



The Main Effort

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Interpreters bridge language gap for ETT mission

By CDR Chad Snee
205th RCAC PAO

Perhaps the biggest obstacle confronting United States personnel assigned to embedded training teams (ETTs) working with the Afghan National Army is the language gap.

Most Afghan National Army soldiers cannot speak English, and our troops are not familiar with Dari and Pashtu, the two languages encountered most often when working with the Afghans.

To bridge this critical gap, U.S. and coalition personnel work closely with interpreters.

Affectionately called “terps,” these young men perform an absolutely essential function — they catalyze effective communication by translating, in both directions, conversations between the ETTs and their Afghan counterparts.

To get a better feel for what the interpreters do, I sat down Oct. 26 for a casual discussion with Naqeebullah Totakhil and Shirzad, two terps who work for 1st Brigade, 205th Regional Corps Assistance Command.

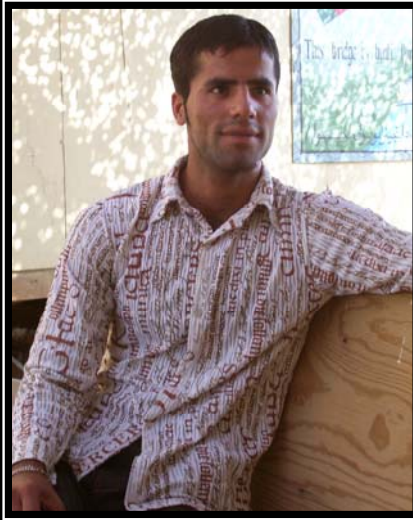
I met with them in their modest but comfortable living quarters on Camp Shir Zai.

Before the interview, we spent some time getting to know one another over cups of hot tea, called “chai,” and handfuls of raisins and salted almonds.

In Afghan culture, this social prelude is a necessary prerequisite, before getting on to the business at hand.

Naqeebullah, a handsome, soft-spoken 22-year-old from Kabul, has been interpreting for just more than 1 year. In addition to English, he speaks Dari, Pashtu, Persian and Urdu.

He told me that he learned about interpreting from a friend and that he



Naqeebullah Totakhil is one of a cadre of dedicated young Afghans who perform an absolutely essential job: bridging the language gap between U.S. and ANA personnel.

decided to apply for a position because he wished to improve his English.

Shirzad, 22, hails from Parwan Province in northern Afghanistan, just south of Mazar-e Sharif. A bright, engaging young man who looks you right in the eye, he exudes confidence and, like Naqeebullah, has a solid command of spoken English.

Shirzad has been an interpreter for 17 months. He also wished to improve his English through his work, and he aspires to study information technology in the United States.

Both men feel a keen sense of pride in their work, knowing that their efforts are helping their country and people.

“For me, the decision to do this work comes from a desire to help our Army and improve the conditions for our people,” stated Naqeebullah. “It is very enjoyable for me to work with the U.S.

forces.”

Shirzad places a premium on honesty and integrity in the performance of his duties.

“Being honest is very important to me,” Shirzad asserted. “I have to do this because it impacts how the U.S., coalition and ANA forces view me and what I do.”

In addition to interpreting, both men take advantage of opportunities to broaden the cultural horizons of the personnel for whom they work.

“When a new person begins working with me, I teach them about the people, culture, customs and religion of Afghanistan,” said Naqeebullah.

I asked if there were any particular challenges associated with their interpreting duties. Both quickly responded that it is very difficult to interpret a discussion when the content of the conversation is unfamiliar.

Shirzad stressed that it is “important to tell the terp what you’re going to discuss, before the session begins. This helps avoid confusion.”

Following our conversation, we gathered for a pleasant lunch at the interpreters’ dining facility at Camp Shir Zai.

It was my first taste of Afghan food, and the delicious meal was a fitting way to end my meeting with these two fine individuals.

Indeed, I came away from my encounter with Naqeebullah and Shirzad very impressed by their commitment, passion and zeal for what they do.

They and their fellow interpreters are an important part of the Task Force Phoenix/205th RCAC team that continues its noble efforts on behalf of the Afghan people.

Afghan Army Corps commanders gather at Shir Zai

**By CDR Chad Snee
205th RCAC PAO**

Corps commanders and other senior leaders of the Afghan National Army gathered at Camp Shir Zai Oct. 30-31 for an informative conference that highlighted ANA accomplishments and identified challenges going forward for the nation's fledgling army.

Also in attendance were senior United States and Coalition leaders, including Gen. David Richards, Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); Maj. Gen. Robert E. Durbin, Commander, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A); and Brig. Gen. Douglas A. Pritt, Commander, Joint Task Force Phoenix V.

Prior to the opening ceremony, conference participants gathered for relaxed conversation and a hearty breakfast of lamb kabobs, flat bread, marmalade and hot tea.

The conference began with a melodic recitation of verses from the Koran, the holy book of Islam, followed by the playing of the Afghan National Anthem.

An honor guard of three ANA soldiers, looking sharp in freshly pressed uniforms, then smartly presented the colors.

Leading the day's presentations was Maj. Gen. Rahmatullah Raufi, commanding general of the ANA 205th Corps, who presented a brief overview of his command.

Gen. Raufi noted that the corps legal staff has been active and that the corps conducted numerous operational and security missions during the past year.

"The main effort of our corps has always been to maintain the security of our nation," he asserted.

Next to address the audience was Chief of Staff of the ANA Gen. Bismullah Khan, who gave a sweeping overview of the state of the ANA.



Gen. Bismullah Khan, Chief of Staff of the Afghan National Army, addresses the ANA Commanders Conference Oct. 30 at Camp Shir Zai.

Gen. Khan stated that much has been achieved, with the help of ISAF and CSTC-A, and he stressed that improving the capabilities of the ANA remains a top priority.

"Heavy weapons will be added, new commando battalions will be established, new and modern equipment will be distributed, and the modernization of the ANA operational and combat elements, including the air corps, will continue," stated Khan.

With regard to improving recruiting and retention, Gen. Khan said that soldiers' salaries have been increased.

However, he acknowledged that there is room for progress, particularly in the area of personnel welfare.

"We are trying and doing our best to remove all shortcomings and improve our daily performance and correct all mistakes," he said. "Looking after the soldiers is a very important point."

Gen. Khan cited improved coordination between the ANA and the Afghan government, through the formation of a policy action group (PAG).

The PAG focuses on four areas, what the general calls "pillars": strategic operations, intelligence, strategic communication and reconstruction.

Gen. Khan called Operations Mountain Lion, Mountain Thrust, Mountain Fury and Medusa "effective"

because they have "weakened and demoralized" the enemy.

Looking forward, the general stressed that the most important objective is recruitment. He wants to see the ANA double in size, to 70,000 soldiers, which requires recruiting about 1,600 volunteers each month.

"We should continue to recruit new volunteers and at the same time try hard to retain our soldiers and encourage them to re-enlist. We must help them," he stated.

Gen. Khan then yielded the stage to Maj. Gen. Durbin, who offered words of encouragement and advice to the ANA leaders.

Gen. Durbin began by lauding the efforts of the ANA sergeants major to improve the professionalism of their army. "This gives me great hope for your future," Durbin said.

Citing the unique challenge of trying to build an army while fighting a determined insurgency, Gen. Durbin emphasized that the mission must come first.

"Mission accomplishment is the top priority," he stressed, "but we always take care of our soldiers."

Durbin pointed out that soldiers going absent without leave (AWOL) is the biggest problem facing the ANA.

He stressed that competent, motivated leaders are the best antidote to the high AWOL rates: "Good soldiers stay in the army of they have good leaders."

Gen. Durbin then concluded with an optimistic assessment of the progress of the ANA.

"I have seen tremendous growth in the competence and professionalism of the ANA," he remarked. "The future of Afghanistan is in the hands of the great leaders of the ANA."

A significant highlight of the first day's events was an address from

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President Hamid Karzai addresses ANA conference

(Continued from previous page) President Hamid Karzai, who joined the conference via a live video feed from Kabul.

In a 20-minute speech, Karzai praised the ANA and sounded the call to patriotism on the part of every citizen of Afghanistan.

“A prosperous future for this nation requires the patriotism of every citizen,” he declared.

He stressed the importance of education and training and taking care of soldiers.

Love of country should be the prime motivator for joining the ANA, he said.

Karzai’s call for patriotic unity is nothing short of historic in a country where clan and tribal allegiances have held sway for centuries.

Karzai made it clear that his country still needs the assistance of U.S. and Coalition forces.

However, he emphasized that “reconstruction should be the responsibility of every Afghan.”

The continued growth and development of the ANA also must remain a top priority, he said.

Ultimately the ANA should become strong enough so that no enemy would think of penetrating the country’s borders. This should be the effort of every ANA member, Karzai proclaimed.

ISAF Commander Gen. David Richards used his few minutes at the podium to declare his command’s unwavering support of the ANA.

“You deserve the strongest support from all of us, and I am committed that we will deliver it,” Richards stated. “If the Afghan people see upward progress, then I’m very confident we

will succeed and see an improved security situation next year.”

Other briefings presented the first day covered upcoming operations to improve security and strengthen so-called Afghan Development Zones;

A presentation on the division of Religious and Cultural Affairs brought attention to the emotional and spiritual needs of soldiers and their families.

The priorities of the RCA include the ANA literacy program; establishing an effective Morale, Welfare and Recreation program; family support operations; and building memorial halls for the five ANA corps. Additional briefs focused on countering improvised explosive devices (IED) and establishing joint coordination centers for the purpose of improving security throughout Afghanistan.

Sgt. Maj. Shamsudine, the command sergeant major (CSM) of the ANA 201st Corps, gave the day’s final presentation: a summary of the CSM conference that took place at the same time as the ANA Corps Commanders conference.

Shamsudine discussed ways to improve soldiers’ performance on the battlefield, to include weapons discipline, marksmanship and physical fitness.

Gen. Bismullah Khan brought the conference to a close by expressing his desired end state for the ANA: “I hope that we will have a self-sufficient army that is capable of safeguarding the country.”

Khan’s wish was one that all assembled in the room found entirely appropriate and fitting.

Overall, the conference affirmed how far the ANA has come while providing practical guidance for how best to address some of the obstacles that stand in the way of the ANA reaching its full potential.



Members of the Afghan National Army general staff gather in front of the ANA Corps flags, following the completion of the ANA Corps Commanders Conference Oct. 31 at Camp Shir Zai.

operational planning; readiness reporting, which is required to capture the capabilities of the ANA; personnel issues; and legal issues.

The second day of the conference, Oct. 31, began with an informative presentation on the ANA inspector general system, given by Maj. Gen. Shah.

Shah pointed out that the ANA IG is a new system dedicated to the following functions: assistance, inspections, investigations, teaching and training, and intelligence oversight.

“We are working to increase readiness throughout the ANA,” he stated. “We must be able to solve problems based on facts and standards.”

Shah reminded the audience that standards must be enforced to have a strong command climate.

Airman, Soldier receive RC South command coins

**By CDR Chad Snee
205th RCAC PAO**

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jason L. Haas and Army 1st Lt. Daniel J. Fay were awarded Regional Command South command coins Oct. 31.

Canadian Brig. Gen. David Fraser, commander of Regional Command South, presented the coins to Haas and Fay for their outstanding efforts in support of the Role 3 hospital at Kandahar Airfield.

[Editor's note: On Nov. 1, Dutch Maj. Gen. Ton Van Loon relieved Fraser as commander of Regional Command South.]

Role 3 provides medical care to Coalition forces. However, the hospital also sees Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police personnel and local nationals on an emergency basis.

Both Haas and Fay serve as medical liaison officers for the ANA, which means that they are called upon to transfer ANA patients from Role 3 to either the hospital in Kandahar or to the clinic at Camp Shir Zai.

The clinic is just a few kilometers from Kandahar Airfield.



1st Lt. Daniel Fay, center, and Tech. Sgt. Jason Haas, right, listen to comments from Brig. Gen. David Fraser, following a short ceremony in which Fay and Haas received Regional Command South command coins from Fraser for their dedicated work on behalf of the Role 3 hospital at Kandahar Airfield.

The two servicemen basically created their jobs, based on emergent needs that the Role 3 hospital was not in a position to satisfy.

“Role 3 doesn’t have any liaison capability to deal with these patients,” explained Fay. “We pick up where Role 3 leaves off.

“Our job is to keep the beds open at Role 3, because that hospital exists to take care of Coalition forces.”

Haas pointed out that their job often requires working odd hours, sometimes on very short notice.

“Whenever ANP or local nationals

show up at the hospital, we are called,” Haas stated.

Despite the demands placed upon them, both men expressed satisfaction with their work.

Their dedication and willingness to help did not escape the notice of Role 3 personnel, who nominated the duo to receive Regional Command South command coins.

The coins are individually numbered and are presented on a limited basis for the performance of duties that measurably enhance Regional Command South mission effectiveness.

205th Soldiers awarded CMB, CIBs

**By CDR Chad Snee
205th RCAC PAO**

A Combat Medical Badge and two Combat Infantryman Badges were awarded Oct. 26 to three Soldiers assigned to the 205th Regional Corps Assistance Command in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Cpl. Gabriel Sudyka, a combat medic from Salem, Ore., received the CMB for performing first aid and other lifesaving measures while under fire.

According to Sudyka’s award citation, the CMB acknowledges his “performance of medical duties while engaged in ground combat,” during the period of August 2006.

Sudyka, 28, was pleased to receive this important recognition, which came after experiencing a good deal of combat. “I’ve been in more than my fair share of fire fights,” he said.

Sgt. First Class Sean P. Mishra, 35, of Klamath Falls, Ore., and MAJ Mark C. Lear, 35, of Galesburg, Ill., each were awarded the CIB for the performance of their duties during separate enemy engagements.

Mishra received his CIB for combat operations against the enemy that occurred June 24 in Panjwayi District, a focal point of intense fighting during



Cpl. Gabriel Sudyka, left, receives the Combat Medical Badge from Col. Michael Petrucci Oct. 26. To Sudyka’s left are Maj. Mark Lear and Sgt. First Class Sean Mishra, who received the Combat Infantryman Badge for the performance of their duties during combat.

the past several months.

The CIB was presented to Lear for his involvement in combat operations that took place July 2 in Shorikay, Helmand Province.

‘Post-Dispatch’ story touts Missouri Guard efforts

**By CDR Chad Snee
205th RCAC PAO**

The concerted efforts of Missouri Army National Guard personnel to train the Afghan National Army are detailed in a story published Oct. 28 in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Post-Dispatch reporter Phillip O’Connor highlights the activities of the 16 Missouri Guardsmen assigned to Camp Shir Zai, an ANA garrison located a few kilometers from Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan.

“The Missourians come from guard units based in Joplin, Springfield, Jefferson City, Kansas City, St. Louis and elsewhere,” writes O’Connor. “Frequently, trainers accompany the Afghans into the field to set up a traffic checkpoint or gather information from villagers.

“Some travel to distant forward operating bases, where they stay for weeks at a time and launch combat patrols with Afghan forces.”

O’Connor recounts some of the challenges that face the Guardsmen when dealing with the ANA, including language barriers, missing equipment and (at times) high rates of desertion.

Nonetheless, the Guardsmen are forging strong relationships with their

ANA counterparts.

O’Connor quotes 1st Sgt. Kevin Cox as saying, “We live with them, eat with them, fight with them, die with them.”

Cox works closely with approximately 80 ANA soldiers, teaching them field artillery.

Exploring the perspective of the ANA soldiers, O’Connor focuses on 27-year-old Sgt. First Class Azim Mohammad.

“Mohammad joined the [ANA] in 2002 after his family returned from Pakistan, where they had lived as refugees since the Soviet era,” says O’Connor.

“He ran a bookstore in his hometown of Khost for a while before he took a pay cut to enter the military.

“A four-year veteran, he recently re-enlisted and now is paid \$125 a month, which he uses to support his wife and



1st Sgt. Kevin Cox, right, a member of the Missouri Army National Guard, meets with Afghan National Army soldiers stationed at Camp Shir Zai, near Kandahar, Afghanistan, in late October. (Photo courtesy of David Carson of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.)

two children.”

O’Connor quotes Mohammad as saying, “I miss my business, my store, my family, but to work for the army and the country is more important than being home. We saw our country in better condition day by day. I wanted to serve my country.”

O’Connor concludes his report by noting that the Missouri Guardsmen are looking forward to going home next year, but that they will find it bittersweet to leave the ANA soldiers.

“The bond is real tight,” says 1st Sgt. Cox in O’Connor’s story. “They all know me. We’ve been through a lot together. We’ve been shot at. I trust some of them with my life.”

For his part, Mohammad believes that the presence of U.S. and Coalition forces will be required until the ANA becomes a viable force of its own.

“We need their help because our country is in a bad situation,” Mohammad is quoted as saying in O’Connor’s story.

Overall, though, progress is being made, and the dedicated Missouri Guardsmen at Camp Shir Zai are one solid reason why Afghanistan is moving forward.



COMMANDER’S CORNER



**By COL Michael Petrucci
Commander, 205th RCAC**

During the last two months, we’ve enjoyed a period of relatively fewer enemy activities directed against our Afghan brothers and the Warriors of the 205th Regional Corps Assistance Command.

For this we should be thankful but also vigilant because the threat is still there. This more peaceful climate has allowed us to focus increased efforts on those projects that will help a population looking for a better life.

It’s good to report that through the work of many we have brought new schools, new wells, new capacities to

many distant locations. We’ll soon help restore an ancient irrigation system that will bring agriculture back to an area once rich with crops.

Inside Kandahar our work will help create 550 jobs in a textile factory that means not only wellness for the workers, but also wellness for the economy through the creation of new jobs. All of this happening while we help the ANA build an enduring force that will ensure the security and growth of Afghanistan.

As we celebrate our Thanksgiving, remember those at home and the freedoms and prosperity given to us by those who have gone before.