

Postcards from Afghanistan

Unforeseen Alliances

Cheryl L. Sims
ANA O&M Project Manager/COR
Afghanistan Engineer District
Qalaa House Compound

Coming from Mount Vernon, Ind., a small farming community in the southwest part of the state, my deployment to Afghanistan — my first adventure outside of the continental United States — has made a big impact on me personally.

At home, I work as an equipment mechanic at the J.T. Myers Lock and Dam for the Corps' Louisville District. Here in Kabul, Afghanistan, I work as an Afghan National Army Operations and Maintenance project manager and serve as a contracting officer representative (COR), where I provide operations and maintenance support for an ANA facility.

As a COR, I leave the security of our compound almost daily to drive to project sites with two Afghan 'shooters' named Matin and Jaweed. I have forged personal bonds with my shooters and other Afghans. I've learned that Afghans are a hard-working, respectful people, and that the Afghan men generally address females conservatively. Therefore, my first encounter with Matin and Jaweed began quietly. After sharing tales and photos about our families, however, conversations soon became easier. Humor followed, as did teaching each other our respective languages. Meanwhile, safety has always been paramount. Matin and Jaweed stay by my side during site visits



and they help to control traffic in tight situations.

I believe the significant personal bonds that I've forged with my Afghan friends can be attributed to three factors that are unique to overseas deployments.

1) The need for mutual protection in relatively dangerous situations conveys mutual caring; 2) The language obstacle provides opportunities for roles as both student and teacher, thus furthering companionship; and 3) Initial thoughts about the differences between us gradually dissolve as similarities surface; we unite as we are assured that we all come from one human race.

Matin and Jaweed also share with me stories about previous CORs and how they remain good friends today. It humbles and excites me to know that when I go back home, my shooters are going to share with the next person they are to protect the same enthusiasm in stories of the friendship they found in me.

My friendships with Afghan citizens are one of my most enduring memories I'll take from this deployment. Hopefully, this short story offers a convincing example of the unlikely rewards that come from deployments which are greater than career, finances, or duty.



L to R: Matin, Sims, and Jaweed arrive back at the Qalaa Compound after a day of site visits in north Kabul.