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ISAF MIRROR

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ISAF MIRROR

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Italian forces Patrol areas around kabul, in support of International Security Force operations

Curtesy ptoto

Afghan combat medics train in Kabul for front lines

Story by U.S. Air Force Capt. Jonathan Stock, ISAF Public Affairs Office

Currently, there are more than 45,000 Afghan National Security Forces building up to secure parts of Afghanistan from the Taliban's influence.

A critical mission during battle is to maintain a healthy, combat ready force and be prepared to provide medical attention to those soldiers if they are injured while in theatre.

Since the fall of the Taliban's regime in 2001, it has been a shared responsibility between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force and the United States of America to produce quality combat medics to assist troops on the front lines when in conflict.

"The role of the combat military Medical Education Center is to bring ANA medic applicants from around the country to Kabul to get medical education and become Army medics," said Maj. Juma Gul, Medical Education Center commander. "In this school they will learn many types of training to assist in transporting patients, first response triage, trauma care and many other areas that they may need to know when in combat situations."

With two classes running simultaneously for six weeks, and over 45 applicants per class, the school is able to roughly train over 2,000 medics per year. In 2006, the school was able to produce roughly 2,600 medics to deploy all around the country in support of combat medical care.

However, although this is the first and only complete Afghan medical training for soldiers, the school is supported by CSTC-A medical mentors who help guide the school to keep it focused on specific objectives.

"We have many roles as mentors to the medical school," said Master Sgt. Carlos Deleon, Senior Mentor for the Afghan Medical Education Center. "From mentoring instructors on correct teaching procedures, medical improvements within course curriculum to resolving disciplinary issues, mentoring out here is extremely rewarding once you discover everyone's strengths and weaknesses to help them improve."

Mentors have been helping since the opening of the school back in 2001. Most of the equipment, body medical dummies, and computers were donated by ISAF with the help of the mentors, said Maj. Juma Gul.

"Each class is taught in both Dari and Pashtu to ensure complete understanding of the lessons," said Sgt. 1st Class Rashid Kawsar, Medical Education Center senior instructor. "The students are extremely knowledgeable as having graduated from high school with the ability to read and write. They pick up information easily and become very good medics around the country."

Since the training has been such a success in combat medic education so far, the class curriculum is moving from a six-week structure to eight weeks to begin teaching new techniques, said Kawsar.

Photos by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ray Winstead

Master Sgt. Carlos Deleon, Senior Mentor for the Afghan Medical Education Center discusses new training techniques with Maj. Juma Gul, Medical Education Center commander Oct. 17.

Photos by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ray Winstead

Combat medic trainees work together at the combat military Medical Education Center Oct. 17 to stabilize a dummy mannequin as part of their course curriculum.

KAIA gets new commander

Story by: U.S. Air force Capt. Jonathan Stock
ISAF Public Affairs Office

A new six-month rotation of command commenced as Col. Nils Froisland, Norwegian Air Force, relinquished command of Kabul International Airport to Col. Rudy Geirnaert, Belgian Air Force, Oct. 1.

The dual-role civilian-military airport, a key to the Afghan population and military for maintaining a presence in Kabul, operates with roughly 250 aircraft sorties passing through daily.

"With air traffic increasing over 30 percent over the past six months, our largest task has been to continue maintaining 24/7 air operations while keeping the airport running smoothly," said Col. Froisland. "However, our new number one priority is to slowly transition the airport over to the Afghan community."

Over the next couple of years, the International Security Assistance Force's mission is to move military air operations north as Afghan aviation experts resume command of the airfield. This will give the entire country of Afghanistan a civilian maintained "gateway to the world," according to Maj. Gen. Freek Meulman, ISAF deputy commander for air.

"The past months have meant a lot," said Col. Froisland. "This command, working with ISAF, has given Norwegians the opportunity to show Norway the commitment and accomplishments our military has been doing in theater."

With many challenges and changes to come to KAIA, Col. Froisland offered his best wishes for the new Belgium command and was able to share his knowledge to keep the airport running as smoothly as when they received it.

"We are very happy to finally resume command of the airport and let our Norwegian friends go home," said Col. Geirnaert. "It is now Belgium's mission to continue the continual air operations running smoothly and the transfer of command over to Afghan authorities in the coming years."

Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff. Sgt. Ray Winstead

Col. Nils Froisland, former Commander of KAIA, and Maj. Gen. Freek Meulman, ISAF deputy commander for air, watch as Col. Rudy Geirnaert signs documents to assume command of KAIA.

USAF frequency manager works to clear Afghan airways

Story by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ray Winstead, ISAF Public Affairs Office

What would happen if any one was allowed to install antennas and broadcast television, mobile phones and radio signals without checking to see if the frequency they would like to use is already in use?

It would be like crowding many people in a small room trying to communicate with each other. Predictably, many words would be impossible to make out.

Working in a specialized three-man shop, designed specifically to monitor wavelength emissions, Tech. Sgt. Timothy Bogan, ISAF Theatre Frequency Manager, is responsible for finding and sorting frequencies so the inevitable interference and other problems of jumbled frequency doesn't occur. Here in Afghanistan most of this work is done on Kabul's TV Hill.

According to Sergeant Bogan, frequency saturation in the country is a product of the Taliban reign. "Interference was occurring due to a lack of established frequency management procedures."
"What surprised me most about TV Hill in Kabul was the high number of antennas in close proximity. I was surprised anything worked at all."

As this is just one of many places used to broadcast signals with over 100 active antennas within three acres, ranging from five watts to over 500 watts, the rooftops on TV Hill were becoming overloaded with sending random waves across the city.

Courtesy photo

TSgt Timothy Bogan, ISAF Theatre Frequency Manager of Afghanistan, searches for errant signals being broadcast from atop TV hill that interfere with registered users communications.

"Managing Afghanistan's airwaves is a full-time job," said Bogan. "There are currently over 30,000 registered individual frequencies, which do not even include the civilian allocations in the ISAF database."

On Oct. 4, a new memorandum of agreement for electromagnetic radio spectrum usage between ISAF Theater Frequency Management Center and the Afghanistan Ministry of Communications and Information Technology was signed for the next two years.

Courtesy photo

Major General Bruno Kasdorf , ISAF Chief of Staff and H.E. Zakaria Hassan, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, sign the 2007 Memorandum of Agreement between ISAF and the Afghanistan Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.

In 2007, ISAF was able to return approximately 15 percent of the available airwave spectrum back to Afghan civilian use and regulation. The agreement details the process by which ISAF and the MCIT will use the available spectrum.
It took nearly eight months to work out the particulars of this agreement, due to the complexities involved in ensuring a win-win outcome for everyone.
The agreement ensures continual exchange of ideas, coordination and diplomatic relations through monthly meetings between the MCIT and ISAF TFMC teams. During the meetings, electromagnetic interference issues are brought to the table and plans of action for resolution are arranged.
"It's through this constant dialogue that the success of radio communication in Afghanistan will be maintained and the partnership between ISAF and the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is fused," said Bogan.

Kandahar Chief of Police Visits Checkpoints in Zhari District

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian P. Seymour
CSTC-A Public Affairs

The Afghan National Police chief of Kandahar Province visited several substations and checkpoints in the Zhari District Oct. 25 to visit with his troops.

Gen. Sayeed-agha Saquib spent the day speaking with members of his force and acquainting himself with developments in one of the most volatile regions in the country.

After serving as chief of police out west in Farah Province, Saquib was promoted this past summer to head a more demanding and dangerous region in the country.

With many years of experience in battle and in policing, Saquib realizes that the future of this district, the province of Kandahar, and ultimately the country, depends primarily on the preparedness and pride of his troops.

"It was my intention to visit these facilities today to see how they were doing, to see if they needed anything from me, and to see if I needed anything more from them," said Saquib. "I enjoyed seeing my police officers and letting them know that I care about them. This will go a long way, I hope."

For members of the Zhari ANP, the visit gave new policemen the chance to meet their leader, ask questions, and show him what coalition police mentor teams have taught them.

The Zhari PMT, alongside ANP forces of whom they've guided for more than three months, provided security and transportation for the general's tour.

This 12-man team, which is deployed from the South Carolina National Guard, is tasked with assessing and training the district police force. Its executive officer, Army 1st Lt. James Payne, believes visits from leadership like this are vital to the morale of younger members of the ANP.

"To see Gen. Saquib, who is a seasoned leader, looks good, and seems to be sending the right message to his men; it sets a good example to some of the privates and recruits-in-training," said Payne. "He wants to show them that he gives a damn and wants to see the Zhari district become successful once again."

Zhari has not been successful, in the eyes of its PMT leaders, for some time now. Prior to their assignment as district mentors, this region, and much of its police force, was controlled by Taliban forces.

The Taliban had their thumbs pressed so firmly on the district police that they were unable to provide security and peace to the people whom they serve, said Payne.

Saquib already knows this, which he says is why he wished to come here. He wanted to reassure his men that they are not forgotten. To Payne, and other PMT members, that sense of understanding is critical to the development of the ANP.

"They need a leader to show them what it's like to wear a uniform properly; to follow the lead of their commanders, and always take care of the people whom they serve," said Payne. "They need a leader to show them what 'right' looks like, and I think that that is what he is trying to accomplish."

The tour marks the second time Saquib has visited the district since assuming command of its police force this past summer. And based on the hopes of PMT leadership, it cannot be the last.

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian P. Seymour

An Afghan National Police officer stands guard on the lookout tower at a police substation near the village of Kolk in the Zhari district of Kandahar Province. The ANP and coalition police mentorteams spentmost the day Oct. 25 escorting ANP Kandahar Province Chief of Police Gen. Sayeed-agha Saquib around various Zhari district police checkpoints..

PMT, ANP Provide Security During MEDCAP

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian P. Seymour
CSTC-A Public Affairs

Locals from a remote village north of the southern tip of Highway One lined up by the hundreds for a chance to receive medical attention from coalition forces Oct. 26.

A handful of physician assistants and combat medics from all over Kandahar Province planned the Medical Civil Action Program for the area based on recommendations from the Zhari district police mentor team.

When the PMT went up to visit this village in the northern Zhari desert a few weeks ago, they found that this MEDCAP was essential. So its team leader, Capt. Hunter Hill, initiated the request and created a plan to build a school and at least two wells in a central part of the village that houses some 7,000 Afghan families.

"I think it's important to not only bring medical care to the villages, but also to build things like schools and wells because that area is completely separated from the rest of society," said Hill. "It's out in the desert, and they need those vital elements in a town of nearly 15,000 people."

Hill and his 12-man PMT, alongside dozens of Afghan National Police forces, provided a security perimeter for the MEDCAP while the medical team treated hundreds of ailing villagers over the course of three hours.

Army Maj. Charles Blankman, Capt. Maureen Sevilla and 1st Lt. Nathan Marsh treated the locals for acute and chronic medical problems, passed out medications and provided instruction for proper use. If the ailment went beyond the capabilities of the medics, though, they were referred to a local medical facility for further treatment.

"This was one of the better MEDCAPs that I've ever done," said Blankman. "It went pretty smoothly, and we saw a lot of people. We usually don't see that many people in that timeframe."

The MEDCAP is also referred to as a village medical outreach, and is designed to both help ailing local citizens and earn their trust in coalition and Afghan forces. It's a big part of information operations, and a valuable program for turning locals in favor of their security forces and coalition mentors.

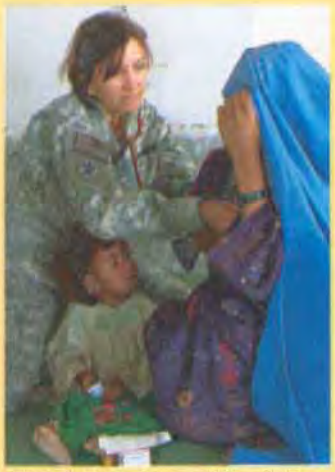
The main thing these people want is security, says Hill. He believes they all want the Taliban out, and admits that it is his team's responsibility to do just that as they are the ones with the know-how. To him, these MEDCAPs are essential, but are nowhere near as important as providing security to the local populace first.

"This place needs to be cleared of the bad guys before we can safely and properly rebuild it," said Hill. "You win the hearts and minds by first bringing security."

Although Hill believes it is difficult to determine how many villages are in need of medical treatment, he knows that it is his team's mission to seek them out the best he can based on threat levels and mission-essential priorities.

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian P. Seymour

Army Maj. Charles Blankman, a physician's assistant in Kandahar, and Army Sgt. Alexander Fecowich of the Zhari district police mentor team help a handicapped elderly Afghan woman into her wheelbarrow after being treated for chronic back pain. Blankman and two other PAs treated hundreds of locals at a remote village in the Zhari district of Kandahar Province during a three-hour medical civil action program Oct. 26.



Army Capt. Maureen Sevilla, a physician's assistant in Kandahar,checks the blood pressure on an Afghan female patient during a medical civil action program at a remote village in the Zhari district of Kandahar Oct.26. Sevilla and two other PAs treated hundreds of ailinglocals during the three-hour humanitarian assistance operation.

By U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian P. Seymour

Engineer unit's skills geared for Afghanistan terrain

Story by Italian Army Capt Angelo Ciavarella
ISAF Public Affairs Office

In the few months the Italian 5th Alpine Regiment has led Italfor XVI, a multinational element of Bulgarian, Greek, and Italian infantry and engineering units, the regiment has undertaken many projects aimed at improving conditions in Afghanistan.

Under the command of Col. Alfredo Massimo de Fonzo, the 5th Alpine Regiment operates in a 1,500 square kilometre area in and around the capital city of Kabul, extending south and west into the Musahi, Cahar-Asyab and Pagman valleys. As part of the overall International Security Assistance Force mission, the 5th Alpine Regiment directs its efforts toward securing its area of responsibility. The unit's goal is to help create an environment where Afghan institutions can perform their functions and govern peacefully.

Courtesy photo

Members of the 5th Alpine Regiment patrol their area of responsibility near Kabul.

Members of Italfor XVI, as well as their predecessors in Italfor XV, have worked to improve the quality of life in six Afghan districts. The contingents have helped provide access to basic facilities such as schools, clinics and water supplies, improving the lives of more than 30,000 people. Work has included the building and renovation of six schools and more than 36 classrooms. Before the numerous infrastructural works by the Italian-led element, about 10,000 children didn't have the opportunity to attend the primary school.

The unit has boosted local economies by building wells, paving roads and recovering land for cultivation. These efforts directly impact the lives of more than 1,500 families.

Italian contingents improved local health care by delivering medicine and medical equipment, and building and renovating clinics both in Kabul and its surrounding areas. During the past year, more than 8,000 people including 5,000 children gained access to medical facilities and basic medical treatments.

With the help of generous Italian donors, the 5th Alpine Regiment has led the inauguration of the Torino school in Kabul Aug 20. They followed those efforts by inaugurating another school in Kabul. And they are nearing completion of schools in the Cahar –Asyab and Musahi valleys.

Other infrastructure projects soldiers have recently completed include the installation of an electrical transformer in Kabul district and a bridge in Musahi valley, opening a vital access route.

Though their work is rewarding, soldiers face many difficulties including difficult terrain, language barriers, and attacks. Members of the 5th Alpine Regiment were shot at by unidentified attackers Sept 2. However, the overwhelming show of gratitude and cooperation from the majority of local citizens makes the work rewarding. And the potential of a secure and flourishing Afghanistan outweighs the risk.

Italfor XV and Italfor XVI projects during the last year

School Projects:
Torino Kabul School and following works on the Kindergarten
Bolzano Kabul School
Korean school and enlargement works (six classrooms) in Chahar Asiab
Six classrooms in Reeskor School
Twelve classrooms school in Musay Valley Twelve classrooms school in Chahar Asiab Valley

Clinic Projects:
Clinic along Violet MSR
Clinic in Musahy Valley
Health district "Italy"
Medical point in pd 19 in Kabul

Water Supply:
Shatoot Canal in Chahar Asyab Valley

Calacan well
Pozzi Shatoot – Alluvione
45 wells in four Kabul Disrticts
Two wells in Musahi Wells
Six wells in Chahar Asiab Valley
ABD or Rauf well in Musahi Valley

Infrastructure Works:
Open to traffic bridge bar Miakhel in Musahi Valley
Open to traffic bridge in PD 9 in Kabul
Reinforcement Musahi Bridge
Road in Lalander Valley
Soccer field in Paghman District
Soccer field in Musahi Valley
Reclamation works in Musahi Valley
It-tu asphalting road project 4,000 square metres in ana barracks

Camp Warehouse hospital continues saving lives daily

Story by Lieutenant Sandra Marcon,
Regional Command-Capital Public Affairs Office

Alina, a young Afghan girl, was a young shepherdess from the Shakadara Province. Her life was simple and rewarding herding flocks, but her life became unbalanced when one of the sheep in her flock blew up on a landmine beside her.

After the blast, Alina felt a terrible pain in her leg and saw it was broken. Her brother and her sister, who were helping out that day, were lying dead near her. When help arrived, she was transported to the medical center at Camp Warehouse where a French surgeon immediately began operating on her.

Alina stayed in bed for three weeks without moving and suffered numerous nightmares. French doctors gave specific attention to her leg and were able to bring comfort to the wounded girl. With the constant attention she received from the French medical team, Alina began to smile again.

After three weeks at the hospital, Alina was able to move in a wheelchair and became the "mascot" of the medical center where many soldiers came to visit her. After an extra month and a half of care, French doctors determined she was able to return to her family who was grateful for the care Alina received.

More than medical support, the French Role 2 medical facility is a little structure that gathers high tech equipment and specific know-how from within. Its mission is to provide medical support, emergency surgery and free consultations for both International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army soldiers. Everyday, a 76-person medical team supports over 1,200 soldiers.

The center is composed of two parts. The Role 1 is responsible for medical support of the French battle group and provides assistance to civilian workers at Camp Warehouse. It carries out about 12 consultations a day and provides medical support for all explosive ordnance disposal team actions.

The Role-2 facility treats emergencies and can organize worldwide aerial-medical evacuation. A big part of the work of the medical team is to provide free consultations to Afghan people. Road accidents, including mine wounds and cataract surgery, are the most frequent cases treated here.

The hospital is one of the most modern military field hospitals in Afghanistan, equipped with an X-ray, a CT scan, a small lab, three operating rooms and four ICU beds. There are three surgeons that treat cases dealing in general medicine, orthopedic and ophthalmologic fields. It also includes one anesthetist, an internist, an emergency doctor and a dentist.

Not only the most modern, the Role-2 facility is one of the most operational medical centers in Afghanistan. Every year, over 3,500 Afghan people are treated here.

With expert technicians and modern technologies, children like Alina are able to maintain hope when life-endangering situations exist in a country with many threats.

Courtesy photo

Members of the French medical team treat Alina following surgery to repair damage following a landmine explosion.

Courtesy photo

A French optometrist examines an Italian soldier using some of the latest medical equipment.

Donated charcoal source of heat, hope for Afghan village

From Regional Command-Capital Staff Reports

French soldiers from Regional Command Capital helped ensure several Afghan families will have sources of heat for cooking and protection against the coming winter weather.

The soldiers, part of the Civil Military Cooperation team, organized the distribution of 62 tons of charcoal to all the families from Bariq Ab. Called "refugees camp", the village is home to 450 families from Kabul's ghettos near "Bottle route."

The area, with its wells and homes, gives the families a place to settle and begin a new life; however, conditions aren't the best. There are no medical facilities or economic activity. Only four teachers are educating the 500 schoolboys and girls of the village in a rundown tent. Only a weekly Shura helps the 13 Maleks of the district to discuss these daily difficulties. The Chief of RC-C French TST 3 attended this meeting to know local elders and took complaints on their main needs.

With winter approaching, the lack of heating material is a primary concern for the village. The International Security Assistance Force agreed to fund 62 tons of charcoal and distribute it to people of Bariq Ab.

Soldiers teamed with the Maleks to create a list of the families, providing them each three bags of charcoal.

Soldiers issued more than 800 bags of charcoal, including 600 to Bariq Ab, 200 to heshneh Ye Kharuti, and 20 to the police station. The coal will provide

the families a source for cooking and heating for three months.

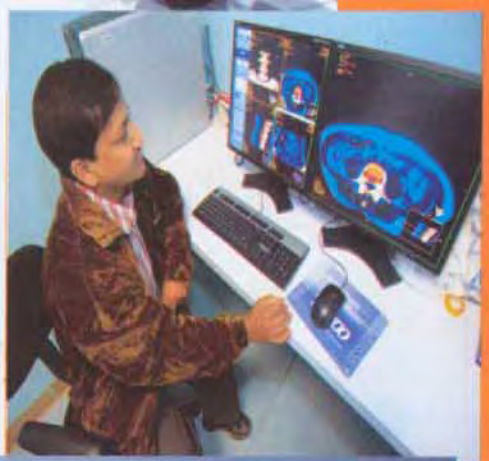
The village of Bariq Ab may simply survive because of charcoal donations this year; however, many believe the

community will soon thrive soon. About 5,000 families are expected to move to Bariq Ab in the next few years.

A French battle group is doing daily patrols in the area, and RC-C French CIMIC team has many projects in progress to help ensure the quality of life continues to improve in the village.

Courtesy photo

A French soldier ensure residents of Bariq Ab receive their alloments of charcoal.



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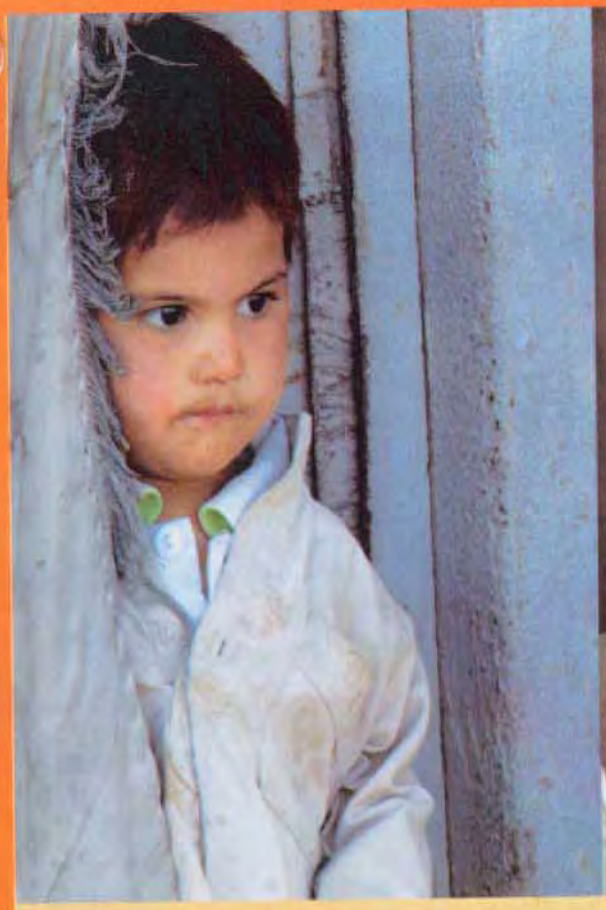

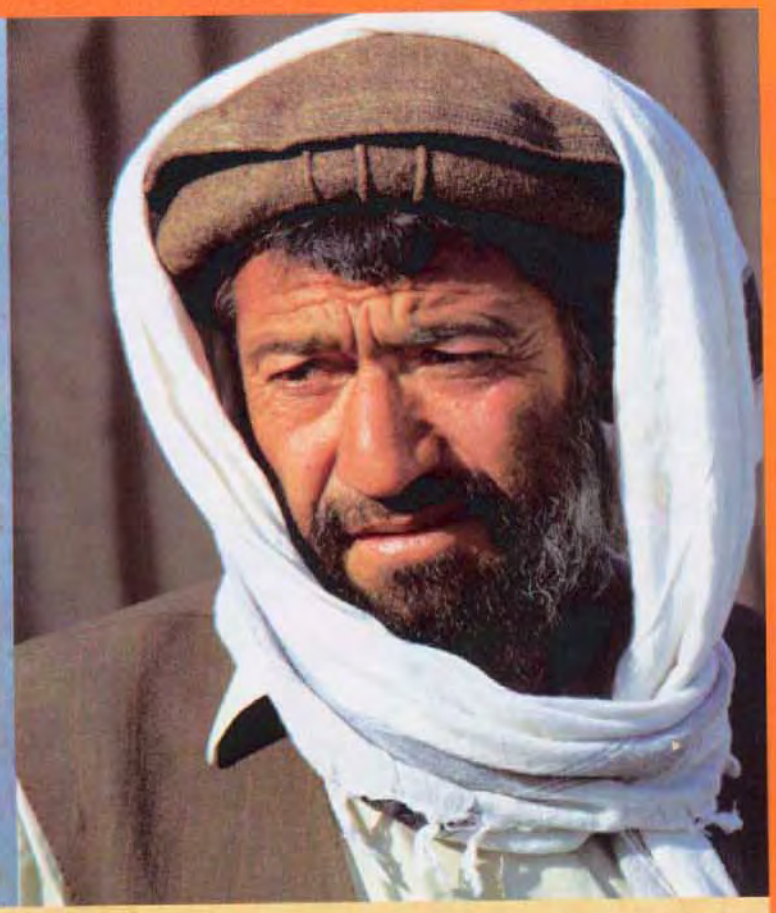

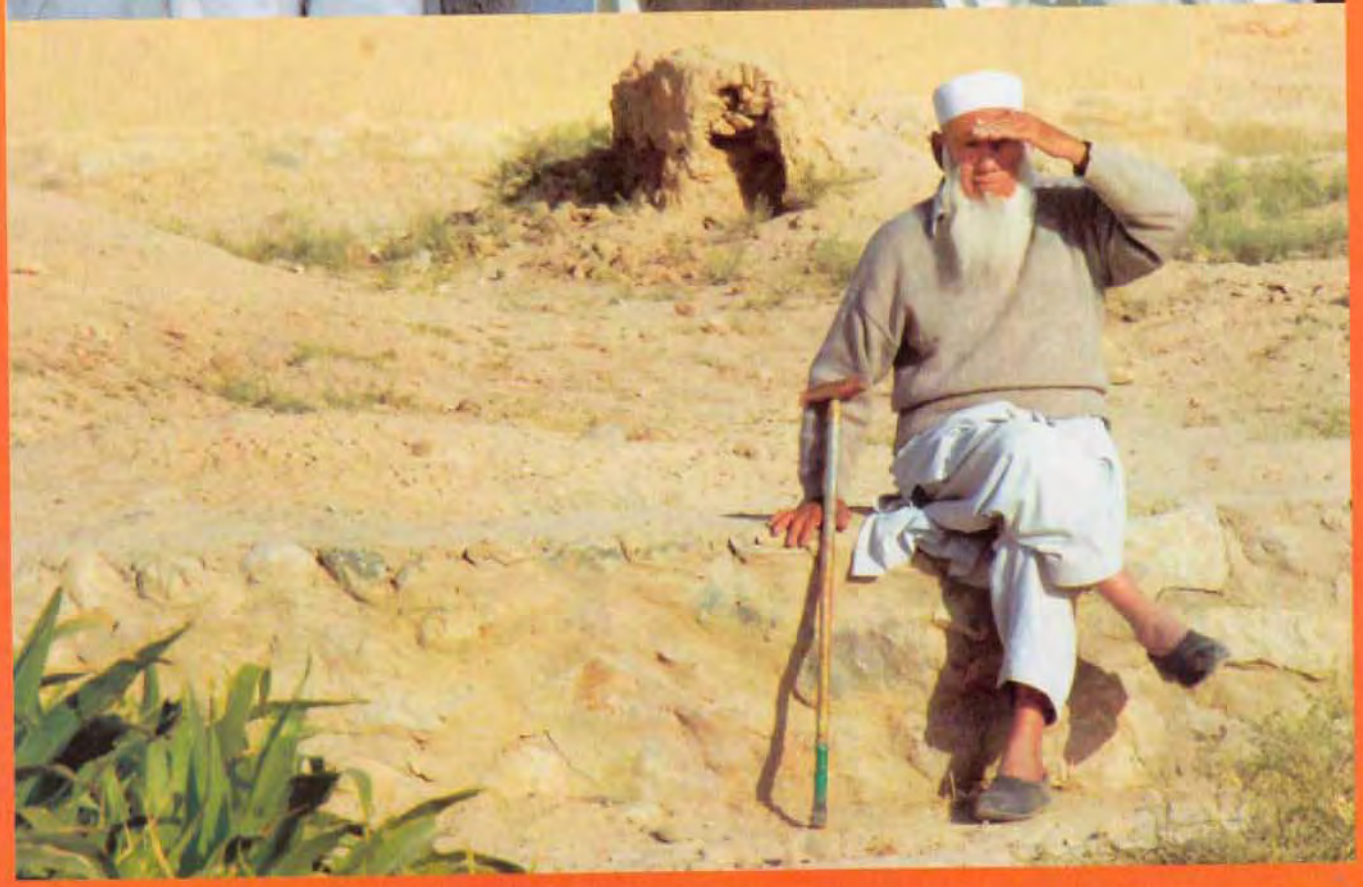

Canadian hospital keeps Kandahar Airfield running smoothly

Story by Master Cpl. Ken Fenner

The Canadian Role-1 hospital's primary responsibility is to cater for all International Security Assistance Force troops within Kandahar Airfield, yet it does so much more.

For a start, the Afghan National Security Forces are treated as equals among ISAF troops in the hospital and given medical care to keep them doing their job, which is a useful means of fostering trust and respect.

Also, civilians both on camp and from the local community are able to receive medical care. This is a key feature of the hospital within the non-kinetic sphere in enabling the winning of the hearts and minds battle to support the ISAF mission.

This Role-1 primary care comes under the Health Service Support Company and is comprised of a staff of 72, including doctors, nurses, deployable medics and drivers.

In the past six months alone, the Role-1 facility has treated over 5,000 patients.

Interestingly, 90 percent of the hospital's presence is providing primary care outside of the wire. The dedicated personnel are keen to deliver their service wherever the requirement is.

A diverse array of organizations relies upon Role-1 support. The varied and sometimes original recipients that require medical assistance include personnel from the Provisional Reconstruction Teams, Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, convoys and even the dog section.

Sgt. Noelle Fraiser, a Role-1 hospital medic, recalled a novel dog rescue incident when a Task Force Kandahar patrol was involved in a mine-strike. Enemy forces attacked the patrol during transport of an explosive ordnance detection dogs.

Two dogs were injured during the incident. Sergeant Fraiser, a member of the patrol, had to rely on her medical experience. She used the same principles she learned to treat humans to stabilize the dogs, saving their lives.

As just one example of many critical cases that hospital personnel undergo everyday to keep Kandahar Airfield and the community running smoothly, their job is an essential one.

Courtesy photo

A Canadian medical technician examines another ISAF soldier

ISAF MENTORS ANSF CAMERA TEAMS

Commentary by Capt. Simon Childs

"It is like telling a story. Only not with words, but with pictures," said Master Cpl. Ken Fenner, Regional Command-South photographer.

The ability for an army to show what it does is a key requirement in the modern, media intensive world. The International Security Assistance Force is very keen to develop this capacity within the Afghan National Security Force so they are able to promote the hugely positive work that they are doing.

In early September, Master Cpl. Fenner organized a photography course between ISAF and ANSF photographer recruits to help them learn how to capture a picture that will "say a thousand words."

The dedicated enthusiasm displayed by Master Cpl. Fenner was infectious. The recruits, who have been assigned to this rather novel duty, show an intense interest to learn the many lessons on the path to taking good photographs.

Technical points are important in photography and lessons always have a theme. Today's theme is the shutter release button. For the untrained there is a tendency to push down on the button far too quickly, thus distorting the image. However, with lessons Fenner will be able to show the difference so blurry pictures will be a thing of the past for these young recruits.

Fenner and his interpreter had their work cut out in teaching the specific required motion. As in most specializations, the devil is in the detail and fortunately the Afghans have an ardent desire to get things right.

"You need to press the shutter like you would do as a sniper pulling the trigger, not as if you were firing on a machine gun," said Fenner.

The analogy was perfect.

The Afghan fascination with the camera stems from when the Taliban had previously banned them. The interest from the troops, as the Afghan photographers practice among their fellow soldiers is palpable; there is a clear craving not only to take the pictures, but to have themselves taken as well.

This clearly has huge positive ramifications in terms of ISAF and ANSF integration. Not only is there team building, coupled with trust and respect being developed, but there is an obvious empowerment which is enjoyed by all.

With photographers like Master Cpl. Fenner giving time for the betterment of future photographers in the ANSF, there is no doubt when the ANSF is ready to protect the country completely that pictures will be the first thing out to show the world of the progress.

Small meds, big impact in Afghan village

Commentary by Capt. Simon Childs

A half-day village medical outreach, or VMO, held in Shinkay District on Aug. 22 by Provincial Reconstruction Team Qalat, left villagers with a healthier outlook on life.

In this remote region of Zabul Province, medical personnel evaluated nearly 200 people to assess overall health in the village and to mentor local nurses who work at the clinic.

"We gave de-worming medication and vitamins to every patient," said Maj. Debra Roberts, a PRT Qalat medical officer. "And we treated each person according to their symptoms and our diagnoses. We noticed a lot of dental complaints here as well as abdominal pain, headaches, skin irritations and joint pain. We were able to treat all of the patients with the supplies we brought with us, but it will be up to the doctors and nurses here to continue with follow-up care."

The supplies were varied, but modest by American standards—ibuprofen, eye drops, cough syrup, anti-allergy tablets, peroxide, creams and lotions. Each villager also had his or her vital signs checked before being seen by one of the medics.

As part of the multi-service team participating in the VMO, Lt. Karen Nordine, a 15-year U.S. Navy veteran, said she finds her job as a physician's assistant rewarding.

"The people here are happy with whatever help we can provide, and many times they don't need much," said Lt. Nordine. "We see a lot of dehydration, malnutrition and minor skin problems."

Maj. Roberts has participated in four VMOs throughout Zabul Province since arriving at Forward Operating Base Lagman in Qalat earlier this year. She said the team really "brought the Afghans in better on this VMO (than in past ones) and we did some great mentoring."

"The toothbrushes and toothpaste we were giving out were a big hit with the locals...so much so that we ran out," said Maj. Roberts. "We did show one group of parents how to properly hold a toddler in order to brush his teeth, and the example toddler—though a bit traumatized at first—was receptive to the advice to brush daily."

The organizers of the VMO also brought along a few toys for the children; about 58 of whom showed up at the clinic.

"The kids really like small toys like hacky sacks, miniature cars and even pens, pencils and paper," said Maj. Roberts. "We get donations of these items from friends, families and organizations back in the United States, but could always use more."

As the VMO wound down in the early afternoon, one patient, an anti-Taliban master religious leader who has written a book about the terrorist group, said he understands the effects of what the U.S. and coalition are doing in his country.

"The Taliban have threatened me, but I am not afraid," said the elderly man. "The Qur'an says that to kill is wrong."

As a U.S. Air Force medic wrapped a blood pressure cuff around his arm, the religious leader said, "I'm happy you're here."

Photo by Capt. Bob Everdeen

U.S. Navy Lt. Karen Nordine checks the temperature of a young Afghan patient during a Village Medical Outreach in Shinkay District on Aug. 22.

New medical facility capabilities to save lives

Story by Gina Gillespie,
Provincial Reconstruction Team Farah

One-and-a-half-year-old Mohammad Sadiq lies on a cot at the Provincial Reconstruction Team Farah medical center. Nurses and doctors constantly check on his progress. His father, Wali, stands in a corner, anxiously watching his son. Lt. Col. Doug Yoder, a PRT Farah doctor, has just finished repairing a bilateral hernia on the young boy.

This is the second patient they've seen with this problem since opening the brand new medical facility.

The former medical staff at PRT Farah wanted to upgrade their Role-1 medical facility to a Role-2 facility, but was unsure whether a surgical team would be available to staff it. A Role-2 facility has surgical capability, while a Role-1 facility does not. In an effort to upgrade, the team decided to construct a suitable building to start the momentum growing.

"We decided if we built a clinic capable of surgery, they could fly in a FST for specific military operations," said Dr. Paul Johnstone, a former PRT Farah doctor. "This would reduce the amount of time that elapses between the time a soldier gets injured and the time he reaches surgery."

The strategy worked even better than planned. Not only has the one-room Aid Station with the tented triage area in the rear given way to a modern, Role-2 medical facility, but a ten-person FST is now permanently stationed at PRT Farah.

The team consists of an orthopedic surgeon, a general surgeon, a certified registered nurse anesthetist, licensed practical nurses, surgical scrub techs and administrative personnel.

A full FST consists of 20 people, so the ten person team at PRT Farah will have to wear several hats.

"Even as physicians we do everything from sweeping the floor to doing the surgical procedure itself," said Lt. Col. Bill Carson, an orthopedic surgeon and current head of the Forward Surgical Team.

Beyond the new building and the medical expertise, the new team brought their own surgical equipment and supplies with them.

"The [FST] at Farah will be equipped with the most advanced medical equipment and medical technology that is currently available—it is truly first rate," said Col. Bart Iddins, Commander of Task Force Med, Afghanistan.

The surgery performed on Mohammad Sadiq will ease his pain and discomfort,but the new facility and surgical team will soon be saving Afghan lives in addition to ISAF and Coalition forces' lives.

Doctors can now perform surgery on trauma victims, including ANSF soldiers at the PRT instead of waiting hours for a MEDEVAC helicopter to take them to Herat.

"We will save lives here because time is of the essence with a trauma, and the objective of a [FST] is to get to them within that golden hour to do life, limb or eyesight saving surgery, and then ship them to a higher echelon where definitive treatment can be taken care of," said Lt. Col Carson.

Afghani Boy returns to Farah after six months of medical care

Story by Gina Gillespie,
Provincial Reconstruction Team Farah

Dust swirled along the runway and the sun beat down on the airport ramp as a crowd gathered at the Farah airfield during the end of Summer in Afghanistan.

Mahsoom was coming home. Almost six months to the day, six-year-old Mahsoom had walked into the belly of a similar plane and headed for the state of California in the United States of America to the Grossman Burn Center at Sherman Oaks Hospital.

Earlier in his life, Mahsoom's face was disfigured in a fire, and Dr. Peter Grossman had agreed to give Mahsoom the surgery he needed to live a normal life.

Mahsoom wailed in fear and confusion the day he flew away, just three days before Christmas. However, he was all smiles as he stepped back off the plane in Farah six months later, accompanied by his host-family father, Dr. Abdul Asat.

A crowd of well-wishers surged forward, led by Mahsoom's natural father, Gul Mohammad. There was cake, presents and everyone wanted to hear about his adventure in the United States. In his excitement, Mahsoom spoke English, a skill he picked up during his stay in America.

While Mahsoom was in the United States, his family was able to communicate with him via telephone, but his father still worried about his son.

"I was not feeling comfortable, I was uneasy," said Mr. Mohammad. "A son, or a child is a man's biggest enemy. If they are away from you then they torture you, you miss them so much."

Dr. Grossman said that from a surgical standpoint, he wished he had more time. He encountered some complications that set him back a bit. He believed Mahsoom needed to let his tissues rest for a year before enduring any further surgery.

Courtesy photo
Mahsoon and his father, Gul Mohammad, greet each other for the first time after six months away from each other.

"The changes that have occurred with Mahsoom are remarkable, far more than the change in his physical appearance," said Dr. Grossman. "When he arrived here in late December of '06, he was a withdrawn, under-nourished, scared child. Since then he has grown and become very outgoing, affectionate, and a joy to be around."

Dr. Afshin Afarin and Capt. Jay Berendzen, two U.S. soldiers from PRT Farah, were the first to bring Mahsoom's plight to the attention of Dr. Grossman.

The pair worked tirelessly for months to surmount multiple bureaucratic obstacles that stood between Mahsoom being disfigured and a brighter future.

"I think it is amazing to see Afghan citizens, American forces and American doctors pulling together to help Mahsoom," said Capt. Berendzen. "Hopefully it will reconfirm in the minds of the Afghan people our commitment to making Afghanistan a better place for everyone, even at the most basic level of society. I really hope that Mahsoom will be able to live a more normal life, and it was a privilege to have an opportunity to meet him and gain the trust and friendship of his family."

Mr. Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States of America, sent the following letter to Dr. Grossman.

Courtesy photo

Mahsoom and his father, Gul Mohammad, walk away from the plane after Mahsoom returned from six months for medical care in the United States.

"I am struggling to find the right words to say thank you to you and your colleagues for the miracle that you have performed. I looked at the pictures of Mahsoom for a long time and my heart was full of joy to see hope and happiness in Mahsoom's beautiful and affectionate eyes. It is not only Mahsoom, but all Afghans that know you, they will never forget what you have done for us. Thank you."

Although Mahsoom lives in a remote village about a 12-hour drive from the PRT, the current medical staff at PRT Farah believe he'll drop in at least once a month for a check-up. When he does, he'll have a fan club waiting to say hello.

ISAF, Coalition and ANSF personnel set up MedCap in Shewan village

Story and Photos by Gina Gillespie

International Security Assistance Force, Coalition and Afghan personnel joined together to bring health care to the people in the village of Shewan during a recent Medical Civil Affairs program (MedCap) in Farah Province.

A team of eight Afghan health care providers, supported by ISAF and coalition forces, as well as Afghan National Security Forces, treated 811 people over a five hour period.

In preparation for the MedCap, doctors purchased over $25,000 worth of medicine from local sources.

Upon arrival in Shewan, soldiers and doctors quickly transformed an empty field into a health clinic. Afghan National Army soldiers secured the perimeter, performed searches and maintained crowd control.

"People were very satisfied with this MedCap because we had food, medicine, doctors, nurses and clothes," said Dr. Muhamad Qasim Bayan, Director of Public Health for Farah province. "That was the best MedCap that I have ever seen. It had a large impact on the village."

He worked alongside a number of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, corpsmen and medics to bring medical care treatment to the poor village that was very much needed.

Besides the treatment tents, patients were able to tour through an education tent, a pharmacy tent, and an health awareness tent, where they received school and dental kits, shoes, clothes, prayer rugs and rice. At any given moment there were 200 people waiting in line for treatment.

The type of ailments treated ranged from headaches and stomach problems to feet and knee problems.

"A lot of people had no shoes so it doesn't surprise me that they had feet and knee problems," said Lt. Comm. Kelley Newman, a physician assistant.

Lt. Comm. Newman said the most important aspect of the MedCap was bringing the people together with health providers from the Afghan medical system.

"I was there as a female because there aren't many female doctors in Afghanistan;" said Newman.

"We were trying to get the women to come out and feel more comfortable. Having the Afghan face on it is what really is going to help bring progress to Afghanistan."

Although health care providers often run across complex medical problems during MedCaps that can't be easily treated, even the simple act of handing out vitamins helps the people supplement a poor diet and increases their strength so they can work harder and be more productive in their daily lives.

For Lt. Comm. Newman, it was the interaction with the children she'll remember the most. She handed out stuffed animals from a bag and had to convince the children they were theirs to keep.

"Just to hear them laugh was incredible," said Newman. "They didn't understand that someone would give them something that they could keep for themselves."

Courtesy photo

Pharmacists sort through medication during the MedCap in Shewan village

Courtesy photo

A local Afghan doctor takes the blood pressure of a local civilian in Shewan village during the joint MedCap.

ISAF gives seven villages in Baghlan pure water

Story by Maj. Antje Krekeler-Jöris

No life without water – to the inhabitants of the Dahana Ghori district this is not an academic statement, but an everyday experience. Thanks to the co-operation of the Hungarian Provincial Reconstruction Team Pole Khumri and ISAF Regional Command North, now the population of seven villages has access to pure drinking water.

Around noon on Oct. 10, two helicopters of Air Transport Wing Termez came to the region. Their "luggage" that they were carring was water pipeline bundles to complete the new 16 kilometers long pipeline.

The transport by helicopters was necessary because the mountainous area is not reachable on roads. As soon as the helicopters had delivered the valuable pipes, local people and ISAF soldiers hand in hand finished installing the pipeline.

"In total, 967 families will benefit from the new pipeline," said Qhanber Shah, the local leader.

He expressed his thanks to the soldiers' contribution not only to drinking water but also to the development of agriculture.

In the Dahana Ghori district, the lack of drinkable water is the main problem – with far-reaching consequences.

A young happy Afghan boy said the water pipeline even gave him even the opportunity to study.

Why? Previously, the boy had to walk an entire day and many kilometers to carry drinking water from a well some distance from his village. By the time he returned with the water walking over the mountains, school had already closed for the night.

The water pipeline project started one year ago. The total length of the pipeline now sums up to 35 kilometers and provides fresh drinkable water for more than 15,000 inhabitants of Dahana Ghori. The total costs were approximately $160,000 USD.

Each step of the construction was discussed with the leaders of the villages. Supported by civil organizations, the digging and laying of the pipelines was done by local workers.

"The main task for the Hungarian ISAF soldiers was to inform the inhabitants about the project and to prepare the pipes for transportation," said Maj. Illes Csordas, a Hungarian PRT member.

Maj. Csordas, responsible for the project, added that, "during the project different specialists closely worked together – soldiers from the logistic platoon with the infantry company and our health group to the CIMIC group."

Also, other ISAF nations were involved. Capt. Michael Hofmann from Regional Command North CIMIC group pointed out, "This mutual work provided again the truth of our slogan: one team – one mission."

Pictures:

Water-pipeline-p-1 Flight to Pol-e-Khomri

Water-pipeline-p-2 Hungarian soldiers are lifting pipes to prepare it for transportation by helicopter

Water-pipeline-p-3 Germans, Hungarians and local people together for a better future – "one team one mission"

Water-pipeline-p-4 ISAF shield with pipes – we are here to build a much more liveable country

Water-pipeline-p-5 A German CH-53 helicopter is approaching pipes to lift and deliver it to mountainous area

Water-pipeline-p-6 Helicopter is flying via villages needed pure water

Water-pipeline-p-7 Afterwards they do not have to walk hours for drinkable water

Major Antje Krekeler-Jöris and Warrant Officer Erika Varga

Courtesy photo

Hungarian soldiers are lifting pipes to prepare it for transportation by helicopter. .

New bridge opens in Teshkan

From Regional Command North Staff Reports

A new, 25 meter long metal bridge opened recently in Teshkan district after two months of construction on Oct. 16.

The new bridge is a vital part of Highway 302, the only major road connecting Badakhshan with the rest of Afghanistan.

Once a dilapidated structure nicknamed the "scary bridge", the new bridge will now ensure safe passage for all Afghans travelling to and from Badakhshan during the critical winter months.

The original 30-meters-high bridge, dating to the Soviet occupation, crosses the Kokcha River and was in such a bad state that crossing it became a danger. ISAF patrols operating in Teshkan identified the state of the bridge and concluded that it might even collapse in the near future.

With the go-ahead from the ISAF Regional Command North, Colonel Sahm, Provincial Reconstruction Team Feyzabad commander, immediately informed the governor of Badakhshan about the construction plans. Both men agreed that immediate action was required as large scale repair works during the winter season would prove next to impossible.

Courtesy photo

The new bridge is a vital part of Highway 302, the only major road connecting Badakhshan with the rest of Afghanistan.

The two men opted for an unusual and ambitious solution-instead of trying to repair the old bridge, a new metal bridge should be placed on top of the existing structure. The PRT would immediately start the planning; the Governor's team would inform the population, start preparing the construction site and organize security through ANP.

The new bridge is now crucial to the construction of the new tarmac road on Highway 302 that will connect Feyzabad with neighbouring Taloqan and Kunduz. Construction work has already begun and will be completed in 2009.

The Teshkan Bridge project is a perfect example how provincial authorities and ISAF cooperate effectively for the benefit of the Afghan population. "We should take the new solid bridge as a symbol – a symbol for cooperation and peace," said Colonel Sahm..

Radio station in North opens airways to ISAF message

Story by Erika Varga
Hungarian Provincial Reconstruction Team
Public Affairs Office

The Hungarian PRT in Pol-e-Khomri donated office furniture to Arzoo Radio Station that had been started recently.

According to Capt. Miklos Kiraly, member of Hungarian PRT, support is important and useful to increase the International Security Assistance Force acceptance among local people. A new radio station was a grateful opportunity for it.

The PRT hopes that the radio program becomes more and more reachable, not just in PeK, but everywhere in the province.

Because of the new contract between Arzoo and the PRT, Hungarians will be able to transmit information about their ongoing projects and further plans not only in PeK, but also in Baghlan the second biggest city of the Baghlan Province.

The radio station manager was ecstatic and expressed his thanks for the support. He said that approximately 200, 000 people listen to Arzoo Radio everyday.

The program has four parts. First, morning programs for children contain a lot of music. The second part starts at early afternoon with political news. Later they turn ahead questions of society and sport news. The last part of programming is about economy during the end of the day.

ISAF was scheduled programming one hour. every day. During this time the radio covers ISAF activities, projects, plans and developments.

The Hungarian PRT has been scheduled 15-20 minutes of program time every week. This time is enough for the PRT to inform everybody listening to the radio about ongoing projects, new developments and to give a small cultural background about Hungary.

The station has been planning to make an English language program and would like to give a new point of view and hope for a more peaceful life to their listeners.

This is one reason why Arzoo was chosen for the name of the station.

Arzoo stands for hope.

ANA, Kunar PRT get school supplies to children

By U.S. Army Sgt. Brandon Aird
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

The Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team and Charlie Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), donated school supplies Oct. 2 to a boys-and-girls school in Asmar, Afghanistan.

The 2nd Kandak, 201st Corps, Afghan National Army helped hand out the school supplies and also provided security while International Security Assistance Force Soldiers talked to the kids.

"We brought the school supplies here to show that the Kunar PRT believes in the importance of your education," said Army Capt. Steve Fritz, during a speech at the boy's school.

Fritz and Spc. James Cook, both members of the Kunar PRT, organized school supply donations on a monthly basis.

"We asked our families back in the states to send school supplies to us," explained Cook. "When we get enough boxes, we visit a school to hand them out." Families back in the states send notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers and even book bags with the Kunar PRT's name etched on the side.

"It's good to be handing out these school supplies," said Cook. "Whole families are getting together and mailing stuff out to us. Its great seeing everything come together."

In the last few months, Cook and Fritz are averaging one school supply drop-off to five or six different schools per month.

"It all just really depends on the amount of school supplies we get," said Cook.

The school supplies are sent to Fritz and Cook through the mail. As the boxes show up, Cook and Fritz talk with the school teachers to organize drop offs.

Fritz and Cook plan on continuing the school-supply donation program for as long as they can.

"We got a call from a local Afghan telling us some of the kids wanted to write letters to our families back in the states to say 'thank you'," explained Cook.

"As long as we continue to get the school supplies," said Cook, "we'll keep visiting these schools."

Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Brandon Aird

Army Capt. Jason Pieri, commander of Charlie Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), teaches English words to school kids in Asmar, Afghanistan, Oct. 2.