



The Main Effort

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Dedicated English teacher blazing trails in Kandahar

By CDR Chad Snee
205th RSAC PAO

Ehsan Ullah is on a quest to see that the blessings of an education are made available to all the citizens of Afghanistan — men and women, boys and girls.

A native of Shajoy district in Zabul province, Ullah grew up with an almost unquenchable thirst to learn, to expand his horizons.

The more he learned, the more he realized that education was essential for realizing one's dreams.

The problem, as he saw it, was that education was not available to all.

"I saw that girls and women were dependent on the men, treated like second-class citizens," he observed. "Education gives girls and women freedom and independence."

Ullah explained that his own life was filled with challenges and uphill battles. But his situation took a marked turn for the better when he decided to become a teacher.

"My life became very honorable and respectable when I started teaching," he said.

Ullah, 36, who has taught for 16 years, opened three schools for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan in 1994. These schools taught boys and girls.

As his career progressed, Ullah focused on teaching English and computer skills.

"I teach about computers and English because there are many jobs available in these fields," he explained. "Afghans who wish to obtain higher education abroad need the computer and English skills."

As he spoke, he emphasized his points with his outstretched right hand



Ehsan Ullah is an education pioneer in Afghanistan. In 2002, he opened the first school in Kandahar that allowed girls to attend. He teaches computer and English classes, to help his fellow Afghans work toward a brighter future. "This is what inspires me," he said.

while gently fingering a set of prayer beads with his left. The joy in his voice was punctuated with broad, earnest smiles.

In 2002, Ullah's perseverance achieved a significant milestone: the opening of the first school in Kandahar that allowed girls to attend.

Bringing the school to fruition was not without some serious risk.

"Keep in mind, the school opened right after the fall of the Taliban [in late 2001], so there was still a great deal of fear among the local people," Ullah recalled.

Nonetheless, he remained undaunted, despite threats leveled against him and his family. The Taliban have searched

his family's home in Zabul province several times during the past few years.

"Knowing that I am doing a unique job is a challenge at times, because the Taliban look at what I am doing in a very negative light," he explained.

Ullah still has close ties to Shajoy because he started a small school there. "It is an underground school, because the three teachers there often receive threats."

In 2006, he established computer and English courses at the Women's Association in Lashkar Gah.

Ullah now resides with his wife and children in Kandahar City, where he

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Community center partners with technology institute

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has lived for six years. He teaches at the school he started there: the Shir Zai Institute of Computer and English Training Programs.

In recent months, Ullah launched his biggest education initiative to date, the Afghan School Project.

According to the project's website, located at www.theafghanschool.org, "the Afghan School Project is a grassroots, non-profit initiative to establish and operate a small school in residential Kandahar that will enable students, primarily women, the opportunity to access valuable vocational training and the Internet.

"The project's overall goals are to improve the accessibility and the effectiveness of education in Kandahar by establishing a community center (the Afghan-Canadian Community Center, or ACCC) in residential Kandahar, and to augment instruction in computers, business and English as a second language with online courses from the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and other educational institutes."

The website stresses that the ACCC

"will have a tremendous impact upon the students' quality of life and on the students' ability to find employment in skilled positions in Kandahar."

"The nature of the support also encourages students to seek work in fields such as business management and health care that will benefit Afghanistan as a whole."

Ullah administers the ACCC with help from volunteers in Canada. The ACCC soon will begin offering SAIT online courses in business management and health.

"Most of the seats in these classes will be for women," Ullah emphasized. "A family in Canada offered to provide Internet connections and other technological support for the classes."

Ullah views community centers as a means of improving access to education while providing a safe learning environment for the students.

"We can't go underground. I've been given an opportunity to improve the lives of my fellow Afghans," he stated. "We are fighting those who want to stop our progress. It's a global village: I need you and you need me."

The source of Ullah's passion for his

life's work can be found in the lessons of history.

"I took some United States history courses and was impressed with how men and women worked together," Ullah recalled.

"When I was studying literature, I learned that Europeans flocked to the universities during the Age of Enlightenment. Education was essential for civilization to develop."

Ullah draws motivation from the past, but he looks confidently toward the future, which he sees every day when he goes to work.

"I am inspired when I go to the classroom and see the smiles on the students' faces. I forget about my problems and try to offer the best for my students."

His commitment to his students is paying off. Many of them have begun successful careers in education and international affairs. He is very proud of their efforts.

As conflicts born of ignorance and misunderstanding rage around the world, Ullah remains resolute in his conviction that education is essential for improving people's lives.

"I am doing my job for my children and for the students. This is what inspires me."

Such amazing words do not ring hollow, for they are spoken by a very noble man who is dedicated to improving his city, his nation, his world.

Ullah is also very grateful for the efforts of the U.S. and coalition forces. He knows that thousands of people are working hard to bring Afghanistan back to a place of prominence.

"I wish you the best of luck and success in your very worthwhile initiatives of bringing us peace, security and prosperity, even at the expense of your precious lives," Ullah said.

"History is recording your bravery and all the work you have been doing for a very worthy cause of world peace and development."



COMMANDER'S CORNER



By COL Michael Petrucci
Commander, 205th RSAC

Let me take this opportunity to take a minute to look at where we were and where we are today.

Eight months ago, many of us were coming into a foreign country tasked with developing an enduring Army for the first time. Equipped with skill sets we may have just acquired, we were taking baby steps as we felt our way into relationships and understanding.

Faced with what seemed to be huge challenges and cultural differences, we forged ahead, learning in part by trial and error. We knew where we wanted to go — we weren't exactly sure where the road led. So where are we today?

Simply put, far from where we were. We've built capacity in the ANA — they are a better Army. Take a look around and you'll see them doing what they couldn't do before. We've built economic capacity with projects that have brought water, agricultural growth, infrastructure and education. And we have built friendships, not only with our Afghan brothers and sisters but with each other. Friendships that will endure when we go home.

We need to keep that focus — there is much yet to do. To let up now is both wrong and potentially dangerous. My challenge — stay the course we've set, hold to the high standards we expect, and take care of one another.

US, ANA reach out to Lundey Kalay villagers

By CDR Chad Snee
205th RSAC PAO

The desire to do good by the Afghan people motivated U.S. personnel from the 205th Regional Security Assistance Command (RSAC) and Afghan National Army 205th "Hero" Corps Soldiers to conduct a village medical outreach (VMO) to Lundey Kalay Jan. 22.

The village, situated about five kilometers south of Kandahar Airfield, is home to about 250 men, women and children.

As the sun headed heavenward in a clear blue sky, knocking the chill out of the air, the convoy arrived mid-morning for a two-hour outpouring of goodwill.

Both ANA and U.S. Soldiers began setting up the medical exam station and the distribution point for the gifts that were given to the children and some of their parents.

Security forces personnel established security cordons around and within the village.

When all was in order, children were allowed to enter the secure area, where they first received a basic medical exam and some hygiene and medical supplies.

They then were directed to the back of a seven-ton truck loaded with cold-weather jackets, blankets, shoes, soccer balls and small backpacks stuffed with an assortment school supplies.

The broad smiles on their faces spoke volumes about showing compassion and generosity toward those whose circumstances are difficult and future uncertain.

While the kids were receiving their gifts, U.S. medical personnel gave more personalized attention to the women and their infant children. These exams were conducted in private, in deference to local customs.

The villagers, young and old alike, were visibly pleased with the assistance they were given, and they were

very cooperative and polite.

The positive interactions were due in no small part to the leadership and guidance of Mohammad Kaseam, the senior elder of Lundey Kalay.

Kaseam proudly announced his place of prominence in the village. "I was chosen by members of the village, who are my relatives," he said.

When asked about U.S. forces helping Afghanistan and the ANA, Kaseam struck a positive tone.



On Jan. 22, ANA 205th Corps soldiers helped distribute clothing and other gifts to children in the village of Lundey Kalay. Their efforts were part of a village medical outreach that helped earn the trust of the villagers.

"I believe Afghanistan will become a strong country, and the United States is helping with that," Kaseam replied.

"The ANA is helping the country, and the people must work with the ANA and the coalition forces to bring peace and security to Afghanistan. We must work as a team."

Casting an eye toward future development in his village, Kaseam hoped that one day there would be a school for the children.

In passionate tones, he explained how his lack of education has limited his options.

"Because I am an uneducated man, I was not able to get a good job. So life has been difficult," he explained.

"Education is very important for the

next generation. The children will have a bad future, if they don't study in school.

"A thief can steal your belongings but not your mind."

Elder Kaseam's comments speak eloquently to the key role that education will play in moving Afghanistan toward prosperity and success.

Indeed, education is the antidote to the Taliban and other zealous groups who wish to roll back all of the gains that the Afghan people have made in past five years.

The ANA Soldiers who participated in the VMO were proud of their service to their fellow citizens.

"We are very happy to be here," said one Soldier. "It is good that we can help these people."

Several U.S. Airmen echoed similar sentiments about participating in the VMO.

Maj. Brenda Frye, a physician assistant who works at the Shir Zai medical clinic, stated that a VMO is "a good opportunity to get out and help people."

Airman 1st Class Christina Nissen, who assisted with searching female villagers before they received treatment, neatly summed

up the importance of such outreach efforts.

"It's all about winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people," she asserted.

Staff Sgt. Thane Ojala felt a special bond with the youngsters. "I do it for the kids," she said.

VMOs, such as the one to Lundey Kalay, and other reconstruction and development projects have one central focus: winning the Afghan people to our side.

In the midst of strife and conflict, such missions build the goodwill, respect and trust that are necessary prerequisites to helping the Afghan people take the destiny of their country into their own hands.



Spotlight on Service: CPL Paul Hallenbeck



By 2LT Jeffrey Fullmer
1st Brigade, 205th RSAC PAO

Cpl. Paul Hallenbeck is a Soldier through and through.

As a member of 1st Brigade, 205th Regional Security Assistance Command (RSAC), he has certainly had his share of troubles and seen his share of conflict.

But Hallenbeck doesn't wallow in despair; rather, he is a beacon of hope, which shines brightly, lit by the fire of the Warrior Ethos.

Instead of being negative, he has learned from his experiences here, and he lets the culture of the Afghan Na-

tional Army (ANA) motivate him freely.

He has a solitary focus on improving Afghanistan, and he loves the Afghans as much as anyone in theater does.

The most exciting thing about being out here, he says, is mentoring the ANA.

He thirsts after knowledge, and his mind is porous, open to the ideas of Afghanistan. He thinks that the values of the Afghans are beautiful. It is refreshing to be around people who value family so much, he says.

His goals for this deployment are a reflection of his love for the Afghans.

He wants to train the ANA as well as he can and understand them more.

He seeks to learn from the ANA, so that his ideas and theirs can mingle, allowing the best ideas to glow, and the worst to be revealed to the light of truth.

Only by pondering ideas that are new to us can people truly learn and grow.

His greatest desire regarding the deployment, before he came here, was to find out what kind of fighters the ANA were. He learned quickly that they are as fierce as the best of them.

For Afghanistan, he hopes that someday all Afghans will be able to get an education. This is truly the best way for us to defeat the Taliban and prevent them from gaining a foothold in the future.

As part of an engaged element, actively mentoring the ANA, he has been more deeply integrated into the culture of ordinary Afghans than almost anyone. He knows what he's talking about.

"Education scares the Taliban," he says, "It keeps the Taliban from lying to the Afghans."

There is no doubt that if everyone did as much for Afghanistan as Cpl. Hallenbeck has done, this country would be even better and stronger than it already is.

There is also no doubt that Hallenbeck wants to continue to serve. "I want to go to Iraq," he said. "There's too much fight in me to stay at home."

Yet after all his service and adventures, his goals for the future are simple. He wants to get married and start a family with his fiancé, Tayo.

He has educated the Afghans, and in turn, he has educated us about the Afghans.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "Education . . . is the great equalizer." Only when Afghans are educated will they be free. And we have Cpl. Hallenbeck to thank for bringing to us that eternal truth.



Cpl. Paul Hallenbeck gets ready to patrol in the village of Mirabad in Uruzgan province in August 2006. (Photo by Capt. Christopher Grigsby)