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Lt. Col. Brendan O'Shea

**Members of the Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team offload supplies from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter Feb. 16 at Kharwar, Afghanistan.**

## Gardez PRT provides aid to isolated, snow-bound village

**By Lt. Col. Brendan O'Shea**  
Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team

KHARWAR, Afghanistan - Members of the Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team delivered food and blankets Feb. 16 to a village that has been isolated from surrounding districts for the past three weeks due to snow accumulations up to 30 feet deep in some areas.

On Feb. 7, the Afghan Ministry of Defense flew a team of Afghan physicians and medical supplies to Kharwar. Since that time, the PRT made several attempts to reach Kharwar by road and by air to deliver more supplies, but it was unable to reach the district due to severe weather.

Finally, on Feb. 16, conditions were good enough for air movement and a team of 13 Soldiers from the PRT traveled to Kharwar via CH-47 Chinook helicopter and delivered several pallets of blankets and food supplies.

Sgt. Mike Wright, a member of the Gardez PRT originally from Company B, 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, said he was honored to be involved with the mission.

"We all knew there were sick people in the village, and that people were dying," he said. "To help deliver supplies to such a needed environment was an incredible feeling. A Lot of us were giving each other high fives after we got back on the bird."

Wright said when the team was exiting the bird, the snow was deep enough that they would fall down after taking a few steps. In the field where the helicopter landed, he said the snow came to above their knees, and it was very cold and windy.

Spc. Jonathan Walz, also of Co. B, said he was proud to help people who were in need of food and supplies.

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# Opinion & Commentary

## The significance of our cause



**Lt. Col. Bobby Mundell**  
**CTF Thunder**  
**Deputy Commanding Officer**

A few days prior to my deployment to Afghanistan, I had an in-depth and insightful discussion with my eight-year-old son Jonathan pertaining to the mission here in Afghanistan and my participation in that cause. Our conversation was varied and included topics ranging from how long I would be gone, to where I would stay, what I would eat and what dangers I would face.

Just as many of you probably can attest to, some of my responses to his inquiries were relatively easy, while others required more contemplation to ensure effective communication. At the end of our conversation, my son paused, looked me in the eyes and said, "I'm glad you are going, so we can be safe, but I'll miss you". His comments that day still provide inspiration and purpose for the execution of my duties here, but more

importantly they place emphasis on the significance of our service and cause.

During this deployment I have analyzed the number of factors associated with the purpose of our cause not only here in Afghanistan, but throughout the world as we face the enemies of freedom in what I and many others have become comfortable in describing as a war of ideas.

One idea is founded on the thought that all humans are free to choose, and freedom provides hope for a better life. The other idea is founded on the idea of compliance through oppression, fear, intimidation, ignorance and deception. The latter uses religion in an attempt to legitimize it and garner support. The results of the freedom based idea are evident in the courage displayed by both the Afghan and Iraqi populations during the successful elections that occurred in those nations.

When given the opportunity to choose, these citizens took that opportunity as opposed to being threatened and coerced into complying with those that seek to oppress hope and freedom. I have personally observed and witnessed the results of the alternative idea. These results are evident in the hopeless plight and oppression that up to now have characterized the provinces and districts of RC East.

But hope, is changing all of this. Fueled by the idea of freedom, oppression and hopelessness are being replaced with opportunities for economic prosperity, education, and basic sustainment. The conditions that are materializing here do not support the idea of oppression and without those conditions terrorism cannot flourish.

Through my analysis, personal experiences and association with the results of both ideas, the purpose of our cause here has become clearer. More importantly I have come to understand just what we,

American servicemen and women, represent to the people of Afghanistan. We represent hope, we represent what our country was founded on, freedom. However, that is only half of the story.

On 9/11, the enemies of freedom inflicted great harm on the citizens of our nation. In doing so, however, they grossly miscalculated the will and strength of our nation. The horror of that day united us as a nation and provided us with the cause we serve. While united in the horror and sorrow of that day, and basic need for security that remains a necessity today, our nation is divided on a number of issues associated with the overall strategy we pursue.

Through all of this division, one factor that serves as the driving factor that unites our country has been the trust and confidence our nation has displayed in us, the United States Military. This trust, belief and confidence is evident in the crowds of well-wishers that greet us when we return from deployment, and those that bid us farewell as we depart for duty.

Many scholars and students of strategic planning define the strategic center of gravity associated with our cause as the will of the population and their continued support of the war on terrorism. This theory highlights the significance of our cause and service as decisive and a critical requirement that enables the center of gravity to maintain energy and effectiveness.

Soon, many of us will complete our tour of duty here. We will reunite with loved ones, friends and reintegrate ourselves into the society we serve. I encourage all of us to reflect on the thoughts conveyed in this article, and more importantly reflect on our participation in this cause. For those whose service here continues, my hope is that these thoughts provide you with purpose to continue your service.

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# America's Battalion strikes back at enemy forces

By **Cpl. Rich Mattingly**  
3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt.

KHOST PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Under the light from a pale, yellow moon, the Marines moved swiftly across the cold and barren wadi, hand and arm signals mobilizing squads and fire teams silently into position around the village.

Shifting in and out of the shadow of trees and low rock walls in the surrounding fields as they neared, America's Battalion sealed a seamless cordon and prepared to search for several men they suspected of perpetuating terrorist activity and attacks on Afghan and Coalition forces in the area.

Only when the night's reverie was split by the blaring sounds of psychological operations' surrender appeals and the roar of Cobra gunships appearing a few hundred feet overhead, did the inhabitants realize they had been surrounded.

By the break of dawn, the Battalion was well underway to completing one of its most successful operations to date in the region.

"We moved over 44 kilometers at night, dismounted a few clicks away, and surrounded the village where we believed the enemy to be hiding by moving in on foot. Our enemies had never seen anything like this



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Second Lt. Luke Lazzo, platoon commander with Weapons Co., 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt., takes a knee and gets his bearings before leading his Marines the final distance to where his platoon was responsible for insuring no suspected terrorists slipped through the Marines' cordon.**

before, so they weren't ready for us and they had no chance to escape into the mountains," explained Capt. Ken Barr, Commanding Officer, Weapons Co., 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, whose company planned the operation over a month and a half, gathering key human intelligence on anti-government militia forces operating in the Khost province.

Over the course of two days,

Weapons and Headquarters and Service Companies, who combined forces for the operation, set up shop quite literally in the suspected terrorists' backyards.

America's Battalion was able to capture eight men they believed to be members of anti-government militias and seize a significant amount of illegal weapons and explosives. And they did it without a single shot being fired.

One of Weapons Co.'s platoon commanders explained the relationship they have tried to foster in the area over the course of the last few months that has improved their successes and ability to go in hard and fast without disrupting friendly ties.

"The local populace has begun to trust us more and more as we've built a relationship with them through local patrols with Afghan police and the medical and humanitarian relief efforts we've performed," said 2nd Lt. Luke Lazzo, second platoon commander, Weapons Co., 3/3. "We try to stress to them that it's their community

and they have to take responsibility for the actions of those they live with. We're here to help them with that. That allows us to go into a town the way we did and successfully find our enemies without too much resistance from the locals."

The Marines and Sailors of 3/3 are operating with a high level of cultural and societal awareness and attention to detail in order to strike a certain balance with the local populace during security and stability operations, said Barr, something he believes is a reflection of his Marines' professionalism as they complete more complicated missions.

When Weapons Co. entered the village, the commander's first action was to meet with the village elders and give them a chance to give up the men who were wanted in connection with the attacks.

"We went to the village elders and mullahs and asked them how they would like us to handle searches of houses in their villages," continued Barr. "We told them that if they would give



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Lance Cpl. Kevin Neale, a rifleman with Weapons Co., 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt. searches a basement room for weapons during cordon and search operations this week in Afghanistan.**

**See "Strikes" page 4**

# CTF Thunder ready for 'fair weather fighters'

By Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen  
Editor

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan - As the temperatures gradually begin to rise and the snow starts melting throughout Afghanistan, anti-government and anti-Coalition militants are expected to resume attacks.

Historically, fighters take respite during Afghanistan's harsh winters and reemerge in the spring with a brief increase in attacks.

In the last few weeks, several people claiming to be Taliban spokesmen have called media outlets to tell them they will launch their "spring offensive" when the weather gets fairer.

However, these fair-weather fighters shouldn't expect to catch the Coalition on their heels this year, said Maj. Duke Davis, operations officer for Combined Task Force Thunder at Forward Operating Base Salerno in Khost province.

"We've already experienced the attacks, and anything that they launch at us, we'll be ready to address," Davis said.

Compared to near zero level of activity during the winter, Davis said any event or attack is going to seem like an increase, but he doesn't expect an overwhelming offensive.

Instead, he expects a small increase in low-level attacks, but thinks the enemy is banking on a historical trend and perhaps even a bit of hope that their forces are going to come out and



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Marines from 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt., move through the snow toward the next house during a cordon and search of a village in Korangal Valley during Operation Spurs this winter.**

conduct major attacks when the warm weather comes.

"But I'm not so sure their message and their threats are associated with any distinct capabilities that they've shown," Davis said. "They're making those statements perhaps in hope, and based on trends, that their insurgent fighters are actually going to come out and do that. I certainly would not give credit to an overarching operational or strategically-coordinated action"

Task Force Thunder is still conducting its own "winter offensive," Operation Thunder Freedom, which was developed to exploit the success of last year's presidential election. The operation's intent was to stay active throughout the winter against the enemy, and continue training the Afghan National Army and Afghan National

Police so they are more able to address enemy attacks themselves in the spring.

"There's a lot of emphasis on what the enemy is going to be able to do, but I will tell you that the ANA and ANP, in conjunction with U.S. forces, are set and our capabilities are greater than they've ever been," Davis said. "This enemy is going to do what they typically do, which is increase attacks in the spring, but they're going to run into an ANA and an ANP force that is much more capable of addressing those threats on their own feet, let alone with assistance from the U.S."

Unlike the enemy, Coalition service members continued operations throughout the winter, no matter the weather.

Marine Sgt. Orlando Arocho, a squad leader with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd

Marine Regiment, said he and his fellow Marines are always ready for anything the enemy throw at them. When they weren't out on missions, Arocho said they were constantly training to maintain their readiness - even when it was cold outside.

No matter how chilly it got, the Long Island, N.Y., native said the Marines never decided it was too cold to go on missions.

"No, no, that never happens," he scoffed. "The Marine Corps just doesn't do that. We have plenty of cold weather gear that the Marine Corps issues us, and that's just no excuse."

Between their fear of the cold and their tactics, Arocho said he doubts the fortitude of the enemy fighters.

"They like to hit and run - it's almost like a sport to them," he said. "They're playing with people's lives here and trying to suppress the country, and it's just not going to happen. They're just cowards. They get no respect."

Even if the enemy does reemerge from its hibernation and attack, their abilities will be questionable. After all, staying indoors for several months probably hasn't helped their war fighting skills.

"In our opinion, they have not improved at all," Davis said. "They just went into hibernation. What we've done is we've actually improved ourselves. We're coming out that much better and that much better prepared because of what the ANA and ANP have done throughout the winter months."

## Strikes from page 3

up the men responsible for attacking Marines and Afghan forces in the area, then we wouldn't be forced to cordon and search their villages. The Marines and Sailors have upheld their end of things admirably, which improves our chances of even more future successes."

It was that approach that led to the operation's success, said 3/3 Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Norm Cooling.

"It's easy to get on line and fight a clearly defined enemy," said Cooling. "In our situation, you can't always locate, close with and destroy the enemy in a straight forward

manner. You have to establish human intelligence relationships to locate the enemy and then devise creative ways to close with him. While doing that here in Sabari, we sent a significant message to the villagers that by helping us they can help make their town and their country a safer place."

The Marines of 3/3 were very successful in their searches which were done with the supervision of the town's elders. In the suspects' homes they found everything from grenades shoved into sacks of flour, to weapons buried in dung heaps, and plastic explosives and blasting caps stuffed in an old car tire. One squad even recovered a belt of illegal armor-piercing AK47 rounds

hidden under an infant in a crib.

"I, for one, understand the mentality of a homeowner who doesn't want some stranger coming into their house," said Sgt. Chris Bloom, squad leader with Weapons Co. whose squad recovered several stockpiles of munitions from the suspected insurgents. "This is their country and we always have to be aware of that. What we did by waiting for the elders to go in with us and let them give up the guys we were after was very important to maintaining the trust of the people."

"It comes down to the golden rule," finished Barr. "You have to treat others here the way you would want to be treated in their situation."



# Coalition troops help Afghans endure cold weather

**By Senior Airman Catharine Schmidt**  
Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan  
Public Affairs

CHAMIN-E-BABRAK, Afghanistan - As Afghans endure one of the coldest winters in years, coalition service members here are making sure they are given an adequate supply of cold-weather supplies and medicine to combat the harsh weather.

About 50 U.S. and South Korean troops visited Chamin-E-Babrak, a local camp for displaced persons, Feb. 5 and handed out nearly 5,000 items, including medicine. Dr. Massouda Jalal, Afghan minister of women's affairs, was also on hand to help hand out supplies and visit with Afghans.

Lines of people waited patiently for a turn to receive blankets, shoes, toiletries and clothing. Children received medicine in one line, and medical tents were set up for people who needed treatment.

The mission was led by the Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team, one of 19 PRTs spread throughout the country. With the PRT, coalition forces provided civil affairs Soldiers, medics, security forces and other troops who said they just wanted to make a difference.

For Spc. Theresa Biehm of the 13th Psychological Operations Battalion, which is based in Arden Hills, Minn., it was her first experience on a mission such as this one.

"It's hard seeing all these people without shoes or socks in the cold," she said. "It's important we're here today because they really don't have any other way to get the help we are providing."

"We were called by the ministry of public health office, who said it was urgent that they needed our help with this mission," said Lt. Col. Lisa Bailey, Parwan PRT commander and a member of the 350th Civil Affairs Command, Pensacola, Fla. "There were people out there who were cold and didn't have blankets. So, we said we would come out and help the people of Afghanistan."



Senior Airman Catharine Schmidt

**Sgt. Jamilia Hodges, 360th Civil Affairs Bn., provides medicine to an Afghan man for his family Feb. 5 at a refugee camp in Chamin-E-Babrak, Afghanistan.**

About 270 families received donations for a total of about 2,000 people.

"We were able to get them a lot of things ... the things that would prevent cold-weather injury," Bailey said. "We were very thankful to be able to come out and help."

Spc. Jasmine Smith, who is assigned to Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan Civil Affairs, came on the trip to help translate.

"I think today's been very successful," she said. "We were here the other day and we were slammed by the kids. (Today) they brought Afghan security and we brought our security, so everything's going good."

With the cold weather, many Afghans are fighting illnesses. Coalition troops made sure they provided them the best care they could.

"We coordinated to bring out the medical team because we knew if we came out to drop humanitarian supplies there could possibly be some medical emergencies or people who needed to be looked at," Bailey

said. "We wanted to combine the humanitarian and medical aspect together. We brought one of our doctors to treat people.

"We gave medicine to the kids to deworm them as well as vitamins," she said. "We looked at the ladies and men who had severe ailments, and we also gave them referrals to (a hospital at Bagram Airfield)."

Coalition troops made sure Afghans were given much-needed supplies and care, accomplishing the mission they came here to do.

"We want (the Afghans) to know that we're not just in the country to build buildings, but we're also coming into the country to help the central government and help build up the people," she said. "That's very important to us."

The 13th PSYOP Bn. and the 350th CACOM are both Army Reserve special operations units with Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

## Snow from page 1

"I enjoyed the mission because I enjoy helping and seeing people happy," he said, "Plus, it was the first mission like that I ever did."

Walz said when he jumped off the helicopter, he was in snow up to his waist and still not touching the ground.

The 75,000 citizens of Kharwar District in Logar

Province have been completely isolated by the heavy snowfall, and more than 2,000 citizens have become ill with respiratory ailments. Approximately 80 citizens have died within the past few weeks from pneumonia and other complications brought on by the severe weather.

While in Kharwar, the PRT medical officer consulted with the local Afghan physicians to determine additional medical

requirements.

The region remains completely snowbound, and despite a large volunteer snow clearing effort, it will probably be several days or weeks before the district is accessible by ground traffic.

Despite the conditions, Wright said he loves these types of mission and he would do it again.

"This is a major part of why we are here, to help the

Afghan people," he said. To give them food because they are starving, and to give them blankets because they are freezing to death just makes us all feel how blessed we all are living in America."

"I will go on as many of these types of missions as they will let me," Wright continued. "This is probably the most rewarding type of mission there is. I like making people happy."

# 3-116 Inf. Soldiers receive CIBs

By Staff Sgt. Mark Turney  
3rd Bn., 116th Inf. Rgt.

GHANZI, Afghanistan - Eighty-five Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment received Combat Infantrymen Badges during two ceremonies here Feb. 17.

Maj. Gen. Eric T. Olson, commander of Combined Joint Task Force 76, presented the CIBs for contact with the enemy under fire.

Many of the CIBs were earned as a result of Troops in Contact in the Wardak province of Afghanistan where Soldiers from Company B, 3-116 came under fire when they were ambushed in a mountain pass. No Americans were injured during the ambush.

Several of the remaining CIB's were awarded as a result of an enemy rocket attack on both Bagram Airfield and Forward Operating Base Ghazni in December of last year. There were no injuries in either attack.

Olson presented each of



Staff Sgt. Mark Turney

**Maj. Gen. Eric T. Olson, commander of Combined Joint Task Force 76, speaks to members of Co. B, 3rd Bn., 116th Infantry Rgt. shortly after conducting a combat patrol with them Feb. 17 in Warkak province.**

the 85 awards personally, often stopping briefly to talk with each man and express his appreciation for the hard work.

"It is important to note that there have been no terrorist attacks on the United States since you men came here," Olson said to the assembled men. "You brought the fight to the enemy and won."

Following the ceremony, Olson and Lt. Col. Blake Ortner, commander of 3-116, joined members of Co. B on a combat patrol in Wardak province.

Olson and Ortner flew to the patrol area and began what turned out to be a two-hour patrol through a region known for its Anti-coalition Militia activity.

Driving through mud and roads all but washed away by the thawing of heavy winter snows, Olson and Ortner accompanied the men through rough terrain and the occasional village.

On the return trip back to the landing base, the convoy was suddenly halted and took up quick fighting positions as the lead element of the patrol noticed something odd on a rooftop before entering the village.

Olson and a party of men approached the compound and discovered an old Russian Dishka machine gun on the roof.

After assessing the weapon as non-functioning and therefore not a threat, the men returned to the convoy and finished out the patrol.

"It was good to see how you (the men of B. Co.) and the locals interacted," Olson said shortly before departing for the flight back to Bagram Airfield. "You showed the people a great deal of respect, and I am proud of you for that."



Courtesy photo

## Jalalabad PRT provides aid to village

Afghan children walk through snow to get to a humanitarian aid mission conducted by the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team Feb. 16 in the Merkhani Valley in the Tora Bora mountains. Trudging through snow that was waist-deep at many points, the PRT members delivered blankets, coats and tarps to 300 Afghan families that have been affected by the deep snow and freezing temperatures.



# 'Culture shock' to see Afghan health conditions

By Capt. Juanita Chang  
CTF Thunder Public Affairs  
Officer

KHOST PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Nearly 1,000 people came to Khilbasat village here to see if the announcements they heard over a loud speaker were true.

They heard broadcasts that Coalition forces would be providing free medical care for local residents. Neither they, nor some of the Coalition Soldiers could believe what they saw.

"The people are really happy that Americans are here today," said a local boy in broken English, talking over the stone wall to a Marine pulling guard duty.

"I am from a third world country, but this was very shocking for me to see," said Spc. Thia T. Valenzuela, who moved to the United States from Guyana in 2001, joined the United States Army the same year, and now calls Decatur, Ga., home.

"While I was de-worming them I was looking at their teeth. They were all rotten and so unhealthy," said Valenzuela, a dental assistant from Company C, 725th Main Support Battalion stationed out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

"It was so shocking to see all the children not wearing shoes," Valenzuela said, this being her first time off a military base, or 'outside the wire' as service members in Afghanistan say. "It was freezing cold and there were so many who were barefooted."

"It was a culture shock," said Sgt. Teresa A. Trevino, of Corpus Christi, Texas. "The females have no rights. They can't say or do anything without a male family member," she said. This was also Trevino's first time outside the wire. She is also assigned to Company C, 725th Main Support Battalion out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.



Capt. Juanita Chang

**Army 1st Lt. Julie A. Sheets, of Co. C, 725th Main Support Battalion calms a young Afghan girl Feb. 21 during a Cooperative Medical Assessment mission by Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team's visit to Sabari District in Khost Province, Afghanistan**

The majority of patients seen were treated for upper respiratory tract infections. Additionally, every person over age two was given a de-worming treatment. Worms are a very common ailment here and many complained of stomach aches and diarrhea that has lasted for years, signs that they their worms have gone untreated for years.

"Most people go to Walgreen's and buy medicine like Motrin, but these people simply do not have that option. It is not available and they do not have money," said 1st Lt. Julie A. Sheets, of Grove City, Ohio. Sheets is a Physician's Assistant assigned to Company C, 725th Main Support Battalion from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii and was the senior female medical practitioner on site.

It is customary in Afghanistan for female Afghans to only be seen by female medical personnel. In some cases, Afghan women will die of ailments before being seen by a male doctor due to the strict culture.

Sheets said this village also had a higher rate of leishmaniasis than usual.

Leishmaniasis is a skin disease caused by an insect spread parasite. It causes lesions that fester and leave disfiguring scars.

"For us to go out and show good will - that we are here to treat their families and their children shows the people here that we are here to help them," said Master Sgt. Edith Horn, the Officer in Charge of the mission, assigned to the Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team.

"This was a key location to conduct the mission because of the influence of the people who live in the area," Horn said. "There is still negative influence in that area."

"The smile on the children's faces and the thanks that the people give us showed us that they were very thankful and that we were well received," said Horn, an Army Reservist and full-time police officer in Indianapolis.

During this single-day mission, the team provided medical care to 338 adult males, 73 women, and 249 children. They also distributed 450 kg of rice, 500 kg of beans, and 64 kg of cooking oil to people in need.

Dr. Rasul, the director of the Mamoor Ali Jan Hospital in Khost Province, was also on scene for the Cooperative Medical Assistance. Dr. Rasul (who goes by only one name, as is customary in Afghanistan) said he enjoys working with American doctors and he learns much from them. He also provided local insight into the problems experienced by the villagers.

Some people literally walked all day, barefoot in temperatures in the 40s, to seek medical care. There are no paved roads in Sabari District, nor many cars. Many came on crutches, and some with prosthetics, evidence of the decades of war and land mines polluting their country.

The medical assistance and assessment visit, coordinated by the Provincial Reconstruction Team located in Khost Province, is essential to identifying illnesses in a particular area so they can address the issues. There are currently 19 PRTs throughout Afghanistan. Each PRT conducts civil assessments and assists the local government with reconstruction and security in each region.

# Conference aims to strengthen Paktika province

By Sgt. Frank Magni  
17th Public Affairs Det.

SHARANA, Afghanistan - Despite poor weather and road conditions, local leaders met with members of the Coalition and non-governmental organizations in Sharana for the first Paktika Province Security and Reconstruction Conference Feb. 24.

Hosted through a cooperative effort between Governor Haji Mohammed Glilab Mengal's staff, the Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team and 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, the conference was organized to discuss current security and future reconstruction within eastern Afghanistan's Paktika Province.

"The goal for this conference was to bring the local government together with NGOs and provide a real assessment of the security situation in (Paktika Province)," said Sgt. Jill Murphy, Sharana PRT Civil Affairs team noncommissioned officer in charge.

"(Paktika Province) is still viewed as one of the more unstable places in Afghanistan," she said. "But, even in the last year, the situation has improved greatly."

While security was the main topic, the group also discussed healthcare, education and local government during the one day conference.

Because the conference was the first of its kind in the area, the organizers didn't know how well attended it would be.

For the PRT and governors staff, the challenge was to get the word out to local leaders and NGOs.

"It was a major push for us to get to as



Sgt. Frank Magni

**A local district leader from Paktika province asks a question to officials who made presentation Feb. 24 during the first Paktika province Security and Reconstruction Conference in Sharana, Afghanistan.**

many areas as possible in the last eight weeks to let them know this would be taking place," said Murphy.

Weather and road conditions also remained poor the day of the conference.

But despite all the challenges in organizing the conference, when it began, the room overflowed with people anxious to address Paktika's reconstruction needs.

"The turnout was overwhelming," said Murphy.

NGO representatives were on hand to

discuss future projects with the people of the province.

M. Mahir Yaqobi, deputy country director for the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, made the trip from Kabul.

He said his organization views Paktika Province as a very important area to focus its efforts.

"I felt it was very important to be here, because in a

forum like this you are able to talk to many of the key local leaders at the same time," said Yaqobi.

Yaqobi, a native Afghan, said Paktika's main problem in the past has been poor security that resulted in instability, making reconstruction projects nearly impossible.

However, he has seen Paktika Province make many strides in the past two years.

"I am very optimistic that mine, along with other NGOs, will be focusing more in Paktika in the next few years," he said.

One of the reasons for his optimism was the conference itself.

"During this conference, it was easy to see that the local government has grown very strong and is very devoted to growth," he said.

Local officials echoed Yaqobi's sentiment after the conference.

"This conference was very important for us," said Dr. Shahabuddin, a Yahya Khak district leader. "We were able to bring NGOs here and show them it is a good place to work."

Based on the success of the first conference, many are hoping this will pave the way for more.

"After a successful election, everyone is starting to believe (Paktika Province) is moving in the right direction," said Murphy. "Hopefully, this conference is one more step in the right direction."



Sgt. Frank Magni

**Lt. Col. Walter Piatt, commander of 2nd Bn., 27th Infantry Rgt., listens to concerns of local leaders Feb. 24 during the Paktika Province Security and Reconstruction Conference.**



# Coalition doctors mend Afghan boy's cleft palate

By Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl  
17th Public Affairs Det.

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Three-year-old Khan Mohammad clung to his uncle, Jan Mohammad, as he entered Bagram Airfield Feb. 14, overwhelmed by the unfamiliar people around him.

The two had just finished a six-hour drive from Ghazni province in central Afghanistan to the airfield, where Khan would undergo surgery.

Khan was born with a severe cleft palate. With his lip and gums split in the middle up to his nostrils and teeth protruding from the gums, it was difficult for the boy to eat and breathe.

Coalition doctors were hoping to change that.

"We first met Khan during a (cooperative medical assistance)," said Lt. Col. John Loose, a member of the Task Force Victory Surgeon Cell.

Noting Khan's discomfort and severe disfiguration, Loose contacted the 325th Combat Support Hospital at Bagram to see if they could help. In a matter of days, the surgery was scheduled.

The first part of the surgery was preparation.

Capt. Don Schondelmaier, a certified registered nurse anesthetist, administered a general anesthetic to help reduce his anxiety.

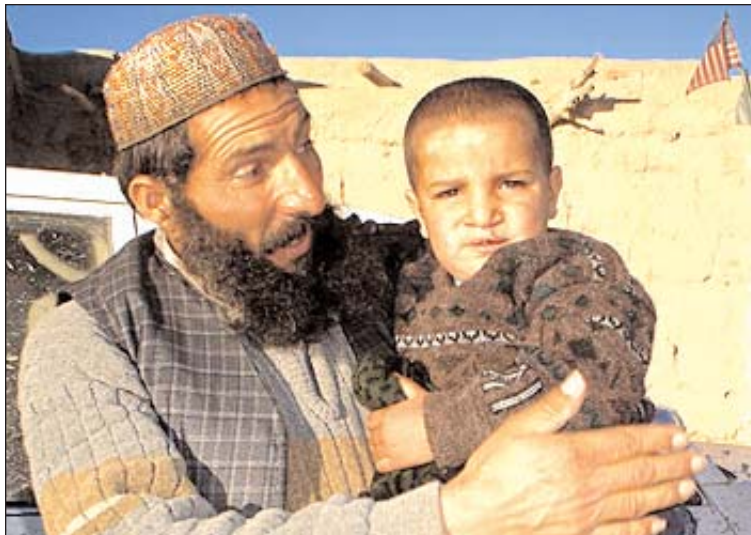
While Schondelmaier and his assistants inserted a breathing tube into the boy's throat, the surgeons, Drs. (Cols.) Dallas Homas and John Caufield, prepared for surgery. Soon, they were closely inspecting Khan's face, determining which parts of the lip would be cut and sutured, ensuring the folds of skin would match up to form the lip.

"This part here is the line between the inner and outer lip," said Caufield as Homas marked an incision point.

Working methodically, the two spent several hours in the operating room, ensuring Khan's lips would look as much like any other 3-year-old's.

For the attending surgeons and assistants, this surgery reflected their favorite part of working in Operation Enduring Freedom - helping others.

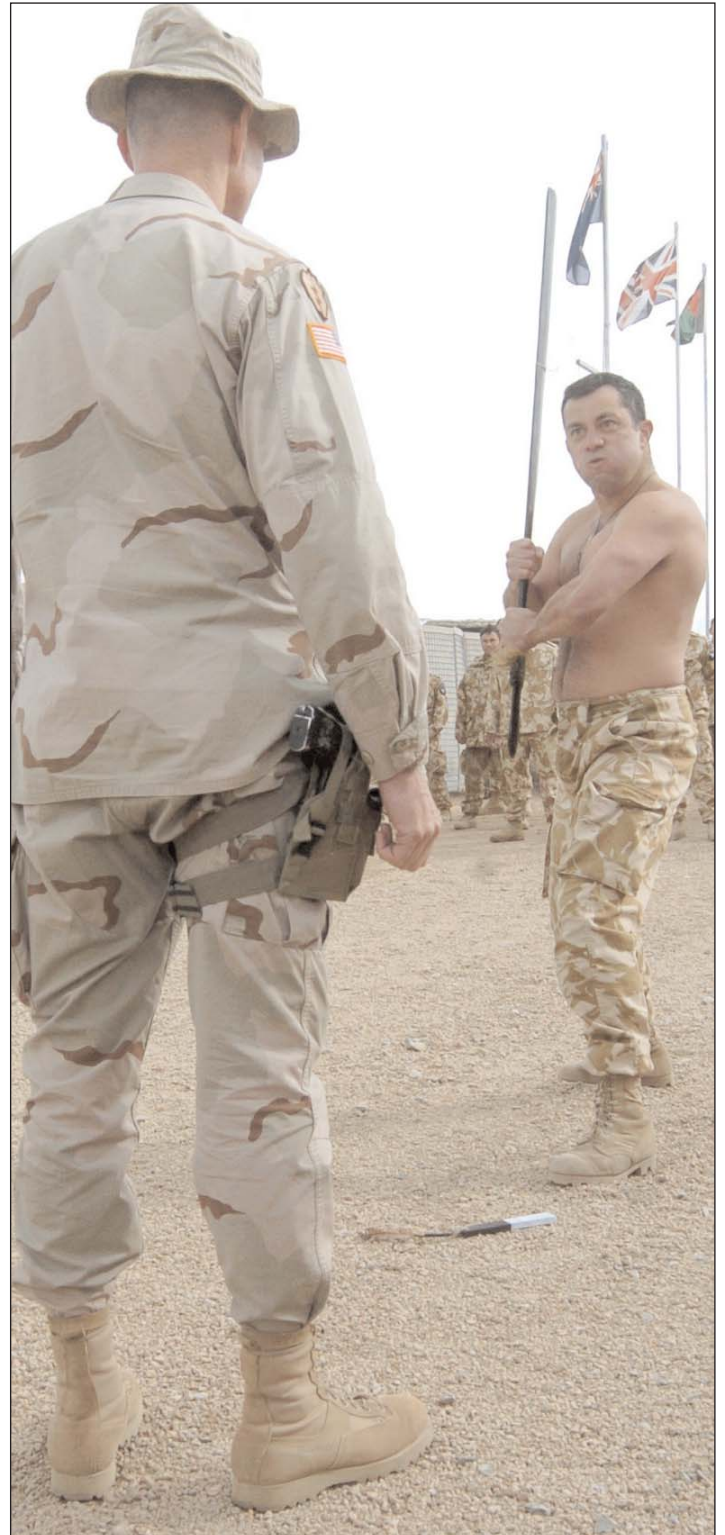
"To perform this surgery is very gratifying," said Caufield.



Jan Mohammad holds his nephew Khan in Ghazni, Afghanistan, after Khan had surgery to repair his cleft palate. The surgery was coordinated and performed by Coalition Forces.

Courtesy photo

## Bamian PRT welcomes CTF Thunder commander



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

Sapper Gavin Mackey, a member of the Bamian Provincial Reconstruction Team from the New Zealand Defence Force (right), challenges Col. Gary H. Cheek, commander of Combined Task Force Thunder, during a Haka Feb. 23 in Bamian, Afghanistan. The Haka is a traditional Maori challenge, and is now used as part of a Wero (welcome ceremony) for important visitors and newcomers to determine if they are "friend or foe."



# PSYOP teams give Marines additional voice on battlefield

By Cpl. Rich Mattingly  
3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt.

JALALABAD, Afghanistan - The crowd grew in the afternoon fog, eager eyes waiting to see what the Soldiers, Marines and Afghan Police were posting on the sign-board they had just set up in front of the most popular radio station in town.

"Whenever they see the 'speaker truck,' people know we have information to disseminate, and we'll attract a large crowd very quickly," observed Army Sgt. Joshua Hale, psychological operations specialist with the 13th PSYOP battalion, referring to his unit's popularity among the Afghan people and the recognition the speakers mounted to his humvee brings.

"Everyone wants our pamphlets and papers," he explained. "Every Afghan I've met wants to know what's going on in the country. We give them information that they might not get any other way about what's going on."

Within minutes of their arrival, several hundred newspapers and leaflets are gone, and carried off in eager arms.

A recent media survey performed by an independent research group found that 80 percent of Afghans say they find it "very important" to be informed about nationwide events. While the overall literacy rate remains around 30 percent, Afghans voraciously consume any news about their country they can find.

For the Afghan Government and the Coalition, this eagerness to remain informed is a large part of the democratic process and another vehicle for them to spread their message of Afghan solidarity.

"For a country whose government is moving forward toward legitimacy on a global scale, having an informed populace who supports their own freely-elected government and its programs is important," said Marine Capt. Tony Apisa,



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Army Sgt. Josh Hale, psychological operations Soldier, fastens new flyers to a "product board" outside of Sharq Radio in Jalalabad. The flyers ranged in topic from how to avoid injury when unexploded ordnance is found to the Afghan constitution.**

information operations officer with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. "PSYOP's provide Marine units an additional asset in communicating with the local populace. In an environment where information operations are often the main effort, PSYOP units are crucial."

Psychological Operations, with a name that conjures images of war movie propaganda, in actuality has everything to do with getting the truth out to the public. Their "product," as it is referred to, carries certain messages about government programs and general information in addition to news. PSYOP material often includes health and hygiene tips and warnings about what to do if Afghans find unexploded ordnance or mines, a common problem lingering from earlier conflicts.

"What we do is not propaganda," said Hale emphatically. "Propaganda is lies, and we don't lie to anyone. We're here to get the truth out so that they can make decisions on

their own."

Army PSYOP Soldiers feel they are making a difference that is tangible in the questions they are asked by Afghans when out on patrols with the Marines. More and more, they say, people are asking questions about government programs or how they can join the Afghan National Army, which continues to recruit heavily.

PSYOP teams assigned to 3/3 Marines are helping not so much to "win" hearts and minds in Afghanistan as informing Afghans, allowing them to make up their minds on their own.

"We're helping to legitimize the Afghan government intellectually the same way the Marines help to legitimize the Afghan government by working with the Afghan National Army," explained Hale.

For Marines working to destroy any foothold for terrorism or anti-government insurgency in Afghanistan, the psychological operations portion of their mission has become

an important part of making Afghanistan a safer, more independent country. "They are able to provide everything from conducting command and control missions to distributing leaflets and posters informing the Afghans of local government programs," said Apisa. "They are integrated into nearly every phase of operational planning."

Issuing messages such as "lay down your weapons and you will not be harmed" or "medical treatment will be given at the village mosque today," from their powerful speakers, the PSYOP Soldiers can help spread messages and diffuse situations in a way that increases the battlefield resources available to the commander.

"Third Battalion, Third Marines has been very fortunate to have Tactical PSYOP Teams in direct support of the battalion. Their experience and special skills bring a 'non-kinetic' fire support asset that the Marines have come to rely on," concluded Apisa.



# Siblings serving in Afghanistan

**By Capt. Juanita Chang**

CTF Thunder Public Affairs Officer

KHOST PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Serving a tour in a combat zone most often means a Soldier spends a year away from his or her family. Not for Army Sergeants Keesha Wilson and Stokley Palmer.

Wilson and Palmer are siblings who are both currently serving in Afghanistan.

Wilson, a resident of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., serves in Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, while Palmer, a resident of Lauderdale, Fla., serves at the Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team in Khost province along the Pakistan border.

Both are assigned to 2nd Battalion, 65th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, Florida Army National Guard; however, during this deployment, they work in the field of force protection, responsible for the security of coalition bases and personnel.

The chronicle leading to their eventual dual deployment together is an endearing one.

Following high school, Wilson, who is five years older than her younger brother, was studying to be a nurse at Broward Community College while living at home with the family in Florida when she accompanied her brother to an Army recruiting office.



Courtesy Photo

**Florida National Guard Sgt. Keesha Wilson and her brother, Sgt. Stokley Palmer, are seen here with their mother last February prior to deploying to Afghanistan.**

"We're inseparable. Either she is my shadow or I am hers. It has always been this way," Palmer said. So, naturally they were together when he stopped by the recruiting office to look at options for himself following high school.

After listening to the recruiter talk, Wilson went right home and announced that she was joining the Army, Palmer said.

Wilson joined the Army as an active duty medic and went to Schweinfurt,

Germany, with the 1st Armored Division.

Palmer had to wait until he finished high school to join the Army.

"She gave me pointers for basic training," he said, and was always there for him to talk to, making it easy for him to join the Army and spend his active duty tour with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Eventually both left active duty. Wilson wanted to go to school and spend more time with her young daughter and Palmer wanted to go to school and come back in the Army as an officer. Not coincidentally, both joined the Florida Army National Guard.

"People in the unit thought we were dating because when you saw one of us you saw the other," Palmer laughed. It wasn't until they deployed that many found out that they were brother and sister.

Around Thanksgiving 2004 they were both notified that they would be deploying to Afghanistan. They immediately united in their plan for telling their parents.

"We waited until the last minute to tell mom because we knew she would be hysterical," Palmer said. "But it was our father who was the hysterical one."

"We waited until about a week before we deployed to tell her. It was Valentine's Day and I bought her a gift and told her after giving her the gift," Wilson said.

Being deployed together has made their time in Afghanistan more bearable for the siblings.

"Just knowing I can call her in Kabul or she can call me any time. It really helps. If anything happened to her I could be there," Palmer said.

"My brother and I hang out a lot at home, so being here we actually don't see each other as often as we do at home," Wilson said.

"It has made it easier to be here because I can talk to him about things that are going on here, and he understands. It has also made it easier on my daughter because she thinks he will protect me," Wilson said.

Following this deployment, Wilson plans to spend more time with her family and to try to go back to studying to become a nurse. Palmer will return to his job at the Broward County Sheriff's Department where he is in the cadet program. He plans to finish the police academy when he returns.

Although the distance between them is nearly 100 miles on the map, they are as close as ever.



Capt. Juanita Chang

**Florida Army National Guard Sgt. Keesha Wilson, from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., guards the north street corner of the coalition forces compound in Kabul, Afghanistan, Feb. 16, 2005. Both Wilson, and her brother Sgt. Stokely Palmer, are deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.**



# Afghans, Coalition work economic plan for Khost Province

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Afghan government and the U.S. Agency for International Development are partnering to put Khost province on the high road to economic prosperity, the commander of the Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team said Feb. 14.

Khost spans across southeastern Afghanistan and shares a 140-kilometer-long border with neighboring Pakistan, noted Army Maj. Carl Hollister, commander of the Khost provincial reconstruction team and a member of the 412th Civil Affairs Battalion.

The province boasts "an ideal location to facilitate trade," Hollister pointed out. Accordingly, he said, the province's governor and the Khost PRT "have been working together to develop this province into the economic engine" for southeastern Afghanistan.

As part of that partner-



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A U.S. Humvee makes its way through a crowded bazaar in downtown Khost, Afghanistan.**

ship, Hollister said, the governor and the PRT have formulated a five-year economic plan for Khost. The plan features six areas of focus: education, healthcare, water, energy, reconstruction and economic development.

The provincial government, Hollister said, wants to expand the number of schools and hospitals, as well

as to improve the water supply system for drinking, irrigation and sanitation purposes.

A new electric power-grid system is nearing completion in Matun district, Hollister said. And, he noted, the PRT is working with the Asia Development Bank and other organizations to find other ways to produce energy for

the province.

A good road network is necessary for healthy trade, Hollister remarked, noting, "Roads are being built throughout the (Khost) province."

The USAID, he noted, is leading efforts to construct provincial district government buildings for elected officials, police, and courts.

Hollister said the PRT is also assisting the Khost Province government in developing new marketplaces.

The soon-to-be-established Khost Economic Development Corporation, he said, will coordinate foreign investment targeted for the province. A provincial chamber of commerce will also be established.

The 412th Civil Affairs Battalion is an Army Reserve special operations unit from Whitehall, Ohio.

The 412th is in Afghanistan to conduct civil-military operations in the Khost Province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.



Lt. Col. Brendan O'Shea

## Sapper reups atop 'Castle Greyskull'

Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Birosh, engineer NCOIC for the Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team, is reenlisted by 1st Lt. James Avrams, force protection director for the PRT, Feb. 11, atop "Castle Greyskull," overlooking Gardez, Afghanistan. Birosh is originally a combat engineer from the 65th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division (Light) out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and reenlisted for 10 more years of service.