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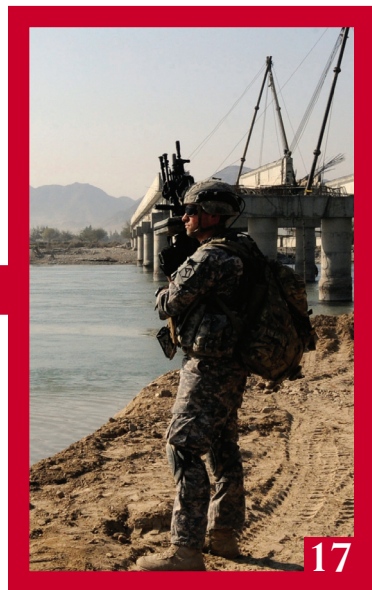
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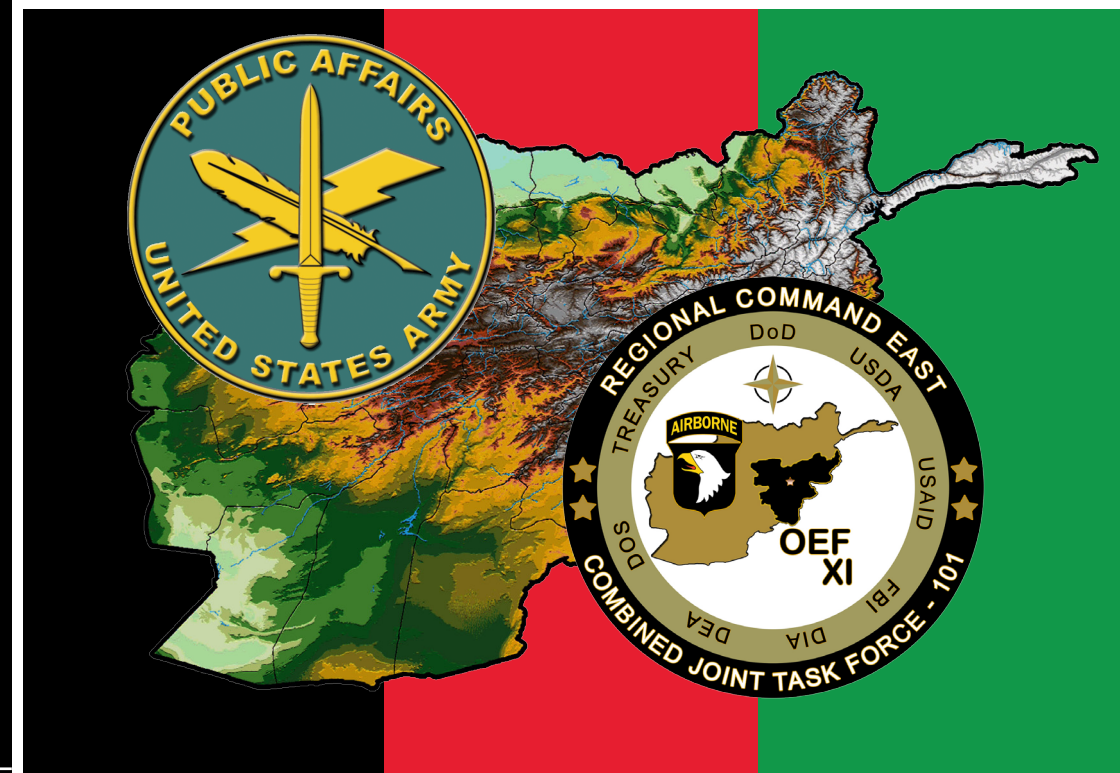
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(Cover photo) U.S. Army Spc. Arturo A. Cabrera, an infantryman from Laredo, Texas, assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force No Slack, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, searches for insurgents on a rocky mountainside overlooking the Ganjgal Valley in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Dec. 11. The TF No Slack Soldiers were supporting Operation Eagle Claw II. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)



Iowa Soldiers, Afghan villagers build mosque

Story and photos by U.S. Army Staff
Sgt. Ryan C. Matson
Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs

What do the towns of Keokuk, Iowa, and Bajawri, Afghanistan, have in common? For centuries, it was probably very little. But now, they are working together to construct a mosque in the village of Bajawri.

Soldiers from 2nd Platoon, 832nd Engineer Company, based out of Keokuk, Iowa, and attached to 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Squadron, Task Force Red Horse, traveled to the small village of Bajarwi Dec. 6 to check the progress of a mosque being constructed that they were donating materials toward.

The Soldiers are all part of the Iowa National Guard's 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat

Team, 34th Infantry Division, Task Force Red Bulls.

"There was a project proposed by a local leader to help build a mosque in the village," U.S. Army 1st Lt. Benjamin J. Davis of Creston, Iowa, 2nd Platoon leader, explained. "The project was a carryover from the unit we replaced."

Several months ago, Company A, 1st Squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Morgan (the unit the 832nd replaced) met with the local malik, Sayad Kareem. Kareem represents 19 villages east of Bagram Airfield. In the village of Bajarwi, Kareem said the villagers wanted to build a mosque to hold worship services.

"The people of Bajarwi did not have a mosque and were not able to get together and

pray," Kareem said. "Everyone in the village is happy and appreciative that the coalition has been able to support the construction of the mosque. Our economy is not that good, and that is why we could not build it completely by ourselves and requested the help of the coalition."

Aiding in the construction of a mosque is a rather unique undertaking for coalition forces.

"It's very rare that U.S. or coalition forces would get to participate in the construction of a mosque," said U.S. Army Capt. Tim Creasman of Boone, Iowa, and 1st Sqdn., 113th Cav. Regt., civil-military operations officer.

Creasman said the villages are more likely to approach the coalition for assistance in education and quality-

of-life issues as opposed to religious needs. Both the citizens of Bajarwi and the Soldiers from the 832nd Eng. Co. said they look at the mosque construction as a step in an improved partnership between the local citizens and coalition forces.

During their trip to the mosque Dec. 2, the 832nd Eng. Co. took the opportunity to appraise the construction of the mosque, as well as to supervise the delivery of 100 additional bags of cement toward the mosque construction. A local Afghan contractor delivered the cement to the village.

The perimeter walls of the mosque are complete—made of red brick and mortar and laid by Bajarwi resident Mirzamin Ahmad-Zai. The walls exemplify Ahmad-Zai's

"(The Afghans) are getting more comfortable talking with us and realizing they don't need to be scared of us."

—U.S. Army 1st Lt. Benjamin J. Davis



craftsmanship and feature elaborate arches along the sides of the building.

"I did it in five months, a little at a time, and continued working as I got materials," Ahmad-Zai said. "This was my first mosque."

Ahmad-Zai also added that members of each household in the village donated money toward construction of the mosque, and those who could not contribute money sent family members to help with the labor.

As they stared at the walls, the Soldiers said they were amazed at Ahmad-Zai's building skills.

To finish the mosque, Kareem

U.S. Army Spc. Bronson Wixom of Keokuk, Iowa, a combat engineer with the 832nd Engineer Company, hollers down to a small Afghan boy in the town of Bajawri Dec. 6.

said the building requires five tons of 16 millimeter rebar, which Creasman said the coalition may help to provide.

Abdul Rahim Mazai, Bajawri's malik, said the Red Bulls are carrying on the partnership of the village shared with TF Morgan, and he cannot express the gratitude he and the villagers feel.

"The coalition forces came here and talked to us," he said. "They listened to our problems and provided us some assistance. This mosque was built by our people through the help of the coalition forces and the Red Bulls with materials. We hope to continue to work together, here and throughout Afghanistan."

Davis said 2nd Platoon met with maliks and local villagers on an almost daily basis since they arrived here almost a month ago. The engineers, led by U.S. Army Capt. Scott E. Hansen of Maquoketa, Iowa, have assumed responsibility for providing security to 120 villages, all of which fall within a 10-kilometer area of the Bagram District. Davis said the unit also tries to help the villagers improve their quality of life, as was the case with aiding in the construction of the mosque in Bajawri.

"We're trying to capture the human factor," Davis said. "We can't really understand what the people here need and how they operate without being amongst the people. They are getting more comfortable talking with us and realizing they don't need to be scared of us."

Before the Soldiers left, Kareem told them he would set up further meetings and include the other maliks of the surrounding villages.

"We hope to have a great partnership with the Red Bulls," Mazai said.



U.S. Army Capt. Tim Creasman of Boone, Iowa, and 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Red Horse, civil-military operations officer, and U.S. Army Capt. Scott E. Hansen of Maquoketa, Iowa, 832nd Engineer Company commander, talk outside a mosque being constructed in the village of Bajawri, Dec. 6.



Story by Elizabeth M. Collins
Army News Service

Don't call Staff Sgt. Salvatore "Sal" Giunta a hero.

Don't say that he went above the call of duty when he single-handedly stopped two terrorists from kidnapping his wounded buddy during a ferocious firefight in Afghanistan in 2007.

Because as Giunta sees it, he was just doing his job. He didn't do anything that any other paratrooper in 1st Platoon, Battle Company, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team -- or anyone in the United States military for that matter -- wouldn't have done, and he can't quite understand what all the fuss is about.

He certainly doesn't think he deserves the Medal of Honor, which President Barack Obama presented to Giunta in a White House ceremony Nov. 16 -- making the seven-year Army veteran the first non-posthumous recipient of the medal since Vietnam.

"This could be any of us," Giunta said of receiving the nation's highest award for valor. "Right now, the Medal of Honor, I'm the one sitting here, but it could be any one of my buddies. It could be anyone in any of the services who are out there doing it every day.

"As for someone calling me a hero, I try not to think about it. I let the words fall away. It seems strange."

'I do solemnly swear....'

Giunta, now 25, visited an Army recruiter while working at a Subway in his native Iowa in 2003, after a radio commercial promised free T-shirts to anyone who came by.

"I like free T-shirts," he joked. "They've got to give you the spiel. That's how they give you the free T-shirt and kind of over the course of a couple days, (I) started really thinking about what the recruiter had said. We are a nation at war and I am 18 and I am an able-bodied male."

He went back, found out he could jump out of helicopters, and he was hooked.

Before he knew it, Giunta was on his way -- pumped -- to southern Afghanistan with the 173rd in March of 2005. He was excited to put his training to use and see some action, but quickly realized that war wasn't a game, that friends got hurt, or they went away and didn't come back.

After coming home at 19, he had tasted his own mortality and didn't like it. Giunta was ready to get out, perhaps get an education and spend time with his girlfriend Jennifer. But like many other

Soldiers, including five others from 1st Platoon, Giunta was stop-lossed. The only place he was going was back to Afghanistan.

Valley of Death

Now a specialist, Giunta arrived in Afghanistan's remote Korengal Valley in June 2007. Near the Pakistan border, it is a smuggling route for weapons and insurgents, and one of the most dangerous areas of the country.

Dubbed the 'Valley of Death,' the 10-mile-long valley has seen some of the fiercest fighting of the war and been home to dozens of American casualties. (U.S. and NATO forces withdrew from the Korengal in April 2010.)

"When we got off the helicopter, it didn't look like any Afghanistan I had ever seen before," Giunta remembered. "The mountains were hard and sharp, and also really, really steep. They had a lot of foliage. I think the trees were some sort of holly tree, so the wood was hard, the leaves were sharp."

The steep terrain and high altitude, he added, would often turn a walk of a few kilometers into a march lasting six to eight hours, especially in the beginning of the deployment.

For the next 15 months, home would

be tiny Korengal Outpost and a series of smaller primitive bases, like 1st Platoon's Firebase Vegas, which the men expanded from a couple buildings into bunkers and sleeping quarters made of plywood, sandbags and Hesco barriers. They never had running water, but were able to get electricity after a few months.

The Soldiers spent much of the summer in multiple firefights a day with an enemy who might hide in mountain caves one day, and in village houses with human shields the next. It was constant, unrelenting stress that Giunta said the men dealt with by leaning on each other and laughing at things that wouldn't be funny anywhere but a remote mountain-top in Afghanistan.

Operation Rock Avalanche

On Oct. 19, the men of Battle Company were dropped deep into insurgent territory, on a mission to not only look for weapons caches, but also to win a few hearts and minds. Firefights were to be expected, Giunta said, "but if you get shot at every day, how much worse can it get?"

A lot, it turned out, but no one could have predicted the intensity of bombings and fighting that followed, including a fierce battle that left several 2nd Platoon Soldiers injured or dead.

When what remained of 2nd Platoon entered the village of Landigal on Oct. 27 to look for weapons, Giunta and the rest of 1st Platoon were assigned an overwatch position, guarding the high ground on Honcho Hill. Radio chatter indicated insurgents were out for more American blood, but, as Giunta explained, radio chatter always indicated that insurgents were out for American blood.

"This is why we're there," he said. "Let's help (the Afghan people) when we can and if (insurgents) attack us, perfect. Now we can shoot back."

They didn't expect a trap, he added, or they would have taken a different route back to the KOP when 1st Platoon began walking single file down the narrow crest of the steep Gatigal Spur shortly after sunset.

Ambush

The men didn't make it far, only 350 or 400 meters, before a hail of AK-47, PKM and RPG fire from around 15 meters away stopped them cold. About 15-20 enemy fighters had lain in wait behind a crest in the hill and parallel to the trail in a devastating 'L-shaped' ambush that cut Giunta's squad off.



Now-Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta during his first deployment to Afghanistan in 2005, when he first bonded with his platoon in Battle Company, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. It was also where he first learned about how fragile life could be. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta)

Sgt. Joshua Brennan, who had been walking point, and Spc. Franklin Eckrode were wounded and separated from the rest of the men, who desperately tried to get to them, returning fire with M4s, SAW automatic weapons and grenades. Apaches watched from the sky, but the fighting was too close for the pilots to separate friend from foe and launch the ordnance that would have finished the attack.

"Every single man next to me did exactly what he could, which was get down and return fire," Giunta said of the Soldiers' response. "There wasn't really much cover, so you've got to take the fight back to them. The more rounds you shoot at them, hopefully the less rounds they shoot at you. The less rounds they shoot at you, the less chances you have at getting hit. You've just got to play with

what you've got. And that's all we had."

Squad Leader Staff Sgt. Erick Gallardo took a round in the helmet, and watching him fall to the ground, Giunta believed the worst because 'only one thing happens when your head moves like that.' He raced through enemy fire and dragged Gallardo, who was only stunned, back to cover and helped him up.

At one point, enemy rounds also hit Giunta, who had always complained about wearing body armor. The rounds impacted both his vest and the rocket launcher he carried across his back. He barely flinched, but noticed something was off: the bullets hadn't come from the same direction as the bulk of the fighting.

"That's something to always keep in the

Story continued on page 8



President Barack Obama presents the Medal of Honor to Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta in the East Room of the White House, November 16, 2010, for his actions of valor during an enemy attack in the Korengal Valley of Afghanistan, Oct. 2007. (Photo by Chuck Kennedy)

back of your mind,” he said.

With Spc. Kaleb Casey ‘laying waste’ with his M249 SAW automatic weapon, Giunta recalled, Gallardo, Giunta and Pfc. Garret Clary, who also had an M203, threw grenades and then bounded forward in the aftermath of the explosions. Each time a wave of enemy fire stopped the men. Casey later reported that every man in the squad had bullet holes in their clothing or equipment. They dropped to the ground and prepped more grenades before bounding forward again.

‘I will never leave a fallen comrade’

When they finally reached Eckrode, he was wounded, but conscious and had been firing his weapon until it jammed. Brennan, however, was missing. While aiding Eckrode, Gallardo put Casey in charge of security and turned to order Giunta to continue the search for Brennan.

But Giunta was already gone, figuring that because he was ‘lazy’ and out of grenades, he might as well keep running and link up with Brennan, “because it’s better to shoot with a buddy than be shooting alone.”

Clary was trailing him by about 10-15 meters, but Giunta didn’t know that, nor

did he expect to find Brennan, a good friend, grievously wounded and being dragged away by two enemy fighters.

“I didn’t understand what was going on,” Giunta recalled. “I’ll think about that moment a lot. That was something I never thought I would see in the military. It was difficult to see. Just reaction -- that’s all you really have time to do, but after sitting on it for three years, it’s more emotional to me now than I think it was to me then.”

It was a part of the Warrior Ethos Giunta didn’t have to think twice about, because it went without saying that he wouldn’t leave Brennan and that Brennan wouldn’t leave him, that any of the Soldiers in the unit would have done the same.

So yelling for help and still under heavy fire, Giunta charged forward alone and fired his M4, killing one of the insurgents and wounding the other. But he did more than save Brennan, Gallardo later explained.

The true nightmare of any leader is a Soldier missing in action, and Giunta prevented that.

“They would have definitely, definitely taken him to a lot worse place,” Gallardo said. “There’s no way we would have

come out of that valley without Brennan. We would have fought tooth and nail to find his body or find Brennan. Giunta definitely saved a lot more lives that night.”

While Clary stood guard, and the fight continued around them, Giunta and Gallardo, who had come running, found a slight dip where they could protect Brennan, and feverishly went to work on him, going through all of their first-aid kits before cutting apart their own clothing, doing anything and everything to stop the bleeding. He was covered with gunshot and shrapnel wounds, but worst were the injuries to his face, and he couldn’t breathe. His wounds were far above their basic lifesaving skills, so they comforted him by talking of home while they tried to get help.

Aftermath

As 1st Platoon finally seized control, Soldiers brought other casualties to where Brennan lay, including the platoon’s beloved medic, Spc. ‘Doc’ Hugo Mendoza. He had been shot in the leg trying to help another Soldier and bled out through his femoral artery. He was already dead.

“And that’s when I knew the (exple-

tive) had hit the fan. We were in a position we didn’t want to be in. We don’t have our medic. I have a severe casualty,” Gallardo remembered, looking down. Third Platoon had come running when they heard RPG fire, but with the rough terrain, it was another 10 or 15 minutes before they arrived. Their medic gave Brennan a tracheotomy on the spot, buying enough time for the medevac helicopter to arrive, and giving the paratroopers hope.

They still had a long two-and-a-half-hour walk back to the KOP, but as far as they knew, Brennan was in surgery. He would make it. That’s what they told themselves, at least, and most of the Soldiers, even Giunta, didn’t know about Mendoza.

Everyone only knew his own small piece of the battle, which had been chaotic and overwhelming and is even now a blur for many of the Soldiers.

“I just hoped and prayed,” said Giunta. “We got back and the first sergeant had the cook cook us up some wings and corn dogs, which, awesome, you know, and you talk to your buddies. ‘OK, you’re good. You’re OK,’ like that,” but it wasn’t long before Battle Company’s commander, now-Maj. Dan Kearney, came and broke the devastating news.

“They were better Soldiers than me,” Giunta said with a catch in his voice. “That’s part of what gets me so much. I was with Brennan for the deployment before and he’s always been a better Soldier than me. He was Alpha Team leader. I was Bravo Team leader. There’s a reason for that. Spc. Mendoza was a combat medic. He did everything we did, plus when we came back dehydrated, ‘Oh I’m this, oh I’m that, I have this blister Doc,’ he would fix it. He went above and beyond every single day.”

Giunta explained that after a Soldier died, his buddies normally leaned on each other for support, but this time was different.

The Army wanted a lot of the men of 1st Platoon, and particularly Spc. Sal Giunta. There were sworn statements and investigations and interviews with the reporters who were embedded in the valley with Battle Company.

“And by the time you’re done, you know, we’re Infantry -- we’re not good writers, we’re not good storytellers

-- and by the time everyone was done with their sworn statements and turned those in, no one wanted to talk about it. We joked about the good times. There’s still people I’ve never talked about it to,” Giunta said.

He called his now-wife, Jennifer, and his mother, Rose, as soon as he could for the distraction, but he couldn’t tell them the details.

Both knew from his voice that something terrible had happened, and Jennifer had heard the basics from another spouse, but it would be years before either had a clear picture of what had happened on that mountainside.

First since Vietnam

Kearney originally decided to put Giunta in for the Medal of Honor three years ago, the same night as the ambush, saying that if Giunta’s actions weren’t worthy of the Medal of Honor, then he doesn’t know what is.

“It started sounding like some story I had read about in World War II with Audie Murphy,” he remembered. “You don’t hear about single individuals taking on the responsibility to leave their squad when they’re a specialist, treat their squad leader after they’ve been shot and then go repatriate their best friend from behind enemy lines, then to run back into the kill zone to start treating his men and leading them out of the kill zone.”

Still, it was something that Giunta refused to believe would ever happen until he heard the president’s voice on the phone congratulating him.

“For almost three years, someone’s like ‘Hey, you’re in for the Medal of Honor,’” he said. “‘Oh, no. I don’t think that’s me.’ Just deny. It’s not worth it. That’s something that’s going to be a big thing and that’s not what I need right now. I’ve got enough stuff going on. And to hear President Obama on the phone, that was a moment of ‘Ohhohh.’”

“It was good. It was very positive and it was exciting and it was thrilling and my heart was beating and my ears were closing and I had my wife Jen by my side and she’s squeezing my hand. And it was positive, but at the same time, it almost seemed unreal,” he remembered, adding that as hard as he tries, he can’t remember exactly what the president said.

Even now the experience is surreal and bittersweet, as Giunta tries to grasp that he will stay forever in the pages of history for helping his friend and doing his job. It’s an honor, of course, but it’s not one that he ever asked for or wanted.

“I have never gone to war alone,” he said. “I have never been in a firefight alone and I’ve never felt alone in the Army. There were a lot of other guys who did incredible stuff. The only reason I was able to do what I did is because they were doing everything they could do.”

“They make it sound like so much of the bullets were focused on me. No. Bullets don’t discriminate. They were on every single man who was there. And now, you’re going to put a medal around my neck and shake my hand and congratulate me, and everyone’s going to be proud of me? And I didn’t do anything other than what I was supposed to? And I know two men personally gave every single tomorrow they’ll ever have?”

So it is of those two men, Sgt. Josh Brennan and Spc. Hugo Mendoza, who Giunta said he will surely think of while the nation watches his historic ceremony Tuesday.

“If they can’t be there for it, I’m happy their families can, and I hope they can feel my sincere gratitude. I hope they can look down on all this and be like, ‘Ah, good.’ And I hope when people ask me, I can bring credit to them,” he said, adding that he hopes he can also honor the guys who were on that mountain with him, guys like Gallardo who are already proud to have served with him and will one day tell their grandchildren about the day they went into battle with a Medal of Honor recipient.

But most of all, Giunta hopes that the medal will remind Americans that brave young men and women are still out there in Afghanistan, sacrificing their blood, sweat and tears every day.

“I hope I can spread that with this,” he said. “This is for everyone who has been to Iraq, everyone who has been to Afghanistan, everyone who has to suck it up for awhile without their family, and it’s about the families who have to suck it up when their husband or wife is deployed. This is for all of us. This is for everyone who sacrifices for their country, who sacrifices for America.”

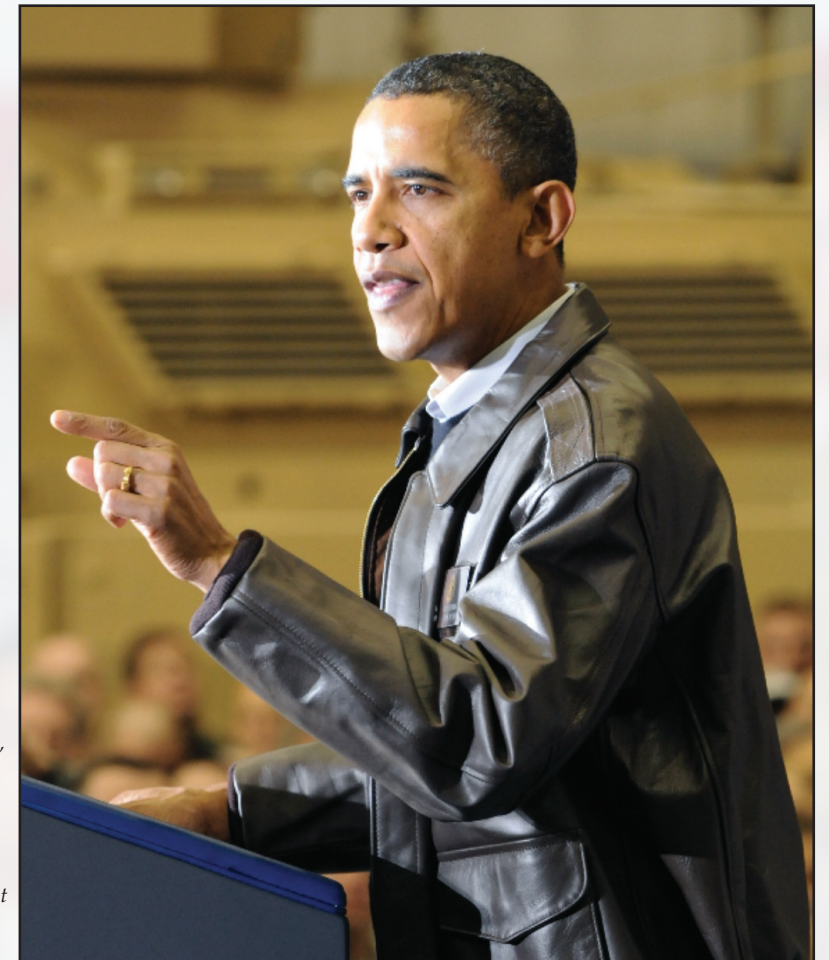
*I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat.
I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade.*

President Obama makes surprise visit to Bagram



“I wanted to spend some time with the men and women of the greatest fighting force the world has ever known.”
- President Obama

(Right) President Obama addresses current issues including the troop surge, pay freeze and extends his appreciation to the men and women of the armed forces and civilians serving around the world during a visit to Bagram Airfield Dec. 3. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. David House, 17th Public Affairs Detachment)
(Below) President Barack Obama is presented with a shirt by Maj. Gen. John Campbell, Combined Joint Task Force-101 and Regional Command-East commander, during a visit to Bagram Airfield Dec. 3. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Christopher Boitz)



(Top) President Barack Obama reaches for a Purple Heart medal which he presented to a wounded Soldier at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, Dec. 3. The president presented five Purple Hearts to Soldiers during his overnight trip to Afghanistan. (Photo by Pete Souza)

(Second) Before his surprise visit in front of approximately 4,000 servicemembers and civilians, President Barack Obama visits with a platoon of U.S. Soldiers from Troop C, 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan that recently lost six members. (Photo by Pete Souza)



RECOGNIZING VALOR

Gates awards medals earned during Operation Strong Eagle



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates presents a Combat Infantryman's Badge to U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Scott H. Swanson, an infantry squad leader from Friendswood, Texas, assigned to 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Panther, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, along with U.S. Army Lt. Col. William B. Johnson of Bristol, Tenn., Task Force Panther commander, at Forward Operating Base Connolly in eastern Afghanistan Dec. 7. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)

Story by Combined Joint Task Force-101 Public Affairs

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates presented six Silver Star Medals and six Bronze Star Medals with Valor to Task Force Bastogne Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Joyce Dec. 7.

The Soldiers, all from 1st Battalion and 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, were recognized for heroic actions during Operation Strong Eagle in June and July in eastern Afghanistan.

"I feel a personal responsibility for each and every one of you since I sent you here," Gates said. "I feel the sacrifice and hardship and losses more than you'll ever imagine. So I just want to thank you and tell how much I love you guys."

During the ceremony, Gates recounted the unit's mission as it embarked upon its first

full-on encounter with an organized Taliban enemy.

"We are breaking the momentum of the enemy and will eventually reverse it," the defense secretary said. But, he added, "It will be a while and we will suffer tougher losses as we go."

The Silver Star awardees were: U.S. Army 1st Lt. Stephen R. Tangen of Naperville, Ill.; U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class John P. Fleming of Alton, Ill.; U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Brent A. Schneider of Broken Arrow, Okla.; U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Daniel J. Hayes of Wyoming, Mich.; U.S. Army Cpl. Joshua Busch of Seymour, Wis.; and U.S. Army Pfc. Richard T. Bennett of St. Charles, Ill.

The Bronze Star Medals with Valor were awarded to U.S. Army 1st Lt. David Broyles of Hilliard, Ohio; U.S. Army 1st Lt. Douglas F. Jones of Dallas; U.S. Army

Staff Sgt. Matthew Loheide from Long Island, N.Y.; U.S. Army Staff Sgt. McCarthy Phillip of Fairburn, Ga.; U.S. Army Sgt. Andrew L. Kuklis of Kansas City, Mo.; and U.S. Army Pfc. Alex J. Norzow III



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Scott R. Pearson, a medical platoon sergeant from Phil Campbell, Ala., assigned to 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Panther, displays a coin he received from Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at Forward Operating Base Connolly Dec. 7. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)

of Bowdoin, Maine.

"It's huge to have the secretary of defense come out here to recognize these Soldiers who are out there taking the fight to the enemy every day," said Maj. Gen. John F. Campbell, commander of Command Joint Task Force-101 and Regional Command-East.

One of the Silver Star recipients echoed Campbell's sentiment.

"It was an incredible honor that the secretary of defense would come; it was a little overwhelming," said Tangen, Scout Platoon leader, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Bn., 327th Inf. Tangen was formerly 1st Platoon leader of Company C, 2nd Bn., 32nd Inf.

"FOB Joyce gets attacked almost every day, so just the fact that he would come to a remote FOB like this and put his life on the line — it doesn't happen every day," Tangen said.

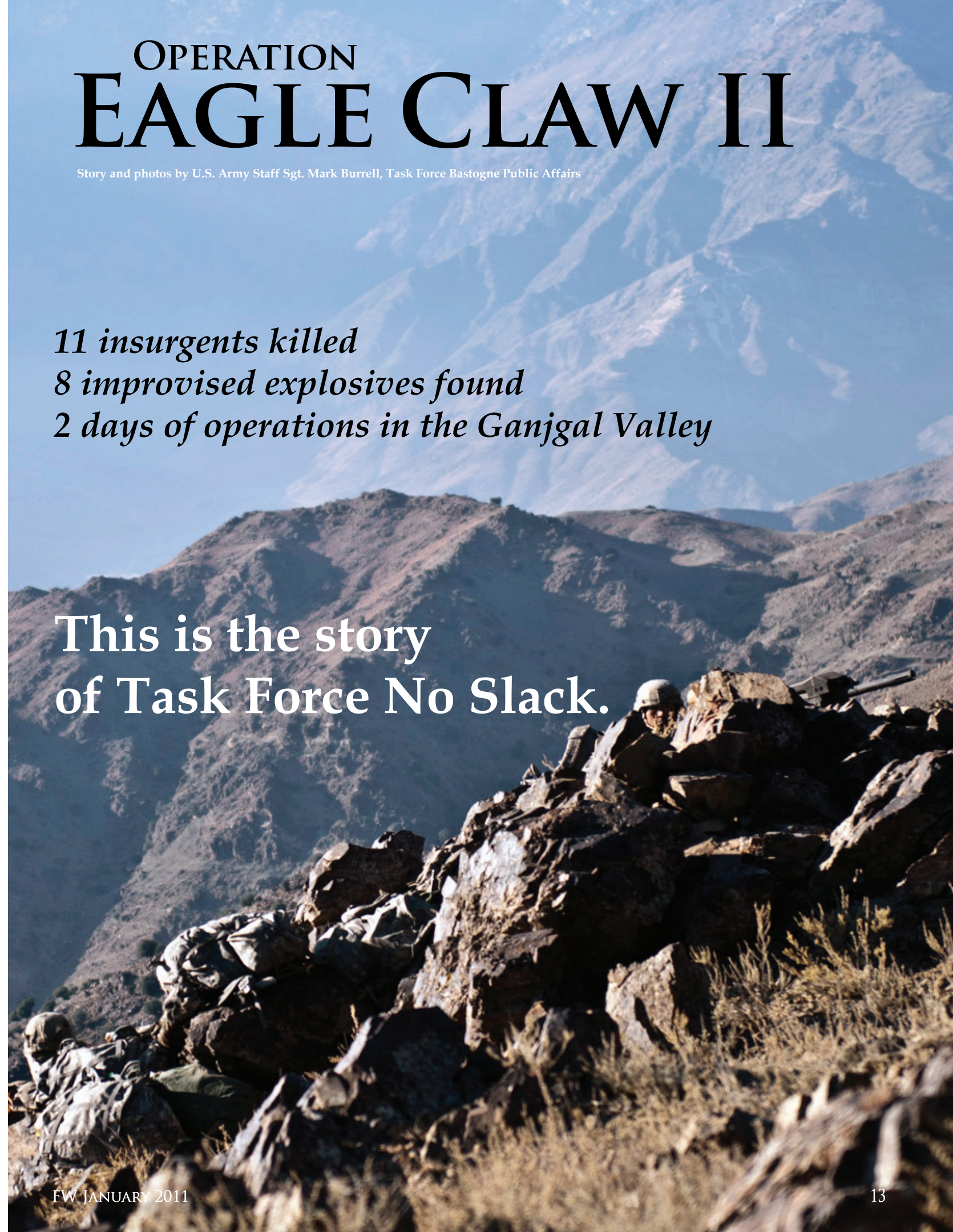
During Operation Strong Eagle, TF No Slack was tasked with clearing Daridam Village to stop insurgents from massing in the Ghaki Valley of eastern Kunar Province. ☺

OPERATION EAGLE CLAW II

Story and photos by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs

*11 insurgents killed
8 improvised explosives found
2 days of operations in the Ganjgal Valley*

This is the story
of Task Force No Slack.



Whoop. Whoop. Whoop. The sounds of helicopters echoed through the Ganjgal Valley in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province the morning of Dec. 10.

Swarming, then hovering as expertly as hummingbirds, the CH-47 Chinooks and UH-60 Black Hawks dropped their cargo simultaneously on multiple ridges overlooking the Taliban stronghold only a few kilometers from the Pakistan border.

Task Force No Slack Soldiers, with heavy combat loads, saturated the valley's walls and Operation Eagle Claw II began.

Within the first few minutes of the mission, it became real.

"There were a number of fighters we saw," said U.S. Army Capt. Ryan A. McLaughlin, Company B commander, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, TF No Slack, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. "You could hear them on our infill when we were moving. They did attempt to react, and very

quickly they were shown that that wasn't a very good course of action."

Several volleys of hellfire missiles exploded, killing five insurgent fighters moving into position less than a few hundred meters away. They were armed and ready for a fight.

The light from the explosions faded and darkness reigned again. As the world slept, the Taliban stalked the Co. B Soldiers moving into positions high in the rocky

(Right) During Operation Eagle Claw II, artillery fire explodes on a suspected insurgent hideout. Eleven insurgents were killed during the two-day operation, the purpose of which was to disrupt a safe haven of the insurgents in the Ganjgal Valley. The valley is strategically important since it is near the provincial capital.

(Below) U.S. Army Sgt. Richard A. Darvoial of Amery, Wis., (kneeling), a combat medic, takes cover while U.S. Army Spc. Corey C. Canterbury of Ocean Springs, Miss., a mortar man, both from Task Force No Slack, fires mortars from a mountain top overlooking the Ganjgal Valley in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Dec. 11.

Hindu Kush Mountains to provide maximum security for the ground assault force.

"The terrain was pretty rugged," explained McLaughlin of Tuscaloosa, Ala. "We were at about 4,800 feet with elevation changes in every direction. 'You go 300 meters, and you're dropping several hundred feet. It's pretty tricky, particularly in hours of darkness. We were looking at zero illumination with severe elevation changes.'"

No matter the obstacles, the

Bayonet Co. Soldiers had an essential role in the overall success of the operation.

"The overarching concept for the mission was to disrupt what has become a safe haven for the insurgents that are in this valley," said McLaughlin. "It's proximity to Asad Abad, the provincial capital, was allowing the bad guys to have easy access coming through Pakistan, through this valley and into the provincial capital. Obviously that's a problem for what we want to do..."



Asad Abad is the most populated area and the center of governance, so we need to protect that."

Freezing winds whipped the rocks as the sun crawled from Pakistan over the barren mountains. Soldiers filled sandbags and built rock walls to stay warm, but more importantly, to stay safe.

"We're (kind of) set up in a patrol base," said U.S. Army Sgt. Joseph M. McKenzie, an infantry team leader from Chicago, also assigned to Co. B. "I'm pretty sure you've heard, 'You can always fix your security.' So we keep making it better."

McKenzie and his squad meticulously piled rock after rock giving them the best cover possible from enemy fire.

"We're basically taking a page out of the Taliban book," added McKenzie. "I mean, they build theirs with just rocks, but add some sandbags and it helps lock the rocks down."

At the same time, other TF No Slack Soldiers cleared villages on the valley floor. They found eight improvised explosive devices, multiple ordnance rounds and ammunition.

"From up here, it feels pretty good to be able to give the support everybody down there needs," said U.S. Army Pfc. Benjamin J. Lohmeyer of Benton, Kan., a rifleman from Co. B. "If something bad happens down there, we're able to have their backs, and that feels pretty good."

Perched high on a rocky nest with a .50-caliber machine gun, Lohmeyer and his squad had a bird's-eye view of the action.

"Why do I do it? I don't know why really," Lohmeyer said. "I do it for the people back home to make sure they're safe and so my buddies are safe ... If I weren't here today, I'd probably have some



U.S. Army 1st Lt. Andrew D. Rinehart, an infantry platoon leader from Belmont, N.C., assigned to Bayonet Company, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force No Slack, uses his scope to look for insurgent activity on a mountainside overlooking the Ganjgal Valley in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Dec. 11.

bad job back home. I'm not going to lie; I'd be trying to get money somehow just trying to get by."

Soldiers like Lohmeyer, who aren't just trying to get by, were critical for the overall success of a mission with so many moving parts.

"We were basically able to make a fairly impenetrable cordon around the objective," said McLaughlin. "That allowed the ground element to come in and do their clearance more quickly than I actually projected, without having to fire a single shot."

Though Bayonet Co. Soldiers didn't fire a single shot, 11 insurgents were


killed during the operation.

"I think it was an important operation," said McLaughlin. "We didn't kill hundreds of insurgents or find Osama bin Laden hiding in the Ganjgal Valley, but nonetheless a very important next step in our progression. The impacts of this one will be felt in the insurgent networks."

"Insurgent propaganda has recently stated specifically 'We own the Ganjgal Valley and the coalition will never set foot here again.' And then within a matter of weeks we showed them, 'Hey, we can come here anytime we want, and we'll do whatever we want to extend the reach of

the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan."

As darkness fell on the third night, the fatigued Soldiers swiftly and silently moved out from their fighting positions and started toward home.

"I think when they see the 101st patch, I don't think its fear, but it's (an) understanding that we mean business," McLaughlin said. "We have the tools and the desire to apply counterinsurgency principles successfully. We're just not here to shell the mountains and not just here to kill them, but we're actually working on a strategic victory. I think that scares insurgents more than anything else." 

"... we're actually working on a strategic victory. I think that scares insurgents more than anything else."

-U.S. Army Capt. Ryan A. McLaughlin



BULLDOGS BITE INTO THE MOUNTAIN

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lucas A. Kammerer of Nashville, Tenn., a squad leader assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Bulldog, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, climbs down after searching a cave for weapons during Operation Bulldog Bite in the Pech River Valley in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province.

Story and photos by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs

“There’s a myth, I think, amongst us coalition forces and International Security Assistance Forces that there are some places we can’t go,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Joseph A. Ryan, Task Force Bulldog commander. “That is absolutely and unequivocally untrue. We can go anywhere we want to go. We have the technology to support it, but most importantly ... our infantrymen are tougher, stronger, more capable and better trained than the enemy,” the Pearl River, N.Y., native added.

To dispel this myth, Soldiers from Bushmaster Company joined with Afghan National Army personnel to complete the final phase of Operation Bulldog Bite in the Pech River Valley.

The area, located in Kunar Province, has been a known insurgent stronghold. Enemy combatants use the valley to attack a combat outpost to the south.

To secure the area and protect the combat outpost, the combined operation’s objectives were to clear the local villages of enemies and caches of supplies.

“Our message to (the insurgents) is to come down and turn themselves in and their weapons and we will negotiate,” said ANA 1st Lt. Asauma Din of Kabul City, Afghanistan, an infantry platoon leader, assigned to 2nd Company, 2nd Infantry Battalion, 2nd Brigade, ANA Corps. “We always approach them peacefully, but if they don’t then we will come get them.”

As the Soldiers moved into the villages, they spoke with

the locals and searched every possible hiding place for anything suspicious. In the midst of searching areas where people live, however, the Soldiers also had to convince the locals that the searches made the area safer.

“The large majority of people in this area are essentially indifferent to the fighting between us and the insurgent groups,” said Ryan. “They don’t take sides, they live with it and have to deal with it day in and day out. They’re farmers, landowners and ranchers essentially. So we obviously take that into account when we conduct operations such as Bulldog Bite.”

During the third day, some Soldiers spoke directly to the village elders to let them know about their suspicions of Taliban in the area and to hear the concerns of those living there.

“We told them we’re not there to disturb their harmony, but if they allow the enemy to use this area as a staging ground or sanctuary, then they’ll be responsible for whatever happens,” said U.S. Army Capt. Thomas Whitfield II of Kingstree, S.C., company commander.

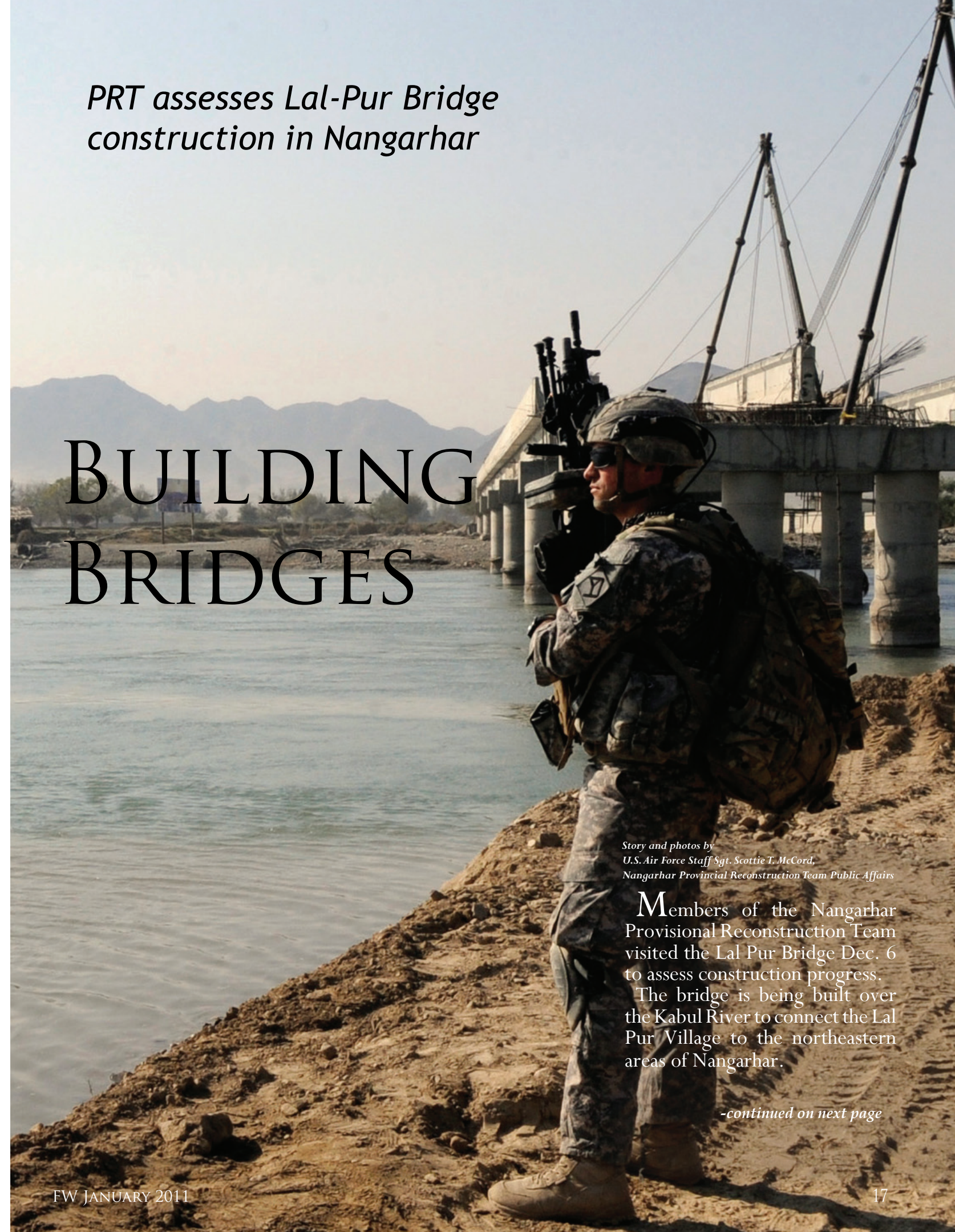
Throughout the different phases of Bulldog Bite, the enemy probed the joint forces’ defenses, resulting in minimal casualties.

Yet, the overall mission produced more than 150 insurgents killed, two training camps revealed, multiple weapons caches and an invaluable intangible.

“Confidence,” said Whitfield. “It gave our guys confidence because it reminds them that we can go anywhere. The best thing you can have is a confident infantryman, especially a confident Bushmaster. And that’s the worst thing for the enemy.”

PRT assesses Lal-Pur Bridge construction in Nangarhar

BUILDING BRIDGES



*Story and photos by
U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Scottie T. McCord,
Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs*

Members of the Nangarhar Provisional Reconstruction Team visited the Lal Pur Bridge Dec. 6 to assess construction progress.

The bridge is being built over the Kabul River to connect the Lal Pur Village to the northeastern areas of Nangarhar.

-continued on next page



The Lal Pur Bridge, scheduled for completion June 2011 by the Meraj Construction Company, will be 11 meters wide, allowing for two large lanes of traffic, and 300 meters long.

The foundation for each of the bridge's piers runs deep into the riverbed of the Kabul River. It is being constructed near Afghanistan's main thoroughfare, Highway 1.

"This bridge has a very solid structure and foundation," said Gul Mohmmad, Meraj Construction chief engineer. "I'm honored my company was chosen to construct it and be a part of Afghanistan history."


"This is the biggest deal for the Lal Pur District ever," said Lal Pur Subgovernor Hija Zuhag. "It will be good for the economy, trade and commerce."

Presently, there are very limited ways of crossing the river, said U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. James Elliott of Richburg, S.C., Nangarhar PRT civil engineer. There is a bridge located 50 km away, but it is a five-hour drive due to poor road conditions. There is also a ferry at the bridge's location.

Both villages that border the Kabul River, Sarband on the east and Lal Pur on the west, are excited about the opportunities it will provide.

The bridge will provide closer ties for the people of the Ghosta and Lal Pur districts to greater Nangarhar and Afghanistan as a whole, said Elliott.

There is no effective competition for the area separated by the Kabul River because of the large distances to markets, said Elliott. It will bring easy access to the northern agricultural plains between the Kabul and Kunar rivers, allowing faster movement of agricultural products to the other side of the river and to the export route to Pakistan.

"The bridge which is costing an estimated \$7 million will be the second largest in Afghanistan," said Elliot. "Once completed, it will provide a permanent crossing for the Kama, Ghosta and Lal Pur districts, all of which are annually cut off during the high flood season." 

(Previous page) U.S. Army Sgt. David Tyo of Pepperell, Mass., Nangarhar Provisional Reconstruction Team infantryman, patrols the west bank of the Lal Pur Bridge project Dec. 6. The bridge will provide a permanent connection to the north eastern areas.

(Above) A ferry crosses the Kabul River Dec. 6. The residents of Kama, Ghosta and Lal Pur heavily use the ferry for transit; the Lal Pur Bridge will provide a permanent, safe avenue.

(Left) U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. James Elliot of Richburg, S.C. (left), Nangarhar Provisional Reconstruction Team civil engineer; Bret English of Kansas City, Kan. (second from left), Army Corp of Engineers general engineer; Gul Mohammad (center), Meraj Construction head engineer; and Jewell "JB" Bealmear of Cadiz, Ky. (right), Army Corps of Engineers construction control representative, walk and examine the Lal Pur Bridge project Dec. 6. The Lal Pur Bridge will be the second largest bridge in Afghanistan.



Soldiers help Afghan girl fight tumor

Story and photos by U.S. Army Capt. Anthony Deiss
Task Force Rushmore Public Affairs

For 13-year-old Afghan girl Safoora, a new opportunity at life is one gift that came just in time for the Islamic celebration of Eid al-Adha. Suffering from a tumor in the middle of her brain, Safoora was able to get the surgery she needed to remove the life-threatening mass.

While the holiday of Eid al-Adha is similar to that of Christmas for Americans, Safoora's gift did not come from a jolly, fat man in a red suit, but rather two men wearing green camouflage.

U.S. Army Col. Ashok Kumar, a physician, and U.S. Army Capt. Regan Norgaard, a physician's assistant, both deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan, with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, coordinated the surgery Safoora needed to have a chance at living a healthy and normal life.

"We knew she had a tumor removed in June 2008 in Pakistan," said Kumar of Rapid City, S.D. "The father told us the doctor who performed the surgery had died since and was wondering if there was anything we could do to ease the suffering of his daughter."

Through a non-Department of Defense volunteer program called Operation Outreach Afghanistan, Safoora was able to receive assistance for her first surgery. The OOA program is a humanitarian organization that provides assistance to needy Afghan families through donations of money and supplies as well as providing medical assistance to Afghan children with special needs by referring them to hospitals in Kabul, neighboring countries, and the United States.

"After Safoora's first surgery in 2008, she recovered well and exhibited no problems until June 2010, when she started to have headaches and dizziness," said Kumar. "A scan of Safoora's brain done in June at a NATO military hospital in Kabul showed a mass in the same area of her previous surgery."

"The doctors at the coalition hospital said her life was in danger, and without surgery soon, she would most likely die," added Norgaard of Brookings, S.D. "Unfortunately, the surgery she needed could not be performed anywhere in Afghanistan due lack of medical resources – we needed to look at other options."



U.S. Army Col. Ashok Kumar of Rapid City, S.D., a physician deployed with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, South Dakota Army National Guard, examines 13-year-old Afghan girl Safoora as her father Ishmael Mohammad watches from the background at the Camp Phoenix medical clinic in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Using monetary donations from OOA, along with their own financial resources and medical contacts, Kumar and Norgaard acted quickly to try and make arrangements to save Safoora's life. Kumar, who was born and raised in India, contacted his cousin who arranged for her medical care at a university hospital in India.

While Kumar made the necessary arrangements with one of the best neurosurgeons in India, Norgaard made the travel arrangements to get Safoora and her father there.

"I'm so thrilled Safoora didn't have any complications, infection or significant brain damage, and she is functioning like a normal child," said Kumar, after a recent examination. "She's completely without any neurological deficiencies and her memory is pretty good. We are hopeful she will not have any recurrence of the tumor."

While Kumar is happy to help Safoora as medical professionals, both of them wanted to help for other reasons.


"As a doctor, you are a part of a team to save a life under normal circumstances,"

said Kumar. "This experience is different in a personal way. The first time I saw Ishmael, I was looking at a father who loved his daughter and had not given up, given the dire circumstances.

"As a father myself, I thought about how much I love my daughter," continued Kumar, who is married with two children. "He came into my office and said 'she is dying, can you do anything?' I had to do something."

For Kumar, helping Safoora has also made an impact in other aspects.

"I always felt that being in Afghanistan, I am serving two countries at the same time – the country of birth and the country that adopted me as a citizen," said Kumar, a U.S. citizen for 20 years. "Doing something for the Afghans is helping in the (counterinsurgency) operation of U.S. forces fighting the insurgents, and at the same time, contributes in a small way to India's efforts that is fighting the same enemy."

It is making a difference, added Kumar. Many of the Afghans he sees around the camp and at the bazaars stop to thank him. 

“You represent not only your own future, but the future of your nation.”

-Brig. Gen. Warren E. Phipps Jr.



Ahmad Nawid, representative of students, addresses his fellow graduates at a graduation ceremony for the Korean Vocational Training Center at Bagram Airfield Dec. 8. Training center officials plan to start a new class in February.

THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

85 Afghans graduate from training center, enter workforce

Story and photo by U.S. Army Spc. Adam L. Mathis, 17th Public Affairs Detachment

“Congratulations, you guys are awesome.”

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Barton Allen of Cheyenne, Wy., with the 455th Expeditionary Aerial Port Squadron, said it with a wave and a smile. His English students sat among the 85 Afghans about to graduate from the Korean Vocational Training Center at Bagram Airfield Dec. 8.

They had studied a wide range of technical fields: automotive, construction, electricity, welding and computers, with students in each field also learning English.

Eight months, or 700 training hours, had gone into the training of the students who sat beneath a banner that perhaps foretold their futures: “You are (the) dream and hope of future Afghanistan.”

“I couldn’t be more proud to be associated with them,” Allen said.

A profitable journey

The Koreans broke ground on the training center June 24, 2009. When the first class began April 8, the KVTC had students from Kapisa and Parwan provinces. Each of the new students were selected by officials from their respective provinces to attend the school.

Representatives from Fluor Corporation, which handles civilian contracting on Bagram, surveyed the school and found

programs that suited their staffing needs while class was in session.

“(This is) what you would see in a vocational school or community college back in the States,” said Joe Yoswa, Fluor director of public affairs.


Which is why, after months of training, each of the students graduated with a job waiting for them. Of the 85 students, Fluor hired 82 to work on Bagram. One is going to a job in Kabul and the other two will stay on at the vocational school, said Deok-Soo Kong, director of the KVTC for Kapisa and Parwan.

“Even though you’re born poor, you can make your life wealthy through your efforts,” Kong said at their graduation.

From past to future

“You represent not only your own future, but the future of your nation,” said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Warren E. Phipps Jr. of El Paso, Texas, Combined Joint Task Force-101 deputy commanding general, to the graduates.

Ravi Sayed Muslim, a KVTC graduate from Parwan Province, said he felt very good about graduating in construction. Before attending the KVTC, he put together exercise equipment on Bagram and went to high school. Now he has a job with Fluor and is considering going to college one day.

“I want to continue my studies ... and I want to work on my skill,” Muslim said. 

Soldiers ‘adopt’ girls school

Story and photos by U.S. Army Sgt. Rebecca Linder, Task Force Rushmore Public Affairs

Located near a rich, private school in downtown Kabul, one of the poorest schools in the area, Ariana, has been ‘adopted’ by Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 101st Field Artillery Regiment. Several boxes of school supplies, including books, crayons, notebooks, pens and pencils, were again donated to the children at the mostly girl school during a humanitarian mission.

“The girls’ schools typically get less funding and less resources and a lot of the people who go to the schools are real poor so their families don’t necessarily have the means of providing them the paper and school supplies expected to be provided,” said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Ric Volp, executive officer, Battery B, 1st Bn., 101st FA. “By providing the supplies, we can help them better their education.”

Soldiers from the Massachusetts and Vermont Army National Guard unit have been working with Ariana since May, and with donations from groups back

home, these Soldiers have been able to create a special relationship with the school.

“The supplies we give them will help benefit their education for being able to do their work,” said Volp. “A lot of the books we gave them are in English so they will help them learn to read and write in English, which will help bring the school girls closer to Americans because of the language they will share.”

Walking into a school with tents and benches for classrooms, the goal of the 1st Bn., 101st FA, was to provide additional space. Since then, with help from the Commanders Emergency Response Program, these Soldiers have been able to provide three additional classrooms to assist with overcrowding and have provided the facility with school supplies.

“The facility is very nice now; they take very good care of it and take a lot of pride in it,” said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Ana Monteiro, assistant civil military operations officer, 1st Bn., 101st FA. “The students learn in shifts; this school has three. So there is not a lot of room,



1st Lt. Ana Monteiro, 1st Battalion, 101st Field Artillery Regiment, Massachusetts Army National Guard, goes down a slide with an Afghan girl at Arian School during a mission to deliver school supplies in Kabul, Afghanistan. The 101st has donated more than \$7.1 million toward education.

but we have been able to help assist with the problem and they are very grateful for what we do.”


“We have a good memory of how nice and giving these people are,” said one school teacher. “We thank them very much and appreciate everything they have done for us.”

With the primary focus of providing a better education for Afghans, the 1st Bn., 101st FA, has put more than \$7.1 million toward education projects under CERP. Fourteen new schools have been built and another 19 are in progress.

The Soldiers are building schools not only for elementary and high school students, but also schools for Afghan students after

graduating high school.

“Out of the 19 schools we currently have under construction, one is a vocational school and another is a civil aviation training institute, where students will learn different jobs at the airport. As soon as they are done, they automatically start working at the airport in Kabul,” said Monteiro.

“I think the schools are one of the best things we can do to fight the insurgencies because so many of the Afghans don’t know what our mission is,” Volp said. “They just know what they have heard. Hopefully, by doing a lot of these school projects the kids will start getting a, better education and actually be able to make a change in their society.” 



1st Lt. Ric Volp, left, and 1st Lt. Ana Monteiro, right, 1st Battalion, 101st Field Artillery Regiment (1-101st), Massachusetts Army National Guard, gives a teacher from Ariana School a stack of school supplies during a humanitarian aid mission.



ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

*Officials complete
high school
for Kapisa Province*

*Story by U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Ashley Skillman,
Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs Office*

An Afghan contractor, Gulab Ikhlas Construction Company, the Kapisa Ministry of Education, and Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team co-hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Abdul Manan High School in Nijrab District Dec. 2 to celebrate the completion of the school.

“We hope that as this school is used, more and more children will receive a quality education that will benefit their future ...”

-Abdul Wahid Hekmat, the Kapisa education line minister

“It’s clear that the people here today are eager to assist in educational needs for this province, and we appreciate you all,” said Abdul Wahid Hekmat, the Kapisa education line minister, through an interpreter. “This school, on one hand, is a positive addition to the constructional development of this district but, on the other hand, it is a great educational service.”

“Knowledge is important for everyone,” said Azizurahman Tawab, the Kapisa executive chief, through an interpreter. “With it, we can remove discrimination, better connect with nature and have a good relationship with God.”

Now that the construction of the school is complete, many of the key speakers emphasized the importance of maintaining the facility so it may be used for years to come.

“We are all very glad that the PRT has helped to build this school, but it’s important to remember that the maintenance of this school is a responsibility for all the Nijrab people, Zargaran villagers and students,” said Sultan Mohammad Safi, Nijrab District sub-governor.

Abdul Manan High School construction began in January 2009. The facility has 16 classrooms, cost roughly \$250,000 to build, and includes a traditional Afghan restroom, guard room, water reservoir and boundary wall. It was built to accommodate more than 800 boys from the local area.


“The PRT is very glad we were able to work with Gulab Ikhlas Construction Company to build this project for the people of Nijrab,” said U.S. Air Force Capt. Seth Platt of Pomfret, Conn., Kapisa PRT civil engineer. “We hope that



Children help set up for a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Abdul Manan High School Dec. 2. The school was completed in less than two years and was built to accommodate approximately 800 students in the local area. The Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team worked with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to construct the school. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier, Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team)

as this school is used, more and more children will receive a quality education that will benefit their future and build a stronger educational foundation for the entire province, which will help all the people of Kapisa.”

Mayed Agha, Kapisa senator in the Afghan Senate, Mirdad Nijrabi, a newly elected Wolesi Jirga member from Nijrab, and the school’s principal, teachers and students joined local villagers to witness the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Abdul Manan.

The Kapisa PRT assists the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in providing a secure, stable environment for reconstruction efforts by increasing capabilities and capacities. The Abdul Manan High School project is an example of the development projects the PRT is using to connect the government to the people and to improve quality of life in the province. 



(Above) Members of the Kapisa and Nijrab government listen to school children singing during the Abdul Manan High School ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 2. The school was completed in less than two years and was built to accommodate approximately 800 students in the local area. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier, Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team)

(Previous page) A villager lays a rug in preparation for the Abdul Manan High School ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 2. The school was completed in less than two years and was built to accommodate approximately 800 students in the local area. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier, Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team)

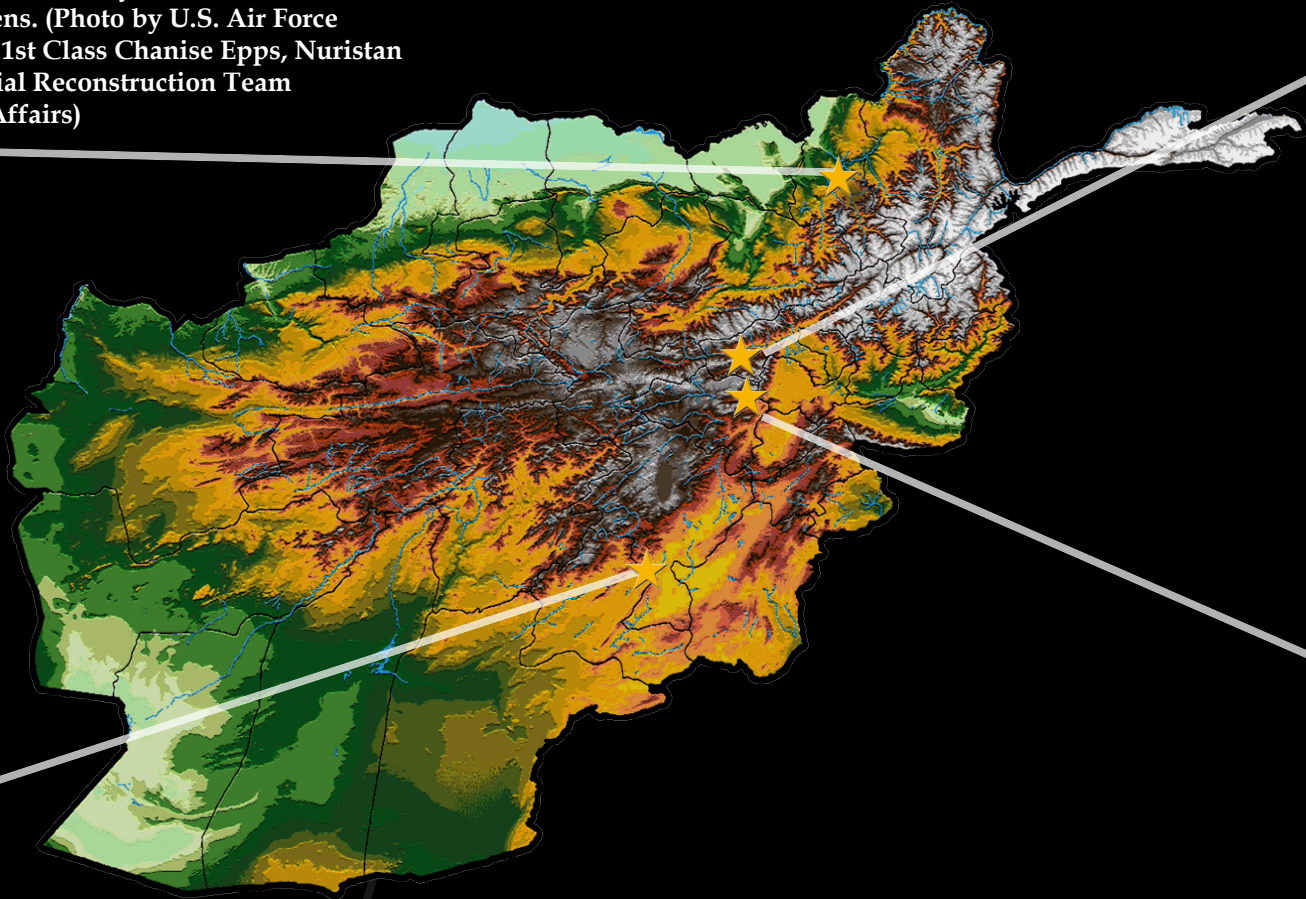
Goodwill across Afghanistan:



A man walks his son down the halls of a school in Nangaresh village. Working with the Afghan government to improve education in Nuristan Province is one focus of the provincial reconstruction team. The PRT visited the school with government officials to distribute school supplies donated by the Matthew Freeman Project. PRTs operating in Afghanistan focus on improving the government's ability to provide security and meet the many other needs of its citizens. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Chanise Epps, Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)

ISAF and ANSF Reach Out

Today Show anchor Lester Holt interviews Sgt. 1st Class Bryn Reynolds of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., Task Force Wolverine, and presented him with a surprise video conference with his wife Debbie and new fraternal twins, Brooke and Tyler. The event was featured during a live television broadcast at Bagram Airfield Nov. 21. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. David House, 17th Public Affairs Detachment)



An Afghan child pulls a cow to be examined by 2-45th Oklahoma Agribusiness Development Team Soldiers in Tandan Village Dec. 4. Animal health and welfare inspections are one way the ADT assists the people of Afghanistan with their agricultural needs. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Barry Loo, Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)



U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Bubba Beason of Benton, Ark., 438th Air Expeditionary Wing first sergeant, has his head shaved at the Afghan Air Force Base in Kabul, Afghanistan, Dec. 6 as part of a group effort to support 5-year-old Lyla Grace Rivers, who is battling acute lymphoblastic leukemia. (Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Jared E. Walker)



SET ME UP

FOB Ghazni hosts volleyball tournament

Story and photos by U.S. Air Force
Senior Airman Courtney Witt, Ghazni
Provincial Reconstruction Team

With spectators cheering, Azadi, from Ghazni City, split Wahdat's defense with a powerful spike earning Azadi the 2010 Friendly Relationship Volleyball Tournament championship title in two straight sets at the sand pit on Forward Operating Base Ghazni Dec. 5.

Eight teams, including more than 50 athletes from the Afghan National Army, Ghazni City, Polish, American servicemembers, and FOB Ghazni linguists, competed in a one-day tournament hosted by the U.S. State Department.

U.S. State Department officials chose to have the tournament on FOB Ghazni to help strengthen ties with the local community.

"We decided to hold a volleyball tournament, not only to show off our local talent, but to encourage Ghazni citizens to drop any preconceived notions and come together with our coalition counterparts and local government for a friendly game of volleyball to help form a stronger bond," said Mohammad Saleem Omar, U.S. Department of State linguist.

This is the first time the Friendly Relationship Volleyball Tournament has been hosted on FOB Ghazni since the FOB was established in 2003.

"I am so very happy to be playing on the FOB," said

Wahidullah, trainer and team leader for Azadi. "I think this is a great idea to help build a better relationship between us citizens and coalition so we can become more together."

Wahidullah said he is looking forward to more oppor-

tunities like this.

"There are plans in the future for another game," Omar acknowledged. "We are looking at the Afghan National Army compound because it's close and it has a really nice facility. ☺"



Azadi blocks Afghan National Army during the first match of the Friendly Relationship Volleyball Tournament between the United States, Afghanistan and Poland Dec. 5 on Forward Operating Base Ghazni.

PRT considers irrigation work

Story and photos by U.S. Air Force
Chief Master Sgt. Richard Simonsen
Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs

Civil affairs and engineer servicemembers from the Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team evaluated the feasibility of an irrigation project proposal in Nangaresh village Dec. 2 to determine the possibility of irrigating 1,200 acres of farmland in the Wadawu valley.

Waikil Sakhi, Nurgaram District elder, said he supports the proposal.

"If we are able to bring water to these fields, we will be able to feed 7,000 people," said Sakhi. "These fields are owned by all the people of the Wadawu Valley. We already have seed and fertilizer from the government, but we were not able to plant this year because of lack of moisture."

"If we bring water to the fields, the people will be able to greatly increase production," agreed U.S. Army Spc. Richard Bogue, the PRT's agriculture expert from White, S.D., "but they will have to be able to maintain it."



U.S. Army Spc. Richard Bogue (left) of White, S.D., civil affairs member and agriculture expert for the Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team, listens to Waikil Sakhi, a Nurgaram District elder, explain how an irrigation proposal would help feed 7,000 people in the Wadawu valley Dec. 2.

The proposed project includes a micro-hydro power plant that would power the district agriculture system and the pumps required to water the fields. The project also has the potential to provide clean water to more than 4,000 Afghans. ☺

French work with Afghan military

Story by French Army 1st Lt. Audrey Chauchiel
Task Force Lafayette liaison to Regional Command-East Public Affairs

The Afghan and French headquarters worked side by side during the combined Bison Playoff II operation to root out insurgents in the Tagab Valley of Sarobi District.

The 3rd Afghan Infantry Brigade, 201st Corps, Afghan National Army and French Task Force Lafayette are settled in the same area of operations and synchronize at the highest level, as partners do.

"This helps us with coordinating our actions and being more efficient on the field. It is also a great opportunity to maintain our friendship and brotherhood in arms," said French Brig. Gen. Jean-Francois Hogard, TF Lafayette commander.

"We are very confident in our combined coordination and support," said ANA Brig. Gen. Emam Nazar, 3rd Afghan Inf. Bde., commander. "This operation is a success, so will be the future ones."

This is the first combined mission since these two generals took command one month ago. ☺



An officer from French Task Force La Fayette speaks during Bison Playoff II in Sarobi District Nov. 21-24. The 3rd Afghan Infantry Brigade, 201st Corps, Afghan National Army, and TF Lafayette worked together to coordinate unit actions throughout the operation. (Photo by French Army Staff Sgt. Sébastien Dupont, French Combat Camera Team in Afghanistan)

TRACTOR BRINGS HOPE

Iowa ADT makes donation to Chowkay Demonstration Farm

Story and photo by U.S. Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn
734th Agribusiness Development Team

By American agricultural standards, the two-wheeled, Chinese-made tractor the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development brought to the Chowkay Demonstration Farm Dec. 5 was not much to look at.

For the farmers of the Chowkay District of Afghanistan's Kunar Province, however, the tractor represented a level of technology not often seen since revolution and war consumed Afghanistan's agriculture sector in the late 1970s.

Mashuqallah, agriculture extension manager for Chowkay District, expressed delight at the ADT's reintroduction of mechanized agriculture to the demonstration farm. He emphasized he had experience using such equipment,

but most local farmers did not.

"It's a new technology for our farmers so they can get familiar with it," Mashuqallah said. "Although I'm familiar with it, having it here will allow other farmers to learn how to use it."

Production agriculture specialists with the ADT first tilled the ground in the demonstration farm's greenhouse to prepare the seedbed for vegetable planting. Then they looked on as Mashuqallah used the tractor to till large strips of earth outside the greenhouse. After Mashuqallah had taken a turn, the specialists trained Mashuqallah's son and several local farmers on the tractor's operation.

The ADT's project manager for the Chowkay District, U.S. Army 1st Lt. Scott Shirk of Emmetsburg, Iowa, arranged to purchase the tractor.

"We bought a seed drill attachment

for the tractor, and what we're going to do is establish test plots of mechanically planted wheat and test plots of hand-sown wheat," Shirk said. "Most farmers around here hand sow their wheat, but we'll be able to show them how mechanically planted wheat has a more uniform planting depth and seed distribution, and that alone should boost yields a good bit."

For Mashuqallah, the tractor was only the latest agricultural improvement for Chowkay District brought about by the Iowa ADT.

He also pointed to the construction of the demonstration farm greenhouse, installation of a new irrigation water pump, and recent Veterinary Outreach Sustainment Programs in his district as examples of the ADT's positive impact on local agriculture.

"The Afghan people are a good nation and they will never forget your help," Mashuqallah said.

At the same time Mashuqallah insisted the ADT could be even more helpful if it addressed the district's degraded canal system.

"The first thing we need is water, because agriculture depends on water," Mashuqallah said. "If there's no water, there's no agriculture; if there's no agriculture, there's no us. It's a fact!"

Shirk concurred with Mashuqallah on the importance of reliable water supplies to agricultural production.

"Mashuqallah has been very good to work with, and we understand the problems he's facing in Chowkay," Shirk said. "The primary issue he's dealing with is the canal system the district uses for irrigation, but Chowkay is not the only district we're working in, and they are all facing similar problems," he added. "That means we can't focus all our attention in Chowkay. As the project manager for Chowkay, I wish we could, but I understand why we've got to allocate our resources to other districts, too."

Mashuqallah, agriculture extension director for the Chowkay District of Afghanistan's Kunar Province, tills ground outside the greenhouse at the Chowkay Demonstration Farm Dec. 5. U.S. Army 1st Lt. Scott Shirk of Emmetsburg, Iowa, Chowkay project manager for the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, stands by to provide assistance. The ADT brought the two-wheeled tractor to the demonstration farm to prepare the greenhouse seedbed for vegetable planting, and to provide training on the tractor to Mashuqallah and other local farmers.



American ambassador dedicates playground at Ghazni orphanage

Story by U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Julie Brummund,
Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs

U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry and the Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team paid a special visit Dec. 15 to the Ghazni City orphanage to dedicate playground equipment donated by the family and friends of Steven Thomas Stefani of Auburn, Calif.

Other attendees at the dedication were Ghazni Provincial Gov. Musa Khan, Polish Ambassador Maciej Lang, and Polish Brig. Gen. Andrzej Reudowicz, Task Force White Eagle commander.

While working for the U.S. Forest Service in Wells, Nev., Stefani discovered the opportunity to take a nine-month assignment as a U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service advisor, helping the people of Ghazni Province develop and implement agricultural projects.

On the desolate hills of Afghanistan, one can't be blamed for wondering how anyone could possibly make a living in such a place. Stefani was here to help the Afghans with just that. One of his many programs taught hundreds of women to raise poultry.

Stefani also helped to improve the grape production in the province, worked to get a cold storage facility built and planned for a sorely needed tree farm. He raised the hopes of the inhabitants in this conflict-torn region that the future could be better for their children.

When he found the Ghazni City orphanage had been so torn apart due to conflict that they didn't have a playground, toys or even soccer balls to play with, it tore at his heart. He contacted his family and friends back home asking them to contribute to this new project.

Tragically, just as the plan was developing, Stefani's convoy, returning from another mission, was hit by a roadside bomb and the 28-year-old's life was cut short, devastating his family and friends.

His family, knowing how Stefani hated to leave a project unfinished and wanting him to be remembered for something more than the way he died, decided to carry out his vision of a playground for this orphanage.

They accepted donations in Stefani's name to cover the cost of the playground equipment and shipping it to Ghazni Province.

Today, Ghazni is still a dangerous province beset with insurgent activity and roadside bombs. Getting the equipment here was a complicated matter plagued with delays, but PRT members stood ready to get the playground ready for use as quickly as possible once it arrived.

The orphanage is a fulltime home to 45 children and hosts a total of 120 children for the school day. It is led by orphanage director, Mir Ameenullah, and staffed with seven teachers and an administrator.

Stefani worked as a U.S. Department of Agriculture advisor to a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghazni Province from March 2007 until his death from a roadside explosion Oct. 4 of that same year.



Karl Eikenberry, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, takes a test run on the slide during the playground dedication at Ghazni City Orphanage in Ghazni City Dec. 15. The playground was donated by friends and family of U.S. Department of Agriculture advisor Tom "Big Daddy" Stefani who was killed in action by an improvised explosive device in Ghazni Province October 2007. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Courtney Witt, Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team)

Never let your buddy fight alone

Be willing to listen...

Not all wounds are visible

Photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew Smith, 55th Signal Company (COMCAM)



TF Iron puts eyes over FOB Andar



The Persistent Threat Detection System blimp inflates in preparation for first flight at Forward Operating Base Andar. The PTDS system increases security in the area by providing Soldiers with an aerial view of the terrain. Enemy combatants in the area attempted to shoot down the blimp almost immediately after it was launched. (U.S. Army photo)

Story by U.S. Army 1st Lt. R.J. Peek,
Task Force Rakkasan Public Affairs

Task Force Iron Rakkasan launched the first flight of the blimp over Forward Operating Base Andar.

The blimp, properly known as a Persistent Threat Detection System, allows a 360 degree, bird's-eye view of the surrounding area during any type of weather, with very little restrictions.

The PTDS, a Lockheed Martin system, requires two people to operate it. Alfred Henderson of Portsmouth, Va., a PTDS crew member, specializes in the maintenance of the system's platform, but like all of the operators, is well trained on the entire system.

The system operators require an extensive background of qualifications. With few exceptions, everyone working with the PTDS has prior military service.

Additionally, most of the crew has civilian knowledge working in defense programs and contracting.

"Lockheed Martin ensures everyone working with the PTDS has a lot of experience and versatility," said Henderson. "Each operator is fully capable of operating this system, as well as handling the difficulties that come with living and working in a combat area."

The "eye in the sky" has proven to be a great asset to Soldiers in Afghanistan. The operators are able to watch

the Soldiers on patrols and provide them with a view they would otherwise lack. Viewing the area from above eliminates the enemy's ability to hide behind a wall or in a ditch.

The blimp has the ability to view the area using three different camera views, as well as seeing at night and during inclement weather.

"The camera lets us ... see more than the enemy wants us to see," one of the operators said.

Insurgents in Andar District seem to be quite aware of the impact the new blimp will have.

Almost immediately after the blimp took flight, insurgents unsuccessfully attempted to shoot it down.

"This is a great way for us to continue to serve our country," said Michael Baumgartner of Crestview, Fla., a PTDS system operator. "We can help the Soldiers to be more effective on the battlefield and perhaps even help to save a life. Any job that supports the troops is worth working hard for."

"We look forward to increasing the security bubble in Andar District with the help of the blimp," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. David Fivecoat of Delaware, Ohio, commander of 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry (Task Force Iron), 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. "The insurgents will have a hard time hiding when the PTDS is up and watching."

"The camera lets us ... see more than the enemy wants us to see."

Persistent Threat Detection System operator

Story Snapshots

Graduation present

An Afghan woman collects chickens she received after a graduation ceremony held at the Director of Women's Affairs compound located near Charikar Nov. 20. The graduation marked a successful completion of a course set up to teach women how to properly raise chickens as an additional source of income for their families. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Whitney Hughes, Task Force Wolverine Public Affairs)



Keeping on moving on

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Eric Rose of Winthrop, Minn., Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team, repairs a vehicle during a mission to a school construction project. Paktya PRT enables the Afghan government to provide public services and development projects to the local populace, thus weakening insurgent influence. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Barry Loo, Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)



Scenic-view classroom

Afghan students take a test in an outdoor classroom at the K-12 school in the Salang District Center. The students and teachers of this school were invited to attend the dedication ceremony of a new legal library opening in the district center, which they will also be able to use for research and studying. (Photo by U.S. Army Spc. James Wilton, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs)





Time for a laugh

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. John F. Campbell, Combined Joint Task Force-101 and Regional Command-East commander, and comedian Robin Williams talk during the Bagram Airfield USO show Dec. 15. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael Sparks, 17th Public Affairs Detachment)



Pre-combat checks

Afghan National Army soldiers clean their weapons for the day during a district center visit in Deh Yak Dec. 11. The PRT civil affairs team conducted a site survey of all facilities within the district center. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Courtney Witt, Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team)



Celebrating graduation

A young boy from the Aryoub Gymnastics Club does a back handspring during a performance at the midwife training graduation. The event consisted of various forms of entertainment including speeches, songs, prayers and skits to celebrate the progress of healthcare for women and infants during childbirth. (Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Sybil Taunton, Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)

Maintaining security

U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Todd Sackman of Ottumwa, Iowa, combat engineer with 832nd Engineer Company, attached to 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Regiment, uses Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment to identify Afghans during a key-leader engagement in Qarah-Bagh District Dec. 7. The HIIDE system is a biometric identification database where Soldiers can easily input the local Afghans' information to identify them by scanning their iris and fingerprints. (Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Kristina L. Gupton, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs)





Extraction

Members of the Afghan National Police Crisis Response Unit prepare to be extracted by an MI-17 helicopter during training conducted by International Security Assistance Force Special Operations Forces in Surobi, Afghanistan Dec. 9. During the training scenario, the CRU performed an air assault and then raided a compound that had been taken over by insurgents. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford, International Security Assistance Forces)

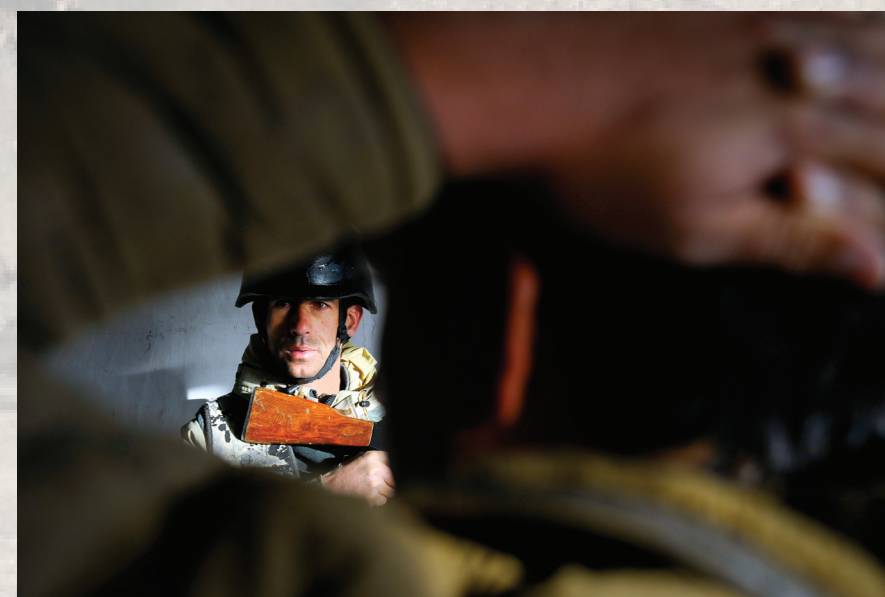


Creating new paths

U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. James Elliot (left) of Richburg, S.C., Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team civil engineer, along with an interpreter, speak with Afghan men providing security on a contracted road between the Pachir Wa Agam and Dih Bala districts. The road will connect the two district centers, aiding in economic growth and governance efforts. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Scottie T. McCord, Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team)

School's in session

Afghan children walk to school in the Kuz Kunar District. Members of the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team visited the Kuz Kunar District Center and discussed the state of the district, particularly education, with subgovernor Haji Abdul Qayum and Minister of Education Taj Mohammad. (Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Casey Osborne, Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)



Guard training

An Afghan National Police Crisis Response Unit member guards a simulated insurgent during training conducted by International Security Assistance Forces Special Operations Forces in Surobi, Afghanistan Dec. 9. During the training scenario, the CRU performed an air assault and then raided a compound that had been taken over by insurgents. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford, International Security Assistance Forces)

Award-winning chef cooks for PRT



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Francine Henry of Port Orchard, Wash., a culinary specialist, slices a yellow pepper while she prepares lunch for her teammates on Khowst Provincial Reconstruction Team on Forward Operating Base Chapman. Henry is the lead chef on Khowst PRT and oversees a kitchen staff of five.

Story and photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Matthew Lohr, Khowst Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs

A Sailor for more than three years, U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Francine Henry of Port Orchard, Wash., a culinary specialist,

is used to preparing meals for thousands of her shipmates while deployed at sea.

Today, as a member of Khowst Provincial Reconstruction Team, she brings her culinary expertise to a joint team of warriors on the ground.

In her short career, she has become an award-winning chef. Henry began her career as an honor graduate from her "A" school, a technical school for Navy culinary specialists.

After placing first in the Navy Region Northwest cooking competition, she won first

place in the Iron Chef Competition two years in a row, first in August 2009 and then again in May. She was featured on a local Seattle news program, New Day Northwest, in May 2010.

"Having a good cook is vital to the morale of the whole team," said U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jack Morris from Chesapeake, Va., Khowst PRT executive officer. "Not all PRTs are as lucky as we are to have an award-winning cook."

Her daughter, Alana, who will be 2 years old in February, drives Henry.

"Everything I do is for my baby. She gives me strength to always be better," Henry said.

Henry began cooking when she was nine years old. She learns something new every day and likes learning new cooking techniques.

She uses this strength as she strives to be a good leader to her subordinates and plans to make her job in the Navy a career.

"It was always my dream to join the military," said Henry. "I joined the Navy because after researching all the other branches, I felt like I was made to become a Sailor."

"I feel like you can never know enough when it comes to cooking, especially for a large group of people," said Henry.

As the current head chef on Khowst PRT, Henry leads a team consisting of U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Samuel Waits of Lancaster, Ohio, and U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Damian Murray of Houston. The three met at Camp Atterbury Joint Military Training Center in August for combat training prior to deploying to Afghanistan.

Murray said his cooking techniques have improved since working with Henry. "We have a great crew and a lot of fun working in the galley," he said.

ADT conducts multi-stop mission to Paktya

Story and photo by U.S. Army Sgt. John P Sklaney III
2-45th Agribusiness Development Team

Soldiers of the 2-45th Agribusiness Development Team conducted a multi-stop mission to Paktya University, a women's center and a farm in Gardez Dec. 4.

The first stop of the mission was the women's development center. U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jill Graham of Tahlequah, Okla., ADT administrative officer, met the director of the women's center and discussed the upcoming installation of a greenhouse.

U.S. Army Spc. Mandy Kennedy of Ellsworth, Wis., ADT education specialist, conducted an assessment of the greenhouse construction.

The director also wanted help from the ADT with poultry and beekeeping training, which the ADT plans to address in the coming weeks.

"The women's center director would like the profits from the greenhouse to be used to help women in the province," Kennedy said.

Radio is the primary means of communication in Afghanistan, said Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Fromm of Enid, Okla.,

ADT information operations noncommissioned officer. He issued hand-cranked radios to Afghans at the center.

Fromm said self-powered radios allow Afghans to listen to the radio without the need for electricity, which is important since most Afghans do not have access to reliable power for television, internet access or basic needs.

The second stop on the mission was Paktya University, where the ADT assessed the progress made over the past few months.

U.S. Army Lt. Col. John Altebaumer of Guthrie, Okla., ADT agricultural team chief, and Kennedy met with the university chancellor of Paktya to discuss improvements the ADT wished to help university officials make over the coming months.

"Some of the future projects at the university include generator power, internet access throughout the buildings, a greenhouse, a faculty exchange program and incorporating female students," Kennedy said.

Kennedy talked to the faculty about the university admission testing that recently took place. This year more than 30 Afghan females took the test for

admission alongside male students.

"Coed testing is something that did not occur during the Soviet or Taliban rule," Kennedy said. "It is a positive sign of improvements made in the province over the past few years."

The last stop of the day was at a local farm.

Projects currently under construction include a multipurpose building, generator building, a perimeter security fence, and electrical and sewer project.

U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Billy Payne of Aubrey, Texas, ADT project manager, gauged the improvements made since the last visit a few weeks ago.

"The contractors have made steady progress ... at the farm," Payne said. "The ADT will work with the contractors to address specific issues that have been encountered during the projects."

Payne said the mission will allow the ADT to increase agricultural production across the province, maximizing the resources that the ADT is able to provide and advise Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan officials in order to strengthen the relationship between the Afghan government and the local population.



U.S. Army Spc. Mandy Kennedy of Ellsworth, Wis., 2-45th Agribusiness Development Team education specialist, hands out items to Afghan girls during a stop at a farm in Gardez Dec. 4. The ADT works to improve agricultural conditions in the province and also provide assistance to Afghans that live around the projects the ADT facilitates.



TURNING PAIN INTO PROGRESS

Kunar women's rights movement gains momentum, support

Story by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio,
Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs

What amount of suffering would a person have to endure to commit suicide by lighting themselves on fire?

This was the question that came to mind as Nasima Shafiq Sadat, Kunar Province Director of Women's Affairs, recounted the tales of sorrow of Afghanistan's women to two U.S. service-members from the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team's Female Engagement Team.

"I am a witness to the pain of these women," Sadat said. "Women who are routinely beaten, forbidden to attend school and given away by their fathers to cover gambling debts. Today is for these women."

As she spoke, Sadat gestured toward the crowd of more than 80 women who had descended on the Ministry of Culture and Information, some traveling up to one hour over treacherous roads, to attend the Women's Justice Shura.

It was a day with two purposes, said Dr. Rafiullah Bidar, Jalalabad regional program manager for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

"First, we want to achieve awareness, especially about the law protecting women from abuse. Second, we want to discuss better implementation of the law in Kunar."

The law Bidar was referring to was passed 15 months ago. It contains 20 specifications of prohibited behavior toward women, from obvious physical abuse to more nuanced, culturally specific prohibitions banning forced marriages and making it illegal for parents to keep their daughters from attending school.

"I am happy to be here and support the fight for women's rights," said Gov. Fazlullah Wahidi, Kunar provincial governor. "We have a law, and it should be enforced. The women here are fighting so hard for what they believe in."

In a country beset by war, this fight does not call for bombs or bullets, it requires understanding.

"Men and women in Islam are the same, they are equal under Allah," said Imam Naquibullah Mohsin, as he spoke of the ways in which women's rights are in harmony with Islam, a difficult task in fiercely traditional Kunar Province. "Peace will never come to Afghanistan until the violence toward women

ceases. The violence is a result of not being educated ... if you do not educate yourself, how can you pray to Allah and ask for forgiveness?"

The women gathered saw progress made that very day as Wahidi called for a female district subgovernor in Kunar Province, a notion inconceivable a few months ago.

"I am excited by the attendance I see here today. Kunar has a strong women's rights movement and we, the PRT, are proud to support you," said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Brian Goss of Annapolis, Md., Kunar PRT commander. "Women, wives, sisters, mothers and daughters are the center of any world and we are all better because of you."

For a day born out of sadness, it ended in hope; hope for justice and for a brighter future for all Afghans. ☺

(Top Photo) Afghan women listen to a speech during the Women's Justice Shura Nov. 30 at the Kunar Province Ministry of Culture and Information. Organized by the Kunar Province Department of Women's Affairs, the shura brought together more than 80 women from across the province to discuss their collective issues and provide education on the 15-month-old legislation which bans violent and oppressive treatment of women. (Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio, Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)

ADT finds positive signs at bazaar

Story and photos by U.S. Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn,
734th Agribusiness Development Team

Members of the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team found that 24 of 25 shopkeepers surveyed in Asadabad Dec. 2 were better off or much better off than they were five years ago and all paid taxes, though a majority thought they were too high.

Additionally, all of the shopkeepers in the provincial capital of Kunar said they would contact a government official to address pressing concerns, though opinions on the quality of government services were mixed. None surveyed identified security as a problem and all described the security situation as good or excellent.

One of the shopkeepers the ADT surveyed was Nuuora, a merchant who sells seed, fertilizer, and other items. His complaint with the government sounded not unlike those of businessmen everywhere.

"I pay 4,800 afghanis (\$106) per year in taxes, and they can't even keep this canal clean," Nuuora said, gesturing at the foot-wide gutter in front of his open storefront.

Nevertheless, Nuuora, who has two wives and 13 children, conceded he was much better off than just a few years ago, when he was a refugee in Afghanistan. Nuuora's experience was not unique among the Asadabad merchants surveyed, the majority of whom fled Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule and returned within the last few years.

The ADT surveyed a wide range of business owners: a hand tool dealer, a sewing machine repair and sale concern, a women and children's clothing boutique, a high-end jewellery store, a hand-made custom furniture shop and many more.

U.S. Army Capt. Pat Birgy of Mt. Pleasant, Mich., the ADT's finance officer, organized the Asadabad market survey, the second by the ADT in as many months.

"Our first time out, we were mainly

looking at food prices, sources and availability," Birgy said. "This time, we wanted to take a more broad approach and find out more about how business actually works here."

Birgy admitted to being surprised by the diversity of goods available for sale and by some of the survey responses.

"There is no doubt there is a very, very vibrant business sector here with a lot of economic activity, more than I think any of us thought," Birgy said. "I wasn't expecting to find a functional tax system already in place, but clearly there is, and now I can sit down with the finance directorate to get a better idea of what that system is, and we can go from there."

The ADT's deputy commander, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dave Lewis of North Liberty, Iowa, also took part in the survey.

"This survey really shows that the provincial government is doing a lot of things right already," Lewis said. "It gives us better situational awareness as we interact with our counterparts in the Afghan government." ☺



U.S. Army Capt. Pat Birgy of Mt. Pleasant, Mich., finance officer for the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, talks with Nuuora, a shopkeeper in Asadabad, the provincial capital of Afghanistan's Kunar Province, Dec. 2. The ADT conducted a foot patrol in Asadabad to gain a greater understanding of local markets, tax systems and the level of merchant satisfaction with government services. The ADT found 24 of 25 merchants surveyed were better or much better off than they were five years ago, and all went to a government official to help them when they had problems in the city.

Warrior Watch

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj.
Robert H. Levis

Story by U.S. Army Capt. Jason P. Beck, 210th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

If you ever visit Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, stop by Task Force Gladiator headquarters and take a look at the deck being built out back. You will notice that every board is perfectly cut and fit together seamlessly. You will notice the mark of a craftsman who believes in measuring twice and cutting once. You will notice the work of U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Robert H. Levis. And, just as he devotes such careful attention to building a better deck, so too he devotes himself tirelessly to building better Soldiers and stronger teams.

Levis has been the operations sergeant major for Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, since August 2009. Ask anyone within Task Force Gladiator about this sergeant major and you are likely to get the same response: “He is one of if not the best noncommissioned officers with whom I’ve ever served.”

“That guy is such a hero,” said Lt. Col Eric T. Heist, commander of TF Gladiator.

With almost 2,500 Soldiers assigned to the task force, there are always challenges and opportunities. So how has Levis overcome obstacles and drive mission success?

“From the beginning, Sgt. Maj. Levis has been very aggressive about training his subordinates,” said Heist. “He is very methodical and highly organized – a man who understands priorities and relentlessly drives action to achieve success. Moreover, he is about sharing information and empowering NCOs – it is not enough that he knows the critical details, all of his NCOs must know them too.”

“He has given a tremendous amount of service and time to the Army.”

-Lt. Col Eric T. Heist

Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Christina N. Sinderson, Task Force Currahee PAO

After 26 years of service to the United States Army, Levis said he plans to retire once redeployed to Fort Campbell, Ky., next year.

“He has given a tremendous amount of service and time to the Army,” said Heist. “I think it is great that he has this opportunity to finish on a high note with the battalion on deployment and then transition to a life where he gets to focus more on his family and other priorities.

“So, while certainly he could continue to contribute and do great things for the Army, he has certainly done more than his fair share.”

Whether Levis is receiving flights, shipping goods around the battlespace, planning events, rewriting a FRAGO, developing Soldiers or simply building a deck, he shows the same unwavering focus and concern.

“He is by far the best mentor I’ve ever had in the Army, and I’ve served 14 years”, said Staff Sgt. Robert T. Statton, who serves as a battle NCO in TF Gladiator operations.

So, what motivates a sergeant major who is such an inspiration to so many other Soldiers?

“Soldiers like Staff Sgt. Stratton, who has a baby and will return to Fort Campbell and will ask to stay with the division even though it is very likely that he will deploy again soon,” added Levis. “Good Soldiers like that who make tough decisions for the greater good – that motivates me.”

“It’s a sad thing to say sergeant major is going to retire; the Army is going to lose a good senior NCO,” said Sgt. Dave M. Dennis, TF Gladiator operations battle NCO. “I love him, because he is a good man and he takes care of his people.”

Retention Watch



Recent reenlistments across Afghanistan



**CJTF-101
Command
Retention Officer**
MG John F. Campbell

**CJTF-101
Command
Retention NCO**
CSM Scott C. Schroeder

**CJTF-101
Command Career
Counselor**
SGM Willene Orr

**Oath of
Reenlistment**
I do solemnly
swear to support
and defend the
Constitution of the
United States against
all enemies, foreign
and domestic; that I will
bear true faith and
allegiance to the same;
and that I will obey the
orders of the President
of the United States
and the orders of the
officers appointed over
me, according to
regulations and the
Uniform Code of
Military Justice.
So help me God.



CJTF-101 DIVISION RETENTION

See What's Happening in the Retention Corner!

HQDA Policy Message 11-02(C2)

- Effective date of message is 14 December 2010
- Initial term Soldiers in balanced or shortage military occupational specialties (MOS) are no longer offered Army Training Reenlistment Option
- The exception for Mid-Career Soldiers in a balanced MOS to request the Army Training Option no longer exists
- Career Soldiers with less than 10 years are offered only the Regular Army Reenlistment Option
- Deployed Soldiers are no longer eligible to reenlist for 2 years for the Current Station Stabilization Reenlistment Option

Effective 1 Dec 2010, MOSs below are over strength at Skill Level 1

12N	12W	13B	15G	15J	15P
15R	15S	15S	15T	15U	19K
25C	25P	25Q	25U	31B	35T
36B	42A	42F	74D	88H	88M
88N	91A	91B	91G	91H	91J
91K	91L	91M	92A	92F	92G
92W	92Y	94A	94E	94F	94H
94K	94M	94P	94T		

Retention Contacts

- SFC Eric Crist - DSN: 318-481-6541, 10th CAB, Bagram
- MSG Carol Lehman - DSN: 303-674-6141, 1-10th MTN, Mike Spann
- MSG Nakia Nelson - DSN: 303-794-9023, 2nd SCR, Lagman
- SGM Jeffrey Sabourin - DSN: 318-421-7131, RC-South/CJTF-10

For additional information see your servicing career counselor or visit www.armyreenlistment.com

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the final Watch

Afghan National Army soldiers and troops assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Bulldog, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, talk and warm themselves next to a fire on Forward Operating Base Honaker-Miracle in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Nov. 22 before conducting an air assault mission. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)