanistan National Army with success. This Christmas Eve proved to be a special one for the Soldiers here, because even if only for a day, peace prevailed. In a place where violence and chaos often reigns, the Soldiers bathed in the General's kind remarks, and their facial expressions reflected the heartfelt sentiment of a leader standing before his troops.



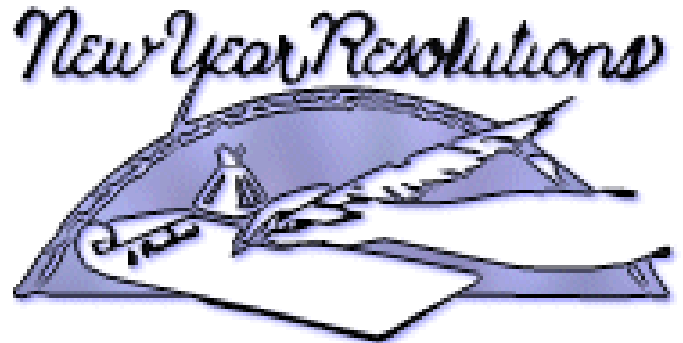
CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Chaplain (MAJ) Eduardo DoCampo 48th IBCT Chaplain



NEW BEGINNINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Starting the New Year is an excellent time to commit to moving forward with your life and faith. We all have new opportunities for new beginnings. These words of wisdom from Philippians 3:14 will inspire you to move forward: "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."



1. "Forgetting what is behind": Good and bad, 2009 is already gone: Don't live in the past. Ask for forgiveness for your sins and shortcomings and ask God to guide you to stay on track going forward.
 2. "Press on toward the goal": Plan your future in faith. Lunge forward, put your sights on what God has for you ahead. Celebrate in the present and make plans for tomorrow.
 3. Walk in the direction of your goals and plans that God has given you, is confirming to you and will help you achieve.
 4. Reaffirm your faith, commitment, and trust in the Lord. Joshua the soldier and leader reconfirmed his commitment to God and challenged his people saying: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14)
 5. Take on and develop to the best of your abilities leadership challenges that require faith and conviction. With courage and seeking wisdom, stretch yourself to the next level to grow spiritually, professionally, intellectually, physically, and socially.
- James Kouzes and Barry Posner, in their book The Leadership Challenge report that a basic lesson all leaders need to learn is that "Character Counts." Over a 20-year period they asked people what they "look for and admire in a leader they would willingly follow." The four qualities which were consistently mentioned were honesty, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent. They call these character qualities "source credibility," meaning that people who possess these qualities are considered to be trustworthy, and credible sources of information. At the core of personal credibility are one's beliefs. People expect their leaders to stand for something and to have the courage of their convictions.



Pray for fellow soldiers, their families, and the United States of America regularly. May the Lord bless you and your family as never before in 2010!

2010

PHOTOS FROM



U.S. Army Warrant Officer 3 Eric McKee, left and U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Gene Elliott, unpack blankets donated by Coronaca Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C., at Camp Phoenix.



(Above) 2nd Lt Ishmael R. Grant, left, Police Mentor Team 3 leader, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, looks over supply property books with Sar-e Pol Province Operational Coordination Provincial supply officer Col. Abdul Alim Shahab at the OCP.



(Above) The New Year celebration hits a high notes as 2010 arrives at Camp Phoenix.

(Right) Air Force Staff Sgt. Elton Gill, or Santa, as he is called comes early to Camp Phoenix to spread some holiday cheer to service members in Afghanistan. 1st Lt. (CH) Leslie Nelson enjoys Santa's visit.

(Left) New year's celebration takes place in the "Tiki Hut" including the proper attire, tuxedos and smoking jackets.



FROM THE FIELD



American, Croatian, German and Swedish Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors participate in the Jingle Bell Run, Camp Mike Spann, Afghanistan Dec. 25.



Spc. Merv Vidal, right, an administrative specialist for HHT, 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment from Calhoun, Ga. is congratulated by the Squadron's Command Sgt. Major, Joseph Recker, for his selection as Rough Rider's Troop of the Year. Vidal, a student at Georgia Military College in Milledgeville, Ga., will compete against fellow 48th Brigade Soldiers for the Volunteer Brigade title in January 2010.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Alan Nichols, left, stands with Master Sergeant William Garrison who was awarded a Bronze Star for his 32 months of service in Afghanistan with both the 33rd and 48th IBCTs.



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Reg Neal, left, congratulates U.S. Army Sgt. Louis Gonzales after being inducted into the order of St. Barbara during the St. Barbara's celebration in the dining facility at Camp Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan Dec. 20, 2009. The annual event honors Soldiers, past and present, who embody the spirit of what it means to be an Artillery troop.



2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment Command Sgt. Maj. Stringfield, right, inspects Lt. Col. Alan B. Alexander's 9MM pistol during Entry Control Point duty Dec. 25, 2009. Christmas Day Stringfield, along with other senior enlisted soldiers, pulled tower guard and other duties so their subordinates could enjoy a day off on Christmas.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ronnie Mays sings Silent Night during a candlelight service Christmas Eve in the Chapel at Camp Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan, Dec. 24, 2009. Mays is from Macon, Ga. and serves with the 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Georgia Army National Guard.