

COALITION

Issue 68

*General Petraeus Assumes
Command of ISAF*

*Albania Sends Combat
Troops to Afghanistan*

*Interview with MG Hashem
CCC Director*



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Photo of General David H. Petraeus during the ceremony where he assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. ISAF Photo by Staff Sgt. Bradley Lail

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A doctor of the Spanish Operational Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT) performs a routine check up on a child at the Shindand Women's Center in Shindand, Afghanistan. ISAF Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Makenzie Lang



Editorial



In this issue, the editorial staff of Coalition Magazine brings to the readers stories covering different topics and places where the Coalition Forces are involved. We had the pleasure of interviewing Major General Hashem, the Director of Coalition

Coordination Center to bring to the readers his insight on different issues. In his interview, MG Hashem referred to his last assignment to Director of CCC as an honor and he praised the cooperation level among the Coalition countries represented at USCENTCOM.

The change of command in Afghanistan was an event of high importance for all the Coalition members. General Petraeus, known for his military experience and the commanding skills successfully displayed during the Iraq war, makes us optimistic that the situation in Afghanistan will gradually improve and the day that the Afghan National Army will take over the security of their country is getting closer to becoming a reality.

The Senior Editor of our magazine, CPT Dritor Papa, highlights in this issue the increasing contributions that our Coalition and NATO member, Albania, is giving to the Coalition. The end of July marked the deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, of an Albanian unit comprised of 44 combat troops, the first combat unit from Albania, but as the Albanian Prime Minister Mr. Berisha stressed during the departure ceremony, that unit will very soon and gradually followed by other troops, where ever the Alliance needs them.

We also bring in this issue the contribution and the efforts that the Czech helicopter units are giving in Afghanistan. They are assisting and training the Afghan pilots deal with the latest operational procedures and equipments.

We also highlight the Coalition Counter IED Conference that will be held here in USCENTCOM during 27-29 September and the sixth anniversary of the Helping Hand Operation that was celebrated in May this year. For more details, please fill free to go through this issue.

LTC Ali E. Al Kuwari
Qatar Armed Forces
Coalition Public Affairs Team

NEWS IN BRIEF

ISAF Continues Efforts to Reduce Civilian Casualties

“We must continue our emphasis on reducing the loss of innocent civilian life to an absolute minimum,” said Gen. Petraeus in his recently released Tactical Directive. “Every Afghan death diminishes our cause. While we have made progress in our efforts to reduce coalition-caused civilian casualties, we know the measure by which our mission will be judged is protecting the population from harm by either side. We will redouble our efforts to prevent insurgents from harming their neighbors.”

www.nato.int/isaf

New Afghan Facilities Improve Counter Insurgency Efforts

The Afghan National Police are actively engaged in fighting the counterinsurgency, to aid in this effort Afghans and coalition forces are rapidly building ANP facilities throughout the Kandahar Province.

The area’s Afghan Border Police will soon have safe places they can call home after working along the Pakistani border.

The compounds will contain living quarters, administrative offices, dining facilities, laundry facilities, warehouses and ammunition storage areas completely surrounded by security walls interspersed with guard towers.

www.nato.int/isaf

Afghan Army Reaches Targeted Strength Early

KABUL -- In a positive development for the country’s rapidly expanding security capability, the Afghan National Army announced on August 10, at the Ministry of Defense that it reached the benchmark strength of 134,000 soldiers two months ahead of schedule.

The announcement, made by Maj. Gen. Zahir Azimi in a press conference held jointly with the ISAF, signified that progress in recruiting and retention is outpacing attrition in recent months, and congratulations on the achievement were immediately extended by ISAF spokesman Brig. Gen. Josef Blotz. Emblematic of the growing capability of the army were the other topics of discussion, which included flood relief in the eastern provinces, special forces operations against insurgent networks, and planned security for next months’ parliamentary elections.

www.ntm-a.com

Reflections of Major General Steven J. Hashem

Director of the Coalition Coordination Center

**Interview of:
Senior Editor of Coalition
Captain Dritor Papa**



**Major General Steven J. Hashem
Director, CCC CENTCOM,
Tampa FL**

Major General Steven J. Hashem assumed responsibility as the Director, Coalition Coordination Center, United States Central Command in April 2010. Prior to his current assignment, he served for 32 months as the Director for Training, Knowledge and Futures (J7/9/10), United States Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

He is a native of Concord, New Hampshire and was commissioned in the Infantry upon graduation from the United States Military Academy in 1974. During his senior year, he won the West Point light-heavy-weight (178-lb.) boxing championship. He earned an MA degree in international relations (Russian/Soviet Studies) from the University of Pennsylvania and an MBA degree in corporate policy and planning (Strategic Planning and Finance) from the Wharton School.

General Hashem is a graduate of the Infantry and Civil Affairs Officer Advanced Courses, the Psycho-

logical Operations Officer's Course, the Command and General Staff College, the United States Army War College, the National Defense University Capstone Course and has attended several executive leadership courses at Harvard University. Awards and decorations earned by General Hashem include two awards of the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, and the Bronze Star Medal. In 1999, General Hashem was selected as a Distinguished Member of the Civil Affairs Corps and in 2007 he was named an honorary member of the Special Forces Association.

1- Sir, you have recently been appointed as Director of CCC at US-CENTCOM, can you share with us how do you feel after assuming this assignment?

It is an incredible honor for me to be selected as the Director of the Coalition Coordination Center (CCC). During my 36-year military career beginning with my first assignment in West Berlin, FRG, in 1975, I have always thoroughly enjoyed interacting with people from other countries. I have had the privilege of working very closely with international civilian and military personnel during my assignments in Bosnia and Iraq and throughout my life as a Civil Affairs officer. I see this as another tremendous opportunity and professional development experience. There is so much that we can learn from one another, not to mention all of the great friendships that are developed. As one of my esteemed international colleagues stated so eloquently recently about his experience in the Coalition, "When you share feelings and thoughts, you are sharing life." In my

mind, the Coalition in CENTCOM is a treasure. There is no other organization like it in the world.

2- As the Coalition Coordination Director, what goals did you have set when you assumed the command and what would you say has been the hardest challenge so far?

I would start by saying that I inherited an excellent organization. Air Commodore Samulski, Major General Livingston and their predecessors have done an excellent job in creating an outstanding entity. That being said, I have two main goals. First of all, continue to enhance, build, and leverage the Coalition presence at CENTCOM based on the Commander's future vision to include better engagement and involvement. Secondly, get the organizational structure and Command and Control (C2) right-sized to best support the Coalition. My toughest challenge has been in establishing a core of permanent manpower in the CCC. Right now the CCC is an ad-hoc organization staffed completely with temporary personnel to include reserve component and active duty personnel that are here usually for one year or less, although oftentimes they are extended. Permanent manning is important not only for the continuity of the organization, but also for establishing personal relationships with the SNRs and their staffs. That being said, the leadership in the J5 and the CENTCOM Command Group share my concern and are committed to helping resolve the situation.

3- There are 60 countries that are part of the Coalition in CENTCOM. What would be your working priorities to ensure that there is a harmonious effort generated in the Coalition in our unified fight against terrorism?

The threat of terrorism is a problem that we all face. Sharing of information is critical. However, it needs to be both ways - not just the US pushing information to the Coalition. It's important that we are as open and transparent as possible with each other within existing national security guidelines. This means frank, honest discussions from all parties that enable us to share our unique perspectives. That being said, there is only so much that the Coalition in Tampa can do. This kind of effort needs to be on a much broader stage at a more macro level. And it certainly includes more than just the military. It requires civil-military unity of action. This is a contest about wills. The friendly nations of the world have to be committed to this fight for the long term - not only with words, but through their individual and collective actions.

4- In your opinion, how important is the role of Coalition Coordination Center in CENTCOM?

The Coalition Coordination Center plays an extremely important role in CENTCOM. The CCC acts as the primary US-CENTCOM liaison to SNRs and LNOs of our coalition militaries. We coordinate with various stakeholders to generate and maintain Coalition partner force offers to include funding, sourcing and logistical sustainment. Finally, CCC personnel facilitate maximum SNR engagement with the CENTCOM staff and the local community to enhance sharing of ideas and cultural interaction. Our primary focus is to provide exemplary support to our Coalition partners.

5- Have you noticed that our Coalition's mission has changed or evolved?

In the short time that I have been in the position, I haven't really noticed a dramatic shift in the mission of the Coalition. However, I think the trend over the long term will be a focus more toward "train and advise" and mentoring missions, especially as combat operations wind down in Afghanistan. Security Force Assistance (SFA) will become more important, not only in Afghanistan, but in other nations as well. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan must be won by winning the support of the local population rather than primarily by killing enemy fighters. I truly believe that there is nothing more important than assisting the Afghan Government and Afghan National Security Forces in becoming fully capable and winning the trust and confidence of the Afghan people. The Coalition can play a big role in that regard. I would also add that I wouldn't limit it just to the defense side of the equation. Development and diplomacy are important as well and our international partners certainly can contribute in those areas.

6- Do you find that the Coalition is integrated well enough with HQ US Central Command?

I do not think that the Coalition is integrated well enough within HQs US Central Command. We have a great mix with our embedded staff, Combined Planning Group (CPG) members and SNRs, but we can do better. As a part of my initial

orientation, I have met with many of the senior leaders on the CENTCOM staff, individual SNRs and members of the CCC and they have expressed the same sentiment. They have given me some great ideas on how we can get the Coalition more engaged and involved and I will be implementing several of those ideas soon after I have vetted them with the SNRs. There is untapped potential regarding the Coalition. We all need to be more creative and innovative in how we maximize their involvement and contributions in a way that is meaningful for all parties.

7- In terms of size or number of countries, do you see our Coalition growing or shrinking in the near future? What impact or challenges would that possibly provide to our mission?

Ideally, I would like to see the Coalition continue to grow, but I'm not sure how realistic that is given the financial constraints that many nations, to include the United States, are experiencing. In addition, as the situation improves in Afghanistan, nations may decide to cut back on their presence in Tampa. At a minimum, I think that it is very important to have SNRs here from AOR countries, NATO and ISAF nations. It is very important for non-NATO troop contributing nations to have SNRs in Tampa because this is a unique forum for them to liaise on their unique issues. There is no other organization in the world with a military liaison function for those countries like at CENTCOM.

There's a lot more that the Coalition can do in the areas of theater security cooperation, combating terrorism, anti-piracy and crisis prevention. We would love to have as many nations here as possible, but ultimately that is a national decision that each country must make for itself. Obviously, CENTCOM has some influence over that by how well we treat, empower, involve and support the various representatives.

If there is a reduction in the number of countries at CENTCOM, it could impair our ability to respond quickly to AOR strategic initiatives or threats.

8- What advice do you have for new Senior National Representatives serving in our Coalition?

First of all, take advantage of the great opportunity that you have here to learn as much as you can about Coalition operations abroad and about the way the United States military and interagency work. Secondly, travel around Florida and throughout America. Most of all get engaged and involved not only in the activities at CENTCOM and with other nations, but also within the local community. Tampa is a great place to live and work and its citizens are incredibly supportive of our Coalition partners. Bottom line is maximize your experience here. This should be one of the greatest and most meaningful experiences of your life if you get involved and are willing to share your unique perspective, thoughts, and ideas.

General Petraeus Assumes Command of ISAF

*Story by SFC Matthew Chlosta
ISAF Public Affairs Office*

KABUL, Afghanistan - U.S. Army Gen. David H. Petraeus emphasized the continuity of the counterinsurgency strategy as he assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force in front of the ISAF headquarters building, July 4, 2010.

Framed by towering pine trees, Petraeus was introduced by German Army Gen. Egon Ramms, the commander of NATO Allied Joint Force Command Headquarters Brunssum, in the Netherlands.

“As President Obama and NATO Secretary General Rasmussen have noted, my assumption of command represents a change in personnel, not a change in policy or strategy,” Petraeus said. “To be sure, I will, as any new commander should, together with ISAF, Afghan, and diplomatic partners, examine our civil-military effort to determine where refinements might be needed.”

“I feel privileged to be joining this critical effort at such

a pivotal time,” Petraeus said. “We are engaged in a tough fight. After years of war, we have arrived at a critical moment. We must demonstrate to the Afghan people, and to the world, that Al Qaeda and its network of extremist allies will not be allowed to once again establish sanctuaries in Afghanistan from which they can launch attacks on the Afghan people and on freedom-loving nations around the world. And with the surge in ISAF forces and the growth of our Afghan partners, we have a new opportunity to do just that.

On the United States 234th birthday, the lawn in front of ISAF Headquarters was thronged with dignitaries and media as Petraeus spoke.

“We are engaged in a contest of wills,” Petraeus said. “Our enemies are doing all that they can to undermine the confidence of the Afghan people. In so doing, they are killing and maiming innocent Afghan civilians on a daily basis.”





Gen. David H. Petraeus speaks after he assumed command of NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. (ISAF Photos by Staff Sgt. Bradley Lail)

“Up front, I also want to recognize the enormous contributions of my predecessor, General Stan McChrystal,” Petraeus said. “We have all worked hard together over the past year-and-a-half to get the inputs right in Afghanistan. No one did more in helping to get the inputs right than General McChrystal. And the progress made in recent months, in the face of a determined enemy, is in many respects the result of the vision, energy, and leadership he provided during his time as COMISAF.

Petraeus arrived at his new headquarters in Kabul on Friday evening and has been getting briefings from his staff and meeting with key Afghan officials, to include Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai and the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry.

“To our diplomatic and international civilian partners here today: We are all – civilian and military, Afghan and international – part of one team with one mission,” Petraeus said. “Indeed, we all recognize the grave threat that the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the associated ‘syndicate’ of extremists pose to this country, to this region, and to the world. We cannot accomplish our mission without working together.”

The more than 140,000 international personnel from 47 nations assigned to ISAF support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its efforts to protect the Afghan people and to secure its territory from violent extremists, who pose a transnational threat.

“To the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians of ISAF and USFOR-A: I pledge to do all that I can to provide the best leadership, direction, and example that I can muster,” Petraeus said. “Your accomplishments this year have been impressive. Predictably, as we have sought

to reverse the Taliban’s momentum and take away insurgent safe havens, the enemy has fought back. Recent months in Afghanistan have seen hard fighting and tough casualties. As we press on in our vital mission, we must continue our efforts to reduce the loss of innocent civilians to an absolute minimum.”

ISAF works to develop the capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces, and partners with the ANSF to reduce the capability and will of anti-government forces through nationwide counterinsurgency operations.

“To the many Afghan partners in uniform who have joined us this morning: Thanks for your tremendous courage and commitment,” Petraeus said. “Indeed, Afghan forces are now in the lead in Kabul and in a number of other areas. In such cases, Afghan units are the ‘supported’ forces, operating with assistance from ISAF to be sure, but already shouldering the responsibilities of leadership.”

The ISAF command synchronizes security efforts with ongoing improvements in governance and socio-economic development, in order to provide an environment for sustainable stability.

“To our Afghan partners: We will do all that we can to help you build a country free of the fear of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, a country in which all citizens can live in peace with one another and provide for themselves and their families,” Petraeus said. “Nothing has been easy in Afghanistan; however, we can all take heart from the progress that has been made on the security front and beyond.

“Indeed, seven million Afghan children are now in school, as opposed to less than one million a decade ago,” Petraeus said. “Immunization rates for children are now in the 70 to 90 percent range nationwide. Cell phones are ubiquitous in a country that had virtually none during the Taliban days, though the Taliban seeks to deny their use. Kabul is a bustling, busy city, as are Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jalalabad.”

Petraeus was nominated by U.S. President Barack Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 1.

Petraeus most recently served as the Commander of the U.S. Central Command and oversaw U.S. support to the NATO ISAF mission, which was mandated by the United Nations Security Council.

“Finally, to the people of Afghanistan: it is a great honor to be in your country and to lead ISAF,” Petraeus said. “I want to emphasize what a number of our country’s leaders recently affirmed – that our commitment to Afghanistan is an enduring one and that we are committed to a sustained effort to help the people of this country over the long-term. Neither you nor the insurgents nor our partners in the region should doubt that.

“We must demonstrate to the people and to the Taliban that Afghan and ISAF forces are here to safeguard the Afghan people, and that we are in this to win,” Petraeus said. “That is our clear objective.”

Albania Sends Combat Troops to Afghanistan

*By Captain Dritor Papa
Senior Editor of Coalition
Albanian Armed Forces*

This peacekeeping contingent, comprised of 44 personnel from the Albanian Land Forces Special Battalion, will be conducting operations side by side with the ISAF operating troops in Afghanistan.

Even though a relatively small country, Albania has always played an active role in promoting peace and stability in the world. This has also been shown by participating in the peacekeeping missions in different parts of the world, and lately in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a gradual way since first engaged in Afghanistan, the number of the deployed troops increased and now there are almost 250 troops, most of them attached to the Turkish and Italian contingents. So far, these troops have been generally playing a support role and have not actively been engaged in combat operations.

On July 28, 2010, the Albanian contingent named "Eagle-1" left the country in a departing ceremony held in the Albanian capital city, Tirana.

In the ceremony were present the Prime Minister of Alba-

nia, Mr. Sali Berisha, the Minister of the Defense, Mr. Arben Imami, the Chief of Defense of the Albanian Armed Forces, Brigadier General Maksim Malaj, generals and high level officials and family members of the departing contingent. There were also present representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, foreign military and civilian representatives accredited in Tirana.

In his speech, Prime Minister Berisha emphasized how important that day was not only for the people attending the ceremony but for the whole Albania. In little more than one year since the day of our membership in NATO, the biggest alliance of freedom of all time, we today deploy the first unit of military personnel with a new mission, with a combat mission, we deploy our troops in one of the biggest battles



Group Photo of Prime Minister of Albania Mr. Sali Berisha , Minister of Defense Mr. Arben Imami, Chief of Defense of AAF BG Maksim Malaj and other high level officials together with the departing contingent.

that the civilized nations and the alliance have ever been involved. On this occasion, Prime Minister Berisha expressed his gratitude to the government of the United States for the valuable support that they have always been providing in the training of our peace keeping troops.

“I am totally convinced, - Prime Minister Berisha continued, - that you will honor the flag of your country. You are departing like eagles, the symbol of our flag that you are going to keep with you. The mission that you are going to accomplish is difficult, but based on your high level of professionalism I am sure that you will successfully accomplish it.” He concluded his speech by reassuring the participants that the Albanian Government will continue to work for the Armed Forces, support them, and gradually will increase the contribution in the peacekeeping missions up to battalion level, where ever they will be needed by the alliance.

In his speech, the Minister of Defense of Albania, addressed to the contingent of officers, non commissioned officers and soldiers going to the war zone. He said, “You are aware of the importance of the duty and the operation level that you have been assigned. The Albanian Government, the Albanian people and the allies have faith in you. Our government, with the help of the United States of America and other allies has done great efforts to improve your training and your professional level. There is only one adjuration that I have for you: Be Albanian men, brave and faithful; be pro-

fessional and not hateful toward the enemy, obey the orders of your superiors, and at every moment think about and help each other.”

He concluded his speech by expressing once again his belief that the departing peacekeeping troops will accomplish their mission in a successful manner and will come back safe and sound; full of dignity to their homeland and families. The Chief of Defense of the Albanian Armed Forces, BG Maksim Malaj and the U.S. Embassy in Tirana representative, Mr. Paul Poletes also addressed to the contingent wishing them a successful mission and a safe return.

Later on, Prime Minister Berisha handed over the National Flag to the contingent commander, Lieutenant Colonel Dritan Demiraj.

The departing ceremony concluded with a group picture of Prime Minister Berisha, Defense Minister Imami, high level officials and the departing contingent to Afghanistan.

Prior to departing, this contingent has undergone a special intensive training in accordance with the duties expected to carry out in their area of operation, in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Their training was closely observed by a team of experienced American troops that have already participated in these types of operations. Due to the importance of the mission, the Commander of the Albanian Land Forces Special Battalion will be commanding the contingent in their 6-month tour to Kandahar, Afghanistan.



Photo of the departing contingent during the ceremony held on this occasion, Tirana, Albania



Coalition Counter IED-Conference 2010

*By CIED Working Group
LTC Michael Thoegersen
MAJ Peter Forsberg*

During 27 - 29 September 2010 a large Counter Improvised Explosive Device (CIED) Conference will take place here in Tampa. The conference is organized by the Coalition CIED Working Group in close cooperation with CENTCOM J3 CIED Branch.

We hope this year's conference will be as appreciated as much as the last one held in November 2009. This year's conference will go more in depth than the previous conference held in 2009, of which you can read in the Coalition Magazine, Issue 64.

This year's theme will center on Defeating IED Systems. In choosing this area of concentration we seek to share best practices that promote a holistic approach to defeating the global threat that is critical to protecting our nations' forces.

The conference will focus on the growing IED threat in Afghanistan and touch on other hotspots due to the proliferation of IED networks around the globe. More than 80

percent of all Casualties in Afghanistan are a horrible reality resulting from the devastation produced by IEDs. Year to Date, IED activity in the ISAF AOR has increased by more than 140 percent compared to the same period last year.

We would like to have as many nations as possible attend the CIED Conference. The intent is to gather CIED Subject Matter Experts from across a wide variety of military and civilian sectors; including law enforcement, industry, and academia thus enhancing the overall success of the conference. Selected individuals from various CIED Organizations and agencies will present briefings and participate in panel discussions and working groups.

The End State of the CIED-conference is:

- A new perspective on CIED within a whole of government approach
- Open up and improved relations between participating organizations and countries





- Concrete actions to assist coalition partners and enhance their CIED capabilities

In order to achieve a tangible outcome for all participating individuals, nations and organizations, briefers from many influential organizations including the U.S. State Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Department of Defence and Explosive Ordnance Disposal units from coalition partners will participate. Together with skilful syndicate leaders and active participation the outcome of these three days will be beneficial for everyone and allow the participants to establish networks within the industry to further international cooperation.

Several similar CIED-forums already exist but NO other forum is attempting the same outreach as the CENTCOM Coalition. Every nation approaches “Defeating IED networks” differently. This opportunity will give each nation the opportunity to further refine its collective knowledge and respective approach to “Defeating the Network.” This global approach will tie Law Enforcement, Department of Defense and coalition countries together resulting in a holistic government approach to countering the global IED threat. Furthermore, we need to educate ourselves in order to better understand our collective and respective approaches to “Attack the Network” - a common operational picture is needed.



In doing this we will enhance our ability to move away from being reactive and take on a more proactive approach, thereby moving further “left of the boom.”

The conference will offer all participating nations within the Coalition recommendations on ways to enhance holistic government approach to defeating IED systems.

The conference will be held, at the CENTCOM JIOC (LCDR Otis Vincent Tolbert Building), in Tampa, 27 - 29 September 2010.



Helping Hand Operation's Sixth Anniversary

**By: Bob Silah,
Captain, USN (retired)
Chairman OpHH**

A few months ago in May 2010, Operation Helping Hand (Op HH) celebrated its sixth anniversary.

It was in early 2004 that, with the help of Dr. Steve Scott, I started this project to"Assist and support the U.S. active duty military wounded/injured patients who are being treated at the James A. Haley Va hospital here in Tampa, and their visiting families." After a slow start, it became a Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Tampa chapter project, with a significant number of chapter members taking part in what we do as our mission.

Over the past six years we have been there to help over 600 of the wounded/injured. Each month Op HH hosts a dinner for the wounded/injured and their families, honoring them with bouquets of flowers and gifts, and each month there is a contingent of Coalition Senior National Representatives' and their staff members at these dinners to join in the festivities honoring our patients.

The coalition continues to be an avid supporter of Op HH since the inception of Op HH. We have continued to meet the daily needs of patients and families with approximately \$750,000 in cash or checks, and over \$800,000 in in-kind materials and services. We send needed clothing to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany monthly for the wounded patients coming in from Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are sending clothing and supplies to Kuwait and to the medical center in Balad, Iraq.

We have branched out with our efforts to become more pro-active to offer more. While we continue to meet the day-to-day needs of our patients and their families here in Tampa, we now offer round-trip air travel for the immediate family members coming to Tampa from anywhere in the United States to visit and be with their loved ones. This air travel is at our expense, as we have provided over \$65,000 to these families for their Tampa visits. We also arranged "a day with



Representatives from USCENTCOM and family members receiving flowers and gifts during the anniversary dinner

the Tampa Bay Rays" in mid July where we hosted over 50 patients, their family members, and staff to watch the Tampa Bay Rays-Cleveland Indians baseball game at Tropicana field in a covered suite with all accommodations, food and refreshments provided entirely by operation helping hand. In addition, for our patients' mothers, wives, and sisters, we are coordinating a "Day at the Spa" for the ladies, again sponsored by Op HH.

We will continue our mission as long as these military patients continue to arrive here for treatment.

The majority are OIF/OEF combat wounded, having suffered from head injuries, amputations, and other poly trauma casualties. Our James A. Haley VA hospital here in Tampa is the busiest VA hospital in the U.S.

We will remain ready to help as long as we are able to. We are thankful that we've been able to give support and meet the needs of our patients and their families, and we are also thankful that we continue to receive corporate donations, grants, and personal contributions that



allow us to give them the help they deserve. There's nothing more I'd like than to be able to "close shop" when there will be no more wounded/injured and the need for Operation Helping Hand will cease, as the last of the patients leave and return home.



The Czech Helicopters in Afghanistan

*Story and Pictures:
Courtesy of the Czech Office
at USCENTCOM*

The Czech Armed Forces are participating in two air missions in Afghanistan. One unit is conducting air operational training at Kabul Airport as a part of the Air Mentor team (AMT). The other unit is providing air support to RC-E HQ from Sharana Air Base.

AOLMT

Small, but vital – this might be a good definition of this unit. In 2008, the Czech Republic donated six MI-17 transport helicopters and six MI-24 support helicopters to the embryonic Afghan Air Corps (AFC). With other helicopters of this type, the AFC has a capable inventory of rotary wing aircraft but requires trained pilots and aviation technicians. Since April 2008, Czech military pilots and technical personnel from the air base in Naměšť nad Oslavou and the helicopter base in Prerov have trained their Afghan counterparts to operate and maintain MI-24 helicopters.

Afghan pilots are very experienced in flying these helicopters but require additional training in operating the

helicopters in accordance with the Coalition rules, using Coalition technology, and maintaining these airframes to Coalition standards. For example, if you show a map of Afghanistan to an Afghan pilot, he promptly points his finger to the destination he has been directed to fly to. But his ability to use Coalition GPS technology does not yet match his otherwise excellent flying skills, and flying with GPS is strictly required for precise cooperation with Coalition Forces. Regarding helicopter maintenance, Afghan pilots tend to operate these airframes until a malfunction appears; Czech technical personnel are sharing their experiences with and training their Afghan counterparts to plan and conduct scheduled/preventative maintenance on these sensitive and high value assets.

But not everything is easy and simple. AMT members are sharing “lessons learned” with the leaders of the Afghan Air Force and addressing future challenges to the continued success of this new armed service. For example, helicopters are



The Commander of Heli Unit while reporting to the Chief of General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces

largely flown by older Afghan pilots who are at times reluctant to be used in Afghanistan-wide support and often operate using a fixed mindset. So, recruiting a new and younger generation of Afghan pilots is a key priority for the Afghan air force.

Using its many years of experience in operating and maintaining these two types of helicopters combined with its skill in operating IAW NATO airspace and navigation requirements – the Czech AOLMT provides the Afghan Air Force with an ideal combination to train the AFC to meet its future challenges – that is the real value of the Czech AOLMT in one sentence.

“Flying Hippos”

Not many people understand why and when pilots of the transport helicopters from Prerov started to use the unit emblem and motto “Flying Hippos.” The explanation may be obvious. The NATO codename for the MI-17 is “HIP,” and most English speakers assume that this is an abbreviation from the word “hippo.” Also, the shape and use of this helicopter is closer to the perception of something that is large and bulky rather than like a small red berry. Whether this explanation is true or not, a hippo with wings is the traditional emblem and motto of this unit. Three helicopters with necessary support are providing air support to the RC-E Commander at the Sharana Air Base. They are performing

a wide range of tasks. Equipped with modernized MI-171S helicopters, the Flying Hippos are able to support field units with transportation, perform CASEVAC, fly SAR missions, and for self-protection, these helicopters are equipped with machine guns installed on the side and back of the aircraft.

These are the first missions that Czech helicopters have flown in Afghanistan. Pilots, gunners, and maintenance personnel have been training since early 2008 to fly at altitudes high above sea level and in dusty conditions as well as in maintaining helicopters to operate in these harsh conditions. The unit now has a wealth of training enabling its pilots and crews to fulfill their daily tasks under all weather conditions. The Flying Hippos are a valuable and highly utilized asset within the RC-E Commander’s repertoire of support.

A second contingent has deployed to Sharana. The first contingent flew more than 430 hours, ferried more than 1900 troops, and transported 95 tons of materials. In providing this support, the Flying Hippos had no major aircraft malfunction or flying safety incident. Impressively, the unit did not lose a single helicopter due to enemy fire nor have a helicopter damaged by ground fire. The Flying Hippos successfully performed all assigned missions. They can proudly wear their emblem and repeat their motto – like a large and well-protected creature, the Flying Hippos are a very valuable asset to the RC-E Commander in accomplishing his important mission of helping bring stability, safety, and security to the Afghan people .



Landing after a successful flight mission



A doctor of the Spanish Operational Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT) performs a routine check up on a child at the Shindand Women's Center in Shindand, Afghanistan. (ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Makenzie Lang)