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Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #42

Executive Summary

The subject of this interview ran the Civil Affairs unit of the Sharana PRT at the time it was formed in mid-June, 2004 and served there until October, 2004. The PRT's principal mission during that time was to work on approximately 50 humanitarian assistance projects, including construction of schools and clinics and digging wells. In the run-up to the October, 2004 elections, the PRT officers traveled with the Governor of Paktika Province throughout the region, consulting with local leaders on needs, demonstrating the reach of the central government, and communicating the message that the coalition was working on behalf of the central government to improve life for the populace.

The interviewee describes how the PRT worked with the local governor to advance women's education. When a girls' school or women's training facility was deemed culturally unacceptable in this very conservative province, the PRT agreed to sponsor "at home" training sessions for women. During this time, the PRT was especially successful in providing basic training and equipment for the local police, including data automation for a criminal database. Another well-appreciated function of the PRT was to provide "Cooperative Medical Assistance" – mobile clinics with a doctor and veterinarian. The veterinary services seemed as much appreciated as the human medical treatment.

According to the interviewee, the resources they had at their disposal were largely sufficient for their mission, particularly when CERP funds became available; this funding mechanism was much more agile than the very formal OHDC (Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Civic Assistance) process. The interviewee suggests that having a UNAMA representative available in the area would have been useful to provide coordination with the NGOs, to avoid duplication of effort. Finally, the interviewee mentions an intriguing psy-ops operation, a publication entitled "Peace in Afghanistan," which despite a very low level of illiteracy, was quite popular in Paktika province.

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According to the interviewee, the resources they had at their disposal were largely sufficient for their mission, particularly when CERP funds became available; this funding mechanism was much more agile than the very formal OHDCA (Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Civic Assistance) process. The interviewee suggests that having a UNAMA representative available in the area would have been useful to provide coordination with the NGOs, to avoid duplication of effort. Finally, the interviewee mentions an intriguing psy-ops operation, a publication entitled "Peace in Afghanistan," which despite a very low level of illiteracy, was quite popular in Paktika province.

United States Institute of Peace  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Afghanistan Experience Project

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*Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen*  
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*Q: You were at the Sharan PRT in Paktika province When you were there?*

A: Yes, I was Civil Affairs in Afghanistan and I started my tour at Sharana PRT as we stood up the PRT. We sometimes refer to it as a Sharana PRT. It would have been about mid-June of '04 and then I left in October of that year.

*Q: Okay, from mid-June of '04 until October, 2004. What would you say was the principle mission of your PRT?*

A: We took over an area of the province of Paktika that was formerly run out of our PRT in Gardiz and we inherited a number of projects; we also had to make new acquaintances and our PRT in Gardiz came down to do the introductions, handed over the files and the construction documents to us. Our main effort was to catch up on a large list of humanitarian assistance projects which included irrigation wells, drinking wells, schools, clinics; it could be building it from scratch or as an extension of a school. We had a few OHDACA projects.

*Q: OHDACA means?*

A: Let me write that out. Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Civic Assistance which was a fund that was designated by project. It took a very long time to nominate a project, to go through the review, get it approved by the OHDACA office in Centcom. Funds are released and then there was a procurement cycle with the formal procurement documentation. Each of those projects had to be paid and closed up separately. It was a very long process. When CERP [Commander's Emergency Response Program], which is C-E-R-P ...

*Q: Right, I've heard of the CERP funds.*

A: When that became available, we were able to draw, typically about \$200,000 dollars worth of funds in Afghan currency. We would get it in Afghan currency, bring it down, and we could pay and start projects immediately and then turn in the paperwork afterwards; all in bulk.

*Q: So that was a big improvement in terms of how you were able to do your projects.*

A: It really improved our ability to get a lot of projects going. There were some limitations of different prices where you needed a brigade commander's approval—one step higher—and then as

it went over a larger amount ... I'm trying to remember if we had like 25, 50, and then 100,000. One project we had at 100,000 we had to get the task force 76 approval. I believe it was up to 25,000 or over 25,000 we had to get the brigade commander's approval.

*Q: Okay, so ...*

A: So we had them lumped in different categories depending on the size of the project. Basically, it was kind of a cash-and-carry interim documentation, type. So we inherited a whole, I would say close to 50 projects and then while we were there, we were getting close to the elections which were in October. During my time there was the registration for the elections. So in order to represent the central government, we joined the Governor of Paktika or Governor Mangal on a trip around the province, where he listened to the local district leaders and the elders of villages and came up with kind of a project list. Then we got together and decided what we could do. For example, maybe we've got a real sum and in each district we would get approximately six projects.. So we generated easily another 50 to 60 projects on that trip.

*Q: That trip you said was prior to the elections. Did you have in mind that the governor would be visible and the populace would be able to make an association between the central government, between elections and between projects, is that how it would work?*

A: Correct. I think the big focus was to show that the central government was strong, was there to help and that we were there working for the government, central government or President Karzai, who was the interim president at the time.

*Q: Right, and the governor had been appointed by Karzai? I think he remained the governor after the elections.*

A: That's right. When we arrived there in June, he had been appointed in January, so he's fairly new. He had originally come from Ghazni; I believe he was the deputy governor in Ghazni and was appointed. There was a lot of discussion that the past governor and the past police chief of our province were corrupt and we had a lot of problems and Karzai decided to replace both of them. So we were lucky when we got there; there were some very good supporters of what we were doing, though I didn't feel like they were always trusting of the people that had been there before them; different ministry people. I didn't think they had a lot of trust in their own people.

*Q: The people that were appointed: Did you think they had appropriate qualifications for their jobs?*

A: It's hard to tell. We certainly didn't ask for bios or had that information. The chief of police was a Colonel who was promoted to General, General Rahimi(PH) while we were there. We had some basic information we could go back to and look at files of some bios but they were mostly done by interviews from past officers who had come to visit. So we had some background information but certainly didn't have the education or a lot of that information available. But I had good respect for the people though we had to learn to work in their culture and their ways of dealing with problems and you can't always do everything in an American or Western fashion.

*Q: Well I'm sure that's the case. Paktika has been described to me as perhaps the least developed of the Afghan provinces and definitely one of the most conservative. So infrastructure was simply not there and people's way of doing things was not what we would consider Westernized or particularly cosmopolitan.*

A: Yeah, we had heard and had seen before getting to Paktika co-education with girls and boys schools and more development of women's rights starting to go on throughout the country. But in Paktika and I didn't see any girls'-boys' schools together, even in the elementary level, it was strictly boys' schools and then there were some girls'. There was one girls' school that was quite a distance from us and as far as women's advances and women's rights and us trying to promote that, they were very conservative and thought we were being too aggressive in trying to build a women's facility to help employ or train women in skills. They said, "not in their province," and there were many supporters and actually they had one of the biggest turn-outs in women registered to vote and actually voted. They thought that the way to approach it is to fund a home-training session where somebody's home would be opened up and other women would be invited in and they would discuss the principles with women and go around to different districts and hold maybe 20 of these over a period of time.

*Q: And those would be in preparation for the elections, or what kind of training?*

A: Oh no, it was just in general. The training was at first to ... a lot of it was mind set; trying to introduce the idea of women being able to work. For example, we had groups in the national level from the task force 76 that came out of Bagram so there were some wonderful things going on around the country. I visited different PRTs in different provinces where there was a bakery that was built and women were being taught how to bake or to sew. There was training to teach them how to be a seamstress or a tailor. We were trying to ... especially widows and those that really needed to make a living. They were able to do that. In our province where we suggested that to a governor and the different ministers, they were not as receptive to that idea. They said that if you build a facility and you invite women, the women won't come and they might be attacked. So the stress was to start slower and not build a new girl's school or women's school or women's training facility.

*Q: Okay, I'm going to go back and make sure I understood, and to tie the question of women's advancement again to the election. Did you say in Paktika there was a high turnout of women?*

A: Yes.

*Q: So that meant they also registered?*

A: Now, the election actually came a few days after we left in October, so while I was there it was the registration results and of all the provinces, I heard they had the highest percentage of women.

*Q: What would it be, approximately if you can recall?*

A: I'm trying to guess. This is going back some time; I think they had over 50%. In fact the lady in our province ... I'm trying to recall her name ... was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and went back to the State Department and hosted a trip to the United States based on the province and her roll on the Loya Jirga. She was a young widow, had lost two sons and her husband and ...

*Q: Did I see her for the State of the Union, by any chance?*

A: I don't know. Suraya Parluka was her name, we called her Madam Suraya Parluka I would say mid-30s, fairly young.

We asked her how she did it and she was from probably one of the worst districts of our province that was up by Neka, right smack on the border of Pakistan up on the northern part of our province, Zor Khalata. She couldn't live there, she was under attack and she went everywhere with her father. I think on the United States trip he was not allowed to go.

*Q: Oh, I wonder why.*

A: I think it was only for her and they were going to have other State Department escorts. But every meeting we had the father was there and she was employed, officially, by ... what was that UN group that did the elections ... I'm trying to recall now what they were called. I think it came out of the UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] elections. I forget the acronym.

*Q: It doesn't matter.*

A: But she was employed under that group and what she said was she went to the hospital where the women were segregated and she was able to get them to ... she had access to them. She had them register there as they came in to the hospitals.

*Q: and they were coming to the hospitals because they were sick?*

A: Yeah, for treatment. And that was the way that she could approach women and get the word out. She'd register them and if their registration was going to come up ...

*Q: Right, it's too bad that she couldn't meet them elsewhere because she was registering only those who needed medical treatment. During the time you were there, did the PRT have some facilitative role in the registration process or was that basically the UN?*

A: We attended meetings with all the different groups. I think the focus there was the U.S. military would be in the background and we, the PRT was not a combat unit to do security, but when we went to meetings with our 227—they were the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry unit in our area, called the second battalion of the 27<sup>th</sup> regiment, the Wolfhounds—they had plans to patrol areas and to provide additional security and a reaction or a response in case there was need. But there was already a UN group, part of the security for the elections, that was in place and protecting the registration sites which later became the election sites.

*Q: Okay, so you were observing it but not really too directly involved.*

A: Maybe indirectly, our training of the police, either providing vehicles and motorcycles or in different meetings with them to make them grow more aware of police standards.

*Q: Yes, could you address that a little bit because that's also an area of interest. To what degree was the PRT involved in police training and what did that consist of?*

A: Sure, there was a formal system to train police nationally, to send them through academies and do a national police and border patrol and like a highway patrol. But at the local level, very few of them we saw were able to go to those academies and trainings. Of course the top level guys would go but they wouldn't always have everyone else go. Right away there was a lot of a push to assess ... and we found out in many areas the police didn't have ... and this is going back before the elections, June, July, August time frame. So we went around and we found out many of the police didn't have a weapon. You might go to one area and talk to the local guy and he might have 12, 15, policeman, half of them were not dressed in uniforms or partial uniforms and half provided their own weapons and a few didn't have a weapon at all.

*Q: I was thinking about that, providing their own weapon, because most people did have their own personal weapons didn't they?*

A: Right. When we started kind of evaluating and sending reports back, there was a lot of pressure to get the weapons out. Just after General Rahimi had been promoted he came back smiling and there was a big celebration because they got all these—was able to go back to Kabul and get all these weapons for his troops, for his police around the province. There were colleagues of mine who were up in Baghram calling, “how did he do it?” “Everybody was pushing and how did he go back and do it?”

*Q: So he succeeded in providing the weapons and then ...*

A: And getting weapons, yeah.

*Q: then your role was in providing training and some additional equipment?*

A: Yeah, we had military police NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer] who went out and met ... in the beginning they would meet daily with General Rahimi. With translation it would take a while to build up the friendship and relationship and to go over and try to answer questions and really in detail assess the level where they were at. And then suggest ways for what they needed; we could see right away they needed computers, they needed telephones, satellite phones, and through different groups like USAID [United States Agency for International Development] and other groups we were able to ... in fact, we even worked with DFID [UK's Department for International Development] a British equivalent to USAID which was one of the first to get us computer equipment. They purchased I think, \$3-4000 dollars worth of equipment which we were able to pass out to the governor and the chief of police and some of the different offices.

*Q: Were they equipped to take advantage of this nice equipment? I don't know how electricity is but it might be a problem. Did they have good phone lines?*

A: No. In fact the phones had to be ... they had to use satellite phones or Iridiums. Electricity they would hook up small generators to operate their computers and such. But they do at least have it so they could start a database for criminals and other organizational things and for us to share data. We could show their administrators what projects were going on, to get them to start automating. We used to get lists of hand written things and we had to get it all translated and it took so long to translate things.

*Q: I can imagine, of course.*

A: Not only just meetings but notes, description of projects, really.

*Q: Your translators, how were they trained; where did you get them?*

A: There were two levels of translators; there were those who were Americans who worked for World-Wide, who were contracted through the military, came over from the United States, and there were those who were hired by ... I'm trying to remember the other company. There's another company and they hired predominately local, most of them were college students or recent college grads who had the English ability along with Pashto and Dari.

*Q: Was their English pretty good?*

A: Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes we'd have somebody's interpreter tell them something and the other interpreter would say, "no he's not giving you the whole story; you're only getting part of it." That happens sometimes in confidentiality: Meetings or confidential meetings.

*Q: Well, definitely if someone is not actually trained as an interpreter, they may speak English and they may speak of course their own language but it's no mean feat to actually provide translation and interpreting.*

A: It was difficult for us. I had a team Sergeant who would like to go on and on and on in a meeting and I would tell him, "Sargeant , stop, small chunks."

*Q: Of course.*

A: So the message can be conveyed in its entirety.

*Q: Speaking of the sergeant ..., you were the head of the civil affairs unit of your PRT, and your team then consisted of how many?*

A: We were organized to have a CMOC, which stood for Civil Military Operation Center, a group that would be kind of the administrative part of our organization, tracking the projects and doing the meetings with the provincial infrastructure there. Then we had a CAT-A team, those were supposed to be four people. Four people in the CMOC and four people on the CAT-A.



CAT-A is our tactical level. They are the ones who actually go out and do the assessments and inspect the projects within the area. When we started, we lost a person who didn't work out and made her go out to Bagram, so we had four people.

*Q: This was a woman, you said?*

A: A woman, yeah. We went down to three and one was a woman and my team sergeant and I. The three of us did an eight-man job. We had to do both the CMOC and the CAT-A part. In fact we would borrow the Iowa national guardsmen to help us do the assessments, kind of train them and ask for volunteers so that we could still do an eight-man mission.

*Q: Very difficult, I would think.*

A: Right, and as we were just starting up the PRT, it was recognized that we weren't going to have full staffing. When our replacements came in September, we had about ten days to do left seat, right seat training with them. They were able to bring six out of the eight and they had two more coming within the month. So they had the full complement.

*Q: Let's say you were going out to do an inspection of a project or discuss a project, would you have to travel with some kind of force protection?*

A: Correct. Our PRT had 85 people and the majority of that was a heavy infantry platoon which was our force protection. They happened to be from the Iowa national guard while we were there.

*Q: Okay, so how many would go on a typical outing ?*

A: If it wasn't the governor's compound it was within ... I think we had 15 kilometers, we could go out with two vehicles and typically would bring another of these Toyota hi-lux(PH) trucks. Typically if it was a routine meeting, we would just go in two vehicles; sometimes we would bring one or two Humvees with us so it could be four vehicles and then each vehicle had to have a minimum of two people. A lot of times the MPs would have to go to a meeting and we would try to do it at the same time so we could use each other so they wouldn't have to bring another vehicle. We would combine our meetings together.. If we went over 15 kilometers we had to go in a larger group and it was a higher classification of an operation. You had to have more equipment with you and more protection and you had to actually have an operation order for that over 15 kilometers.

*Q: 15 kilometers sounds a little arbitrary.*

A: Yeah, I think they looked at the map and drew circles and looked at the time it would take to go. For the governor's compound we were only three, four kilometers away so it's fairly close, but with the rough roads, it could take 20 to 30 minutes to go three kilometers.

A: It was just, you were in first and second gear the whole time and stopping and going over bumps; it's very slow.

*Q: Now within that 15 kilometer perimeter, what would be the normal threat? You'd be on the look out for roadside bombs?*

A: Yes. Which we'd call IEDs, improvised explosive devices.

*Q: Yes, I'm familiar with them. I don't know how often you'd find one.*

A: We had a few incidents while we were there. After I left, one of our groups was attacked in Shegen(PH). There was a fatality and a few lost limbs. That was from our PRT. That was kind of a bad place on the border. We kind of knew the areas that were bad; there was also a method to find out the latest intelligence. There was a lot of shared information with the local police. We wouldn't tell them when exactly we were going to go but we needed to go down to such and such area and, "what information could you tell us about those folks?" So we had some daily meetings with our force-pro and our commander. We were very cautious, I think, compared to some of my colleagues in Iraq. We couldn't believe how some of their operations weren't as cautious and didn't go through all the things that we did in Afghanistan.

*Q: Is that right?*

A: Yeah, I was surprised. I was trying to figure out ... they had so many people in Iraq, so many divisions, so many troops that a lot of times they didn't have the same requirements. You'd think it would be more strict there, maybe more of a threat.

*Q: I would think certainly more of a threat, but maybe they also thought there was some safety in their larger numbers.*

A: Maybe. The guys from Gardiz traveled a larger area than we did, and they were on the road a lot and we would meet up with them from time to time and exchange information and have meetings and we actually lived in Gardiz for a short time while our advance party was setting up our tents and some of the basic life-support systems for us. So we got to know them pretty well and then we took over their territory in that province. But they had a number of times where they were attacked; an RPG would hit the side of their car and it was a dud and didn't blow up or it hit a wall as they drove by. I think we were lucky the time that we were there.

What's funny though is the times that we would go to the governor's . There were land mines and explosions that went off with some of the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry division units around us and we soon realized that you had to stay off the roads and we were able to actually go cross country more. And because we were in Toyotas, we didn't look like military, because there are a lot of Toyotas around.

*Q: Who would be using these other Toyotas?*

A: The Afghans primarily had Toyotas there. So we were using the same vehicles they did.

*Q: That was a good idea.*

A: It was just two vehicles going down the road. When you had the Humvees with you, you could see the Humvees from a distance. They had large antennas and if you were in the middle of two Humvees in a line, you were a target. A lot of my colleagues said a lot of times that they thought the Toyotas were safer from the threat of an IED, whereas if you were going to get attacked by a group, you were safer with Humvees because you had the firepower and the protection. We had a procedure if you were attacked with machine guns or RPGs. But a road side bomb, they have to see you coming and trigger it. It's a little harder with a dusty Toyota vehicle.

*Q: You would not expect to be attacked routinely but did it occur during the time that you were, that you were in one of your convoys?*

A: My sergeant was on a convoy on the governor's trip that was attacked by an IED; luckily it hit behind the last vehicle in the convoy. They reacted, they heard kids scream, they secured the area, they called it in and the kids screaming ... they weren't hurt, they were just frightened. There was a rocket attack that happened while we were there that we think was aimed more at the governor's compound because we had heard a rocket prior to us getting there and there was a stray one that hit close to us. So we're not really sure if it was aiming for us or it hit over the governor's compound.

*Q: But then again the governor, he wasn't very popular there either.*

A: Yeah, they think it was probably the predecessors who were doing that. There were land mines that were found or IEDs that went off that hit our counterparts there from 227. Their company that was in our area. The CLAW (PH) that we occupied was previously theirs when they were building a new site and then they moved next to the governor's compound and had a site there. Their Battalion headquarters was in Orguni which was out to the east. So they had a number of incidents; they would come over and come in to our place if they were closer to us and get protection, and we had the physician's assistant in a larger medical team.

*Q: A physician's assistant, not a hospital?*

A: Right.

*Q: Useful, but still not ...*

A: I think we had five medics. We had a lot of supplies and kits.

*Q: Right.*

A: But it was always very cautious. We had a Marine Colonel who was our commander. It was kind of interesting, how we had inter-Service ...

*Q: was that unusual?*

A: Yes. Usually you were all Army or ... You know, they had some positions at higher headquarters where they had intermixed Air Force-Marines. But he was picked to be our first PRT commander. He left, I think it was end of November of the year I was there, '04. I'm not sure who replaced him. It was after we left. He always had the standard that every time there was a convoy, there would be a medic along. He would be in one of the vehicles in the convoy. Our medics went out all the time; it was not only just as a precaution if somebody were hurt in the convoy but to also assist Afghans with little problems. There was always a way for us to show that we were concerned with them and sometimes they would just write these little prescriptions. It's just kind of funny to think of a young medic writing prescriptions. Basically, "this guy looks like he needs x, y, z, he should go to such and such hospital" and they would show up and have this little note written in English and commonly people would come up to us with a note that somebody else wrote, some other medic wrote for another location, you know, seeking medicine or help or an evaluation.

*Q: Now of course the medic wouldn't be in a position to dispense antibiotics to the populace?*

A: Normally not, normally we'd be what we'd call a CMA, Cooperative Medical Assistance; that's where we actually went out and saw people. If we could we would bring a doctor and a veterinarian and schedule and get support from other organizations and even do it with local Afghan doctors. There we would bring a lot of medicine and perform one of these kinds of all day or sometimes half day events where people would line up or women would line up separately and animals would be in another location.

*Q: And that would be a popular event?*

A: More animals than people were treated.

*Q: well, animals were very prized I gather..*

A: That was one of the things that was popular on the governor's trip when we went around the province, it was to hold the CMA in each location. 227 had a battalion surgeon, a doctor, and I think he had a nurse but I think he had a couple of medics with him and we joined with him and did a combined CMA.

*Q: CMA was Civilian Medical Assistance?*

A: Or Cooperative Medical ...

*Q: Cooperative Medical Assistance.*

A: It goes by other names. Sometimes they call them Med-Cap. Or Vet-Cap. Vet for Veterinarian.

*Q: Oh I see. So obviously you spent a lot of time on the humanitarian assistance side of things. ) I think you mentioned earlier that this kind of medical assistance would be your daily routine. Of*

*course I believe you mentioned that you yourself were doing the administrative support and monitoring the projects?*

A: Right, with the funds. We'd also have ministerial meetings. We'd go out to the provincial hospital there in Sharan and talk with the minister of the province and he would bring in different reps and different organizations and we would jointly try to figure out, one, what were ... some of the NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] were hard to get ahold of. You knew they were in the area but they didn't come seek you out. So we're trying to find out what are they doing. We had to do a lot of deconflicting. Sometimes we'd go out on one of the governor's trips where there was a proposed site to build a clinic; we'd get there and find out just a kilometer or two kilometers away somebody else was saying, "why are you building a clinic? There is this other organization that's building a clinic." So one group didn't know what the other group was doing. By meeting with the provincial Afghan people, they knew what everyone was doing, so we had to give them our list and they'd get a list from somebody else. But I think the NGOs, because they wanted to be neutral, some of them came to seek us out but we didn't have a UNAMA rep in our area and that hurt because I think UNAMA kind of helps to organize all the NGOs.

*Q: I heard that they do often have that coordinating role. Actually I'm surprised to hear that there were NGOs in your province, because I had heard that they were no longer working there, but apparently there were some at the time that you were there.*

A: Yeah, I'm trying to remember. Swedish Peace had built some clinics.

*Q: Would those NGOs have come only after the fall of the Taliban?*

A: I think they were there after the fall of the Taliban, I'm not for certain.

*Q: And they would not have been there before that, I guess?*

A: There weren't very many in our areas. You would hear that there was an organization and then when you kind of dug deeper, you'd find out that they were actually being paid through USAID and that was the other thing ... We wanted to find organizations that weren't getting U.S. funds. It was really funny.

*Q: In the PRT was there a USAID representative at the time you were there?*

A: No.

*Q: I did learn there was someone apparently later. At the time you were there, there was not a State person either?*

A: No, no State or agriculture. What we needed was an agriculture rep. The closest UNAMA was up in Gardiz and he would come down every once in a while. He was a Frenchman. He was fluent in Dari, which was really neat when he would go out and speak Dari with the governor.

*Q: That would suggest that he had spent some time in Afghanistan, perhaps several years and he hadn't just arrived after the fall of the Taliban, if you will. During the time that you were there, did some of the projects get completed so you were able to inaugurate them and take credit for them?*

A: Yeah we never wound up doing an opening ceremony, I would have liked to have done that with some of these projects but they were quite a distance away. There were pictures taken. Actually my boss did get to go to ... I think I remember ... I wasn't on that trip, but they actually got to do an opening of a school. They took pictures of the governor and the PRT commander and the local contractor. I remember the contractor coming to get paid and brought us the pictures and we said to our boss, "hey, can you sign off on this?" Sure can. We even used our PRT commander as a quality assurance so we could pay the guys. There were a lot of projects that were 75% done when we left that we started and there were some that we were finishing up that the group before us had started.

*Q: So, for example, construction of a school, from the time that it was decided to make the school until it would be finished, how long roughly would that be?*

A: If it was CERP funds, you could finish in, I think about six months. A lot of times it was very strange. We'd pay a down payment; work would stop after they went through paying their workers 25% and they came back looking for more money and we're like, "well you have to get 50% to get 50% payment, you can't get more money ; you know, you've got to do more work." So they'd do more work and then they'd stop again and we'd have to go ... it would take ... it was quite a logistics feat to get more money. Because we had to either get sent down a ring flight(PH) and they only came once a week or you had to get a convoy that was going back to Bagram. Then there was a limit of how much money you could take. About \$200,000 was what our brigade allowed us to take and the previous PRT commander from Gardiz said, "you want to see if you can get a million dollars? 'Cause we have got a million dollars worth of projects on the books." He said, "if you keep it there, you can handle it," but they only allowed us \$200,000 at a time when I was there.

So we had to get back a couple of times to get more money. And then these guys would come up and they'd travel there; no note. They can't call you and say, "I'm here for payment," they would just show up and say, "I'm here for payment." Then as we got past 50% we actually wanted to go out and inspect them before we ... a lot of times there was a discrepancy. He said it was completely done and we found out that the wall was only 75% done and then you find out there was a conflict with the neighbor of the property or something and then the guy said, "oh yeah, I couldn't finish it." But previously he said he was done.

[END TAPE SIDE]

A: We had to verify who he was and we had to go back to find the project and the amount and the paperwork and a lot of these we had inherited but to pay the contractor, we had to get actually get visual inspection and we couldn't do it all piecemeal; we needed to do a group so we could schedule a convoy to these different locations. But when they were finished it might have

taken us two to four weeks before we could actually get out, inspect it, do the paperwork, get the money ...

*Q: Now when you were doing your inspections, I think you have some background in building control and maintenance?*

A: In my civilian job? Yes.

*Q: In your civilian job ... so could you personally do the inspection and determine that yes, they used the right building materials; it was done according to specification and it won't leak when the first rains come?*

A: Yeah, for some of them it was difficult because you didn't get to see it all in phases. Maybe you saw the finished product. Here's the other thing: because we had limitations, sometimes a project was done under the \$25,000 and it didn't include hooking up electricity or water, but you went into a building and there was a faucet or power outlets. There was no way to test it without the water, so then they came back and said, "oh yeah, you have to put the water in." Well, that was a change order; that was an additional contract. So we didn't always get the complete project in.

*Q: You might be assuming that of course they're going to put electrical outlets and wire the building for electricity, but apparently they didn't have enough money to do it so they didn't do it? Was that how it worked? Then you would discover that on your walk through.*

A: Or there was wire but there was no generator to actually test that the lights were going to work and different things. It was more like ... there was a jail cell in a governor's building built on the governor's area. They had some long range plan of hooking up water and major electricity and some of the work was going to be done by the police chief and the governor, so it wasn't part of ... it was left out of the contract. It was not a requirement to have all the specifications; it was just a basic plan: "here is a plan for a school; build it the way you build schools." We did have construction engineers on our site that worked for the PRT that we would bring out and use when we needed the expertise.

*Q: And those folks were Afghan engineers or ... ?*

A: No, those were American Army. We had a Major and an E-6; both were very good. Their main job was to get the new PRT built but we used them also to help us, especially in some of these important buildings.

*Q: Right, because otherwise who would be able to carry out the work on the projects that you were identifying?*

A: Yeah, it was up to us. We did use Afghan engineers that worked for the governor. Because sometimes we didn't understand why something was built a certain way and we would bring them to help. Sometimes they would agree with us or even be harder on the contractor than we were. Other times, they said, "no, no, you don't understand. We don't do septic tanks like you do

in the United States. You don't need to run the public toilet." So we were thinking it was a proper way of doing it. They knew their culture and standards.

*Q: So it was actually very helpful to have them I would think?*

A: They were very helpful.

*Q: And those were folks who had been trained in the Soviet Union or...?*

A: Actually I'm not sure.

*Q: Did they speak any English?*

A: Yes. Majority of the ... Half the contractors spoke English, definitely the people that worked in the provincial ministries, whether it was the road construction ministry or agriculture or the hospital or education that all spoke English well. It was almost to the point where we didn't need a translator with them.

*Q: Well that's great.*

A: I have get to get going in a few minutes.

*Q: Okay, I'll be conscious of your time and I think that we're about ready to wrap up anyway. Let me see if I can pull this together with a couple general questions.*

A: Sure.

*Q: Did you feel that you had the right resources, adequate resources to do the job that you were trying to do? Various jobs, I realize they were multi-faceted, but did you think that resources were adequate?*

A: Because we started the PRT there, we were short civil affairs folks and we knew that going in. We kept asking for additional people and we didn't get them. We knew when replacements came they would have the full complement so that was one short fall we had. We didn't have the State Department or the USAID in our area at the time and we knew that would happen later. So I was happy to hear that they actually turned up. I know that some areas were starting to get a Department of Agriculture rep. That would have been the full complement. We didn't have a psy-ops team in our area. There was one in Orguni and we got some products from them and we had to do some additional work to get products from Bagram and these would be the sole Afghanistan ... Peace and Afghanistan paper that was written in English, Dari and Pashto. It was very popular at that spot. So a lot of times we wondered; we had heard that they had such a high illiteracy rate. When we passed them out, people grabbed them but we wondered how many actually could read them.

*Q: Wrapping fish perhaps?*



A: Yeah, but they were very interested in looking at it, even with the pictures and the writings.

*Q: And that was Peace in Afghanistan it was called?*

A: Yeah.

*Q: I haven't heard about that.*

A: Yeah it was a real nice paper that was handed out. We would get them monthly or so and pass them out. If anything else, the students could use them at the school because they could use the English and then look at the translation.

*Q: Sure.*

A: And there were good stories about what the coalition forces were doing in the country to bring peace there. One thing that was extremely helpful was we received a lot of radios, the hand-cranked ...

*Q: Hand-cranked, battery powered?*

A: You could use batteries but if you didn't have them, you could hand crank it; they were Grundig radios. They were about \$35 dollars apiece. We got good support when those came in and then there were other things that we were asking for. Soccer balls, clothing and blankets. The first part of my job was at the headquarters pushing these things out so then I had some contacts when I got on the receiving end to know who to ask and how to get those shipped out to us. Actually some of the contractors I worked with in Bagram wanted to do business with me and came out to Sharan. School supplies; that was a big resource that we handed out to the schools.

*Q: Right.*

A: Big boxes that cost us about \$250 dollars a box, would equip 75 students and a teacher. They had these school bags ...

*Q: And it may have been the first time they ever saw such things ?*

A: Yeah the schools were ... they hardly had any supplies at all.

*Q: So they were very welcome?*

A: Then we had tool kits. We had blankets come in and all sorts of things. Even things that were donated from friends and family back home; they would send used clothing and things and they would mail it out to us.

*Q: So you were in charge of distributing all these things. And you were sometimes able to get some publicity for some of it? I don't know what kind of media they might have on hand.*

A: The military had a public affairs office and sometimes they would be out on events with us. We would always ask for them; we didn't always get one or you could take photographs and send them back with a little write up. We came under re-organization when we came under the brigade structure. The brigade was moved to Serlernalf(PH) which was an Arab post.

And they had their own public affairs officer and support. So we would get an email saying, please send us stories of what you're doing we can't always come out to your site but we'll happily receive the information and the photographs.

*Q: So there was no local media, Afghan media?*

A: I didn't see any. That was something that was successful in other areas a little later. Putting up radio towers for example, it was possible to look at television, broadcasting and things like that, but we didn't have any of that yet.

*Q: So would you say, on balance, that the PRT you worked with was successful in accomplishing its mission?*

A: Yes, from where we were and just starting up, I thought we were very successful.

*Q: Is there anything you would like to change about the structure of the PRT that you haven't mentioned, as a last thought here?*

A: No, I think there was a lot of thought put in to the PRTs as they expanded. While my unit was there, there were four new PRTs that were opened and they had ... I think they had the proper organization to make it successful.

*Q: Great, it sounds as if you were there at an auspicious time. I don't know if you're able to monitor progress in the province since you returned ...*

A: I have some emails with people ... The interpreters seem to like to email.

*Q: Well that's nice actually.*

A: I get mails from them.

*Q: I only know what I read in the press, but these days the news coming out of Afghanistan is more worrisome than I would like to see it.*

A: Probably because the parliamentary elections are going to be coming up in September, so ...

*Q: I guess that stimulates opposition activity. Anyway, I do thank you for sharing with me. Hopefully, a lot of people will have a chance to read what you've shared so, I thank you very much for your help.*

A: Okay, no problem.

*Q: Have a nice evening.*

A: Thank you.

*Q: Okay, bye.*