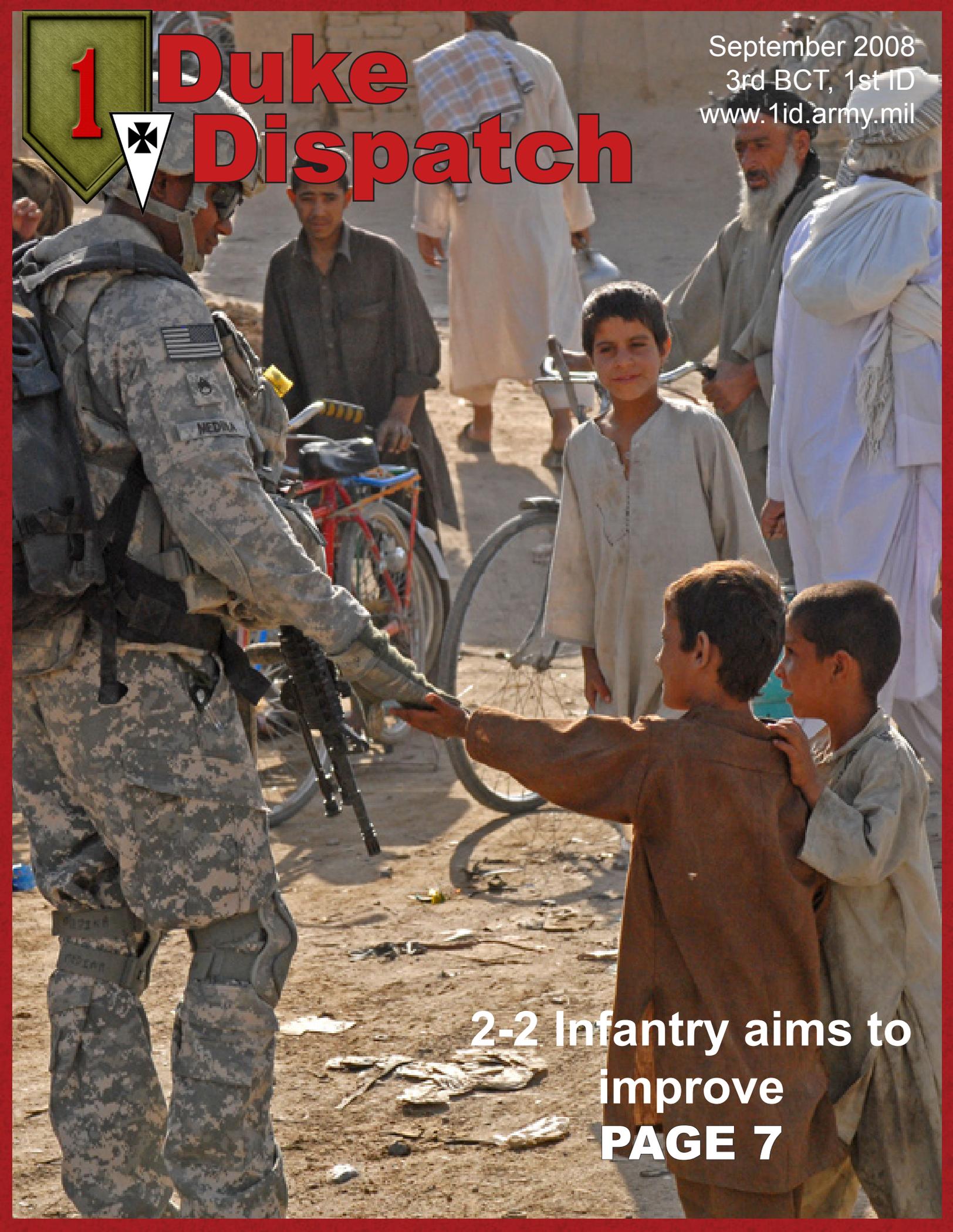


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Duke Dispatch

September 2008
3rd BCT, 1st ID
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improve
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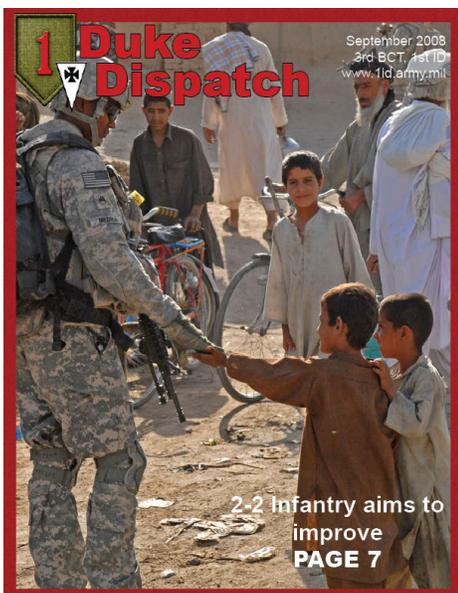
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Staff Sgt. Lester Medina, 2-2 Inf., interacts with the local children during a visit to a bazaar in the Maywand district of Afghanistan. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Adora Medina)



3rd BCT, 1st ID Magazine

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Secretary Gates meets with Afghan governor

*Story By Staff Sgt. Adora Medina
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO*

Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, met with Konar Provincial Governor, Sayed Fazullah Wahidi, to discuss ongoing and future plans for the Konar province, during a visit to Afghanistan, Sep. 17.

The Konar province encompasses 14 districts and shares a 200 kilometer border with Pakistan. Navy Cmdr. Daniel Dwyer, the Konar PRT commander, pointed out that the majority of “kinetic activity” the province experiences, is mainly due to its’ proximity to the Pakistan border. Dwyer and Governor Wahidi, explained their approach of “economic counterinsurgency” to Secretary Gates.

“We feel it’s more important to give jobs to the local fighting age male to prevent them from picking up a rifle and fighting against us. We’ve been very successful with that right now,” Dwyer said.

The execution of projects such as the Konar construction center, a three month course that teaches carpentry, plumbing and construction, has enabled the people to maintain long-term jobs and put these skills to work within their respective communities. Prior to the execution of this project the primary labor originated from Pakistan.

Another major topic of discussion was the production of roads and bridges and the essential role it plays in the economic structure of Afghanistan.

“With \$83 million, we’re primarily focusing on



Photos by Staff Sgt. Adora Medina

Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, greets the Konar Provincial Governor, Sayed Fazullah Wahidi, at the Jalalabad Airfield, Sept. 17.

roads and bridges. We’re building that core infrastructure for Konar so their surplus crops can find ways to market,” Dwyer explained.

The roads provide easier access, for merchant travel, through the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan and have cut the Improvised Explosive Device threat significantly in those areas.

“Where the road has come, we’ve gotten some economic progress. We’re able to bring the government to the people and we’re starting to see a difference,” Col. John Spiszer, Task Force Duke, commander, said.

Bridges have also contributed to economic growth by providing a route to Afghanistan for the many secluded villages cut off by a river along the Pakistan border.

Governor Wahidi emphasized the importance of these entryways explaining how medical care, crops and agriculture were all being lost to Pakistan, and how the education of nearly 80 percent of the children in the Konar province was acquired in the bordering country. However, the simple construction of bridges changed all of that, giving the people the support and easy access to their capital.

“With the support of the coalition our people are successful, we are very much thankful of them,” Wahidi said. He further explained how they are working with his province to make them as “one body” he continued to say that the people in his province are happy with the work coalition forces have put into the development of Afghanistan.



Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates walks with Task Force Duke commander, Col. John Spiszer, at the Jalalabad Airfield, Afghanistan, Sep. 17.

MPs make a difference in security for Konar Province

*Story by Navy Lt. Neil Myers
Konar Provincial Reconstruction Team*

The 3rd platoon, 527th Military Police Company arrived in Konar Province, Afghanistan six months ago with a mission to train Afghan National Police officers in one of the most challenging regions in the country.

The 3/527 MP Company, based in Grafenwohr Germany, support the mission of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, also known as Task Force Spader, in Konar Province. Their motto is "Strike Deep." Sgt. 1st Class Tommy Davis from Leeds, Alabama said his MPs are training the ANP in Kabul, Torkam Gate, Naray and Asadabad.

"Everyone can do the other person's job. My medic has been a team leader, a driver and a gunner. We have performed rescue missions and accident investigations. Pretty much anything you ask them to do they do well," Davis said.

The Soldiers go outside the wire everyday. They teach the ANP to perform proactive policing in an environment that demands the police react to terrorist activity.

"It's hard to investigate crime when you are also fighting insurgents and looking for IEDs," Davis said.

The MPs train the ANP to conduct proper personal and vehicle searches, apprehension and detainment. They also concentrate on individual and squad movements, building entry procedures and reaction to improvised explosive devices.

Sgt. Nathan Byrd from Catawba, North Caro-



Photos by Lt. Neil Myers

Sgt. Nathan Byrd and Sgt. 1st Class Tommy Davis Performing a Dismounted Patrol to Observation.

lina said: "In addition to counter terrorism training we are training the ANP to perform problem oriented policing. We're getting them off the checkpoints and into the community to conduct basic police work."

The MPs believe that getting the ANP to interact with the community will go a long way towards changing their image in the minds of the Afghan people.

"They are tied up at the checkpoints. Once the security situation improves to the point where they can function as cops they will do fine," Davis said.

"The ANP are motivated and honestly want to learn" Pfc. Benjamin Warnick from Knoxville, Tenn., said. "It's nice to know we are making a difference. It's motivating to watch the officers properly clear a building, practice good muzzle discipline and safely clear their weapons."

The Soldiers see the training making a difference and the learning go both ways.

"My cultural awareness and respect for Afghanistan has grown through this experience." Spc. Latasha Jones from Liberty, Miss., said. "The language is a barrier. Sometimes during training we use stick figures and physical demonstration and that actually helps build our confidence and leadership."

Davis is proud of his men.

"I have been to Bagdad in some of the worst places you can imagine," Davis said. "My platoon is the best I've ever worked with. They are combat trained and experienced. About one third have previous tours in either Iraq or Afghanistan. We're a family. We are a very close unit."



Sgt. Tommy Davis leading the ANP in a Basic Rifle Marksmanship Course at Camp Monti Range.

Humanitarian efforts strengthening bonds, developing Nuristan



Photo by Staff Sgt. David Hopkins

An Afghan National Police officer hands a recoilless round from a cache to Capt. Ty Dawson, 703rd EOD Company commander, on September 1, in the Nuristan province of Afghanistan.

*Story By Staff Sgt. David Hopkins
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO*

On September 1, a group from the Provincial Reconstruction Team, Local Governance and Community Development and International Security Assistance Force soldiers visited Paruns Village in Nuristan to assist the people by: eliminating a weapons cache, teaching new techniques for goat cheese production and marketing, and to check on several ongoing construction projects.

The first priority of the visit was to locate and destroy a weapons cache the Afghan National Police buried for safekeeping near the compound.

"We'll transport it out of here if it's safe," Sgt. 1st Class Angelo Patellaro, team leader for the 703rd Explosives Ordnance Disposal Co. from Peoria, Ill., said. "We'll bring it to a disposal spot and detonate it."

The EOD team was told the cache was large and they were not disappointed. By the time all the ordinance was removed they had recovered: 46 recoilless rounds, 23 107mm rockets, 21 mortars and

other items.

The removal of the explosives keeps them out of the wrong hands, but it also builds relations with the local community.

"This is helpful for us and keeps the bombs from getting to the Taliban," Col. Mohamad Dullah, commander of the Nuristan ANP jail, said. "It's like when someone is thirsty and a friend gives him a drink of water. The Americans are doing this...helping us. They are our friends."

After the explosives were dealt with the focus was on helping the goat farmers of the province through a goat cheese expert from Holland. Ben Weijers, independent goat cheese consultant with LGCD, travels around the world doing consultations for farmers.

His focus was collecting information in order to establish a plan to improve the sanitary conditions of the cheese production.

"The biggest issue with the current cheese production is the conditions. They are low by any standards. They will cook food in a bowl and then make cheese in the same bowl without cleaning it, or they will butcher a cow and then cut cheese with the same knife without cleaning it. We need to teach them how to do it safely."

The PRT is also working to develop the village by constructing safe buildings that can withstand the heavy snowfall during the winter.

"We are building a new Afghan National Police compound, a new district center and a new governor's compound up on the hill," Dr. Jeffrey Bordin, Red Team leader for Human Terrain. "We are also building a very nice well in the middle of the village, which is well underway and we are building several government buildings there."

Prior to the new construction the buildings were made from wood and simple stone. The PRT inspected the construction to make sure the new projects were being built to last.

"We also took the opportunity to perform quality checks on some projects we are funding there to make sure that they are being built to the standards of the contracts," Aylward said.

The work in Paruns is helping develop the area and is brining them closer to becoming an independent nation.

"Food and health education and keeping munitions out of the hands of terrorist are just a few elements to achieve success in the region. The projects being done by our PRT in Paruns ultimately contribute

(Story continued on page 9)

Affecting our area of operations



*By Col. John Spiszer
3rd BCT, 1st ID, Commander*

The focus for Duke Brigade this month has been to execute Counterinsurgency Operations; complete spending for this fiscal year's commander's emergency relief program; preparation for Voter Registration for the people of Afghanistan, and continuation of our Sacred Duties.

This month we also did an operational review and published an update to our plan for Counterinsurgency Operations within Nangarhar, Nuristan, Konar and Laghman (N2KL). The intent of the plan is to help us determine the best methods on how to separate the people from the enemy in order to transform the environment and effectively progress in the areas of security, economics, development and governance for the people of Afghanistan.

One of the key ways that the Duke Brigade has really affected our area of operation over the past two months is through the Commander's Emergency Relief Program. We spent more than \$167 million for Fiscal Year '08, and \$90 million since our arrival. This program allows us to have a direct impact on the people of Afghanistan. We use the funds from this program to build roads, bridges, wells, schools and medical clinics. The work we are doing has a very positive effect on the people and their daily lives.

Through the local governance, maneuver

units, provincial reconstruction teams, and the agri-business development team we bring about change. The PRT's aid in governance and reconstruction development and the ADTs foster progression in farming and livestock. The big thing for us this month is assisting with preparation for Voter Registration, which starts in October in Afghanistan for their 2009 elections, while many of our citizens are also registering to vote in our November 4, 2008 election. We want to ensure we do all we can to help in whatever way we can.

Helping out by providing support to the people of Afghanistan is a big part of what we do. The troops work really hard in all aspects of their duties, and have even received a few media visits to emphasize the important work of our troops. PBS Frontline reporter, Timothy Gucza, was with us for about two weeks. During this time he spent several days with the 1-26 Infantry, Blue Spaders, collecting information for a documentary set to air Oct 28, 2008, called "The War Briefing." Please take a look and see the valuable work that our men and women are doing for their country and the country of Afghanistan.

Last but not least, I would like to take this time to acknowledge the great bravery and professionalism of seven of our fallen who have paid the ultimate sacrifice since September 30, 2008. Please pray for them and their loved ones: Pvt. Vincent Winston C/2-2 IN; Spc. Marques Knight B/1-26 IN; Pvt. Michael Dinterman B/1-26 IN; Pvt. Michael Murdock A/1-6 FA; Sgt. Brandon Farley A/1-26 IN; Staff Sgt. Nathan Cox B/1-26 IN; Pvt. Joseph Gonzales B/1-26 IN.

These American heroes paid the price to keep our country and their comrades safe while trying to help the people of Afghanistan. We have also had an additional twenty-seven Soldiers wounded, thirteen of which have been evacuated from theater.

Also congratulations to the following troops who received valor awards for their heroism: The following Spader Soldiers received ARCOMs with valor— Pfc. Casey Slavin, Spc. Michael Jones, Pfc. Tory Kilgore, Pfc. Joshua King, Pfc. Thomas Hare and Sgt. James Sowers. And the following Raider Soldiers received ARCOMs with valor – Staff Sgt. Juan Santos, Pfc. Marco Maldonado Garcia and Thor – Sgt. Davarus Shields

So, thanks to all the Families and Soldiers for their support for us in Afghanistan. No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great. Duty First!

2-2 Infantry aims to improve southern Afghanistan



Photos by Staff Sgt. Adora Medina

Capt. Trevor Voelkel, commander of Charlie Co., 2-2, greets a key leader during a visit to a district center in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan, Aug. 27.

*Story By Staff Sgt. Adora Medina
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO*

Villagers young and old, stood alongside the streets of Afghanistan, to watch as Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, made their way down the rock-strewn path, toward the Maywand district center, to attend a meeting with the village elders, Aug. 27.

With goals of good governance and district development in mind, the 2-2 Inf. Soldiers would be joining the Canadian forces for the first time in attending a bi-weekly meeting with the elders, since the units' recent arrival into the area, adding an additional 800 troops to the already numerous Canadian forces within the southern region of Afghanistan.

"I think they're ready for us to come here, but they're just hesitant because they don't know how long we're going to stay and what our true aims are," Capt. Trevor Voelkel, 2-2, Charlie Co., commander, said. "I think once we can get out into the area and they really see that we're going to be here for the long haul, they'll come around and we'll be able to really make an impact in terms of security and development within the area."

The meeting allowed the incoming unit to get a feel for what the local populace expects in terms of support and progress. During the meeting the elders discussed everything from security issues, recommended development projects and concerns within their respective villages.

"For being the first [meeting], and from the

reports from the Canadians, they had a bigger turnout than they've had in a while," Voelkel, a Brenham, Texas, native, said. "So that, hopefully, is a sign that [the Afghans] realize we're here to stay and the security problems they've had in the past will begin to get resolved."

Since Operation Enduring Freedom commenced in 2001 the Taliban has had influence on the people of the Maywand district. 2-2 hopes to change this during their time in the region.

"This area definitely has a lot of promise and the people are ready for us and they want the security, it's just that the Taliban has had such an influence and grip on this area," Voelkel said. "I think it will get better with time as we can continue to force project more Soldiers out into the area and that the people and the village elders will feel more comfortable with us to get more projects developed."

With the deployment of additional Canadian and U.S. military forces into the south this year, the cooperation from the people is on the rise.

"The future we're offering is worth investing in. They have this idea that it's going to happen like that. They were told initially that if they voted western democracy would bring everything to them and now they've suffered that disappointment and we're sort of explaining it to them by stages like yes we can offer you all of these things like electricity, water and irrigation," Master Cpl. Tatyana Danylyshyn, Psychological Operations, Canadian Scottish Regiment, said. "It's not going to happen right away and there are things they have to do to make it happen, but it's just convincing them that having these things is worth making the effort for, and showing them what they have to do in order to get it."



2-2 Soldiers, pull security at the top of a tower overlooking a district center in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan, while key Afghan leaders and Coalition forces met to discuss the development and security in southern Afghanistan, Aug. 27.

NCO development continues during deployment



*By CSM Ronald Orosz
3rd BCT, 1st ID, CSM*

Does NCO development stop because we are deployed? I say it doesn't and shouldn't stop. The on-the-job combat experience you get can't be replaced by any school. But what about the administrative topics you get while attending the Warrior Leader Course and other NCOES courses?

Counseling is required of all leaders and for all Soldiers. Professional development counseling is important during a deployment so Soldiers know where they stand for promotions, reenlistment options, duty station choice, and their overall duty performance. Personal counseling with Soldiers is important to learn about their "Battle Mind" and to ensure the Soldiers are coping with the stress of combat.

How do you relieve the stress in some of our confined combat outposts? Exercise allows stress relief. Some of you do exercise in your contact with the enemy and during movement to contacts. You can and should exercise anywhere and is part of the NCO development program.

In some of the most remote locations I've visited there is some sort of weight lifting apparatus used for strength building and cardio development. NCOs figure it out and have for hundreds of years. You can't get any better combat focused physical training than

here in Afghanistan. Push-ups, pull-ups, and patrolling are all excellent stress relievers and you can do them anywhere. Physical exercise will relieve your stress, prepare you for your mission and will set the example for your Soldiers.

Exercise can help reduce stress, but the very nature of a combat deployment is extremely stressful and can take its toll over time if you don't talk about it. Leaders should have a forum where Soldiers can talk about the stress during the deployment or just vent.

Leaders need to talk to their counterparts to relieve their stress. First Sergeants, Company Commanders, Platoon Leaders and Platoon Sergeants need to talk to each other. We are on the same team and we need to work together on this. Our junior leaders serving on the front lines everyday are learning valuable skills through small unit drills not easily replicated in a training area. This is NCO development.

It makes me proud when I see Soldiers and junior NCOs in remote areas maintaining standards when no one is looking. I call this NCO development and initiative. The leadership has instilled standards in junior leaders and set the example for them to follow.

This is important in making and keeping our Army strong! If you let your Soldiers do things that undermine the leadership and the standards then we fail in NCO and leadership development. But, if you instill pride and discipline in your Soldiers you might be a Duke NCO. You need to set the example for your Soldiers and wear the uniform correctly. You need to counsel your Soldiers every month

and capture it on paper. You need to pull security on a dismounted patrol and see the enemy first. You need to supervise your Soldiers during weapons maintenance.

All of this is NCO development and Leader development. There is no such thing as a good field Soldier. All this stuff is as important in combat as it is back in garrison.

So I ask you again, does NCO development suffer just because we are deployed to Afghanistan? I say it doesn't and shouldn't. Enforce the standards! Duty First!

"Does NCO development suffer just because we are deployed to Afghanistan?"

CSM Ronald Orosz



Photo by Staff Sgt. David Hopkins

Ben Weijers, a goat cheese expert with Local Governance and Community Development teaches Afghan goat farmers how to produce quality products. Weijers is working with the Provincial Reconstruction Team to help the people of Nuristan.

(Story continued from Page 5)

to the overall development of this country, to include the development of the Paruns region, the developing Provincial capitol of Nuristan,” Col. John Spiszer, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division commander, said.

The PRT also has high hopes for the future of Paruns and feel the people of the province will one day have a stable government and a tourist industry.

“Somewhere down the road, the people of Nuristan will have a functioning provincial government in Parun,” Aylward said, “and the only Americans you will see will be those of us who come back to ski or snowboard on their mountains in winter or fish or kayak in their beautiful rivers in the summer.”

1-6 Field Artillery career counselor exceeds goals

*Story By Pfc. Charles Wolfe
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO*

Re-enlistment is a dilemma every Soldier faces during his career. The choice to return home to family and friends or re-commit to the Army and its many missions is not an easy one to make. Enter a 79S, Army Career Counselor, carefully trained in re-enlistment procedures and schooled in Army career benefits. Retention is a Career Counselor’s main focus, re-enlisting Soldiers his primary mission. Staff Sgt. Brian Worrell, a Career Counselor with the 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery, is more than accomplishing this important assignment. Master Sgt. Danny Wendell, Retention Non-Commissioned Officer for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, is impressed by Worrell’s knack for the job.

“For a rookie Career Counselor, he’s done exceptionally well. He works hard. He’s flying from FOB to FOB taking care of Soldiers,” Wendell said.

Career Counselor is not an entry-level position. Soldiers who pursue this occupation often have an experienced tenure in the Army. Worrell is no exception, having logged fourteen and a half years of service prior to completing the necessary training to earn his Career Counselor Badge in April of 2007. Before accepting his new role in guiding Army careers, Worrell worked as a Cannon Crew Member. Though the jobs are very different in nature, Worrell finds the lessons he learned as an artilleryman can still apply to his new duties.

“Some of the leadership I learned as a 13B has really helped me be a Career Counselor,” Worrell said. There is a vast amount of contrast between Wor-

rell’s two occupations. With only slight reluctance, he boasts a clear favorite.

“I enjoy being a Career Counselor more. You get to interact with more Soldiers. It makes me feel good that someone puts their trust in me to take care of Soldiers and their families,” Worrell said.

Worrell’s comfort is helping to fuel his success. In his first fiscal year as a Career Counselor, he has re-enlisted 102 Soldiers, almost 20 more than the average, completing his retention mission in every arena and winning his unit the 3rd BCT, 1st ID’s “Early Bird Award,” which is given to the first battalion to reach their re-enlistment goals.

For Worrell, though, the best reward for his diligent efforts is the satisfaction of improving a Soldier’s career.

“I like taking care of Soldiers,” Worrell said. “We work hard to get assignments to benefit the guys here.”



Photo by Sgt. Charles Brice

Staff Sgt. Brian Worrell displays a retention award alongside 1-6 FA’s Command Sgt. Major and Battalion commander.

Different cultures merge to provide safety

Story By Staff Sgt. David Hopkins
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

At times of international conflict and war, cultures are brought together for a common cause, to restore peace. This is apparent everywhere you go in Afghanistan; International Security Assistance Forces are working with Afghan National Security Forces, blending experiences and completing the mission.

In the mountains of the Konar province of north-eastern Afghanistan American troops with ISAF are working side-by-side with members of the Afghan National Army to complete the mission of bringing stability and democracy to the country.

From guarding the outpost walls to combined patrols through remote villages and medical assistance, the joint effort is a success.

"We have ANA working with our guys at many of our outposts and they really are working well together," Lt. Col. Brett Jenkinson, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, commander, said.

One such situation where this joint effort is working is at the gate at Camp Blessing. American Soldiers are combining efforts with ANA to keep the installation safe from enemy threat.

There are language barriers, but through the assistance of interpreters the Soldiers are able to work together in many tasks, building bonds and sharing cultural experiences.

"I like working with them," Pvt. Michael Ramirez, infantryman, C Co. 1-26, said about working with ANA at the gate. "They are all hard workers, really hard workers."

Together the Americans and ANA search vehicles and personnel entering the post. It's important



Photos by Staff Sgt. David Hopkins

Tajwali Shirzai, a Soldier with the Afghan National Army, searches a vehicle before entering Camp Blessing in north-eastern Afghanistan.

that they work well together in such a violent region. If they miss anything it could mean mission failure and the loss of lives. The key to this mission's success is trust. There must be trust amongst the guards in order for them to work as a team, checking every possible option to keep danger away from the installation.

"It took me a couple weeks to gain their trust," Ramirez said. "Now I trust them 100 percent. I trust them like I trust my 3rd platoon buddies and that makes it possible to work together as a team."

The trust between the soldiers grows everyday on the gates, but they are learning more than trust; they are learning to speak each other's language.

"I've learned a lot of Pashto since I've been here. A lot of the ANA speak pretty good English from working with Americans, too," Ramirez said.

There are cultural differences involving religious practices, the different ways Americans and Afghans view interpersonal relationships and various other differences, but they work through the obstacles and gain respect for each other's cultures.

"It is a good time for me and we have a good relationship," Tajwali Shirzai, ANA gate guard, said with the help of an interpreter. "They are our guests here and we always welcome them. We have growing respect and this helps us to do our jobs better."

The American and Afghan soldiers have developed a trust and connection that helps them fight for what they believe in and they will continue to do the job they are tasked with, guarding the base, while building international bonds.

"We'll be out here searching people and guarding the gate together as long as it takes," Ramirez said. "We enjoy each other's company and work hard every day."



Tajwali Shirzai, searches a local national worker before he enters Camp Blessing in northeastern Afghanistan. ANA soldiers often work with American Soldiers on the gates to provide security.

“Suicide Prevention: Helping One Another”



*Story By Chaplain (Maj) Steve George
3rd BCT, 1st ID*

William Shakespeare’s famous literary character, Hamlet, once spoke these words: “To be or not to be – that is the question...” Years before that time, a biblical person by the name of Judas Iscariot – terribly overcome by grief and shame at having betrayed his good friend, Jesus of Nazareth, went out and took his own life. For almost as long as humans have been walking the face of the planet, the prospect of self-destruction, self-annihilation – suicide – has been a deadly force with which to be reckoned.

Why do people take their lives? In a study published by the Harvard School of Public Health, the following is noted: “Many factors lead individuals to try to end their lives. Drug and alcohol dependence and abuse, depression...impulsiveness and aggressiveness, a family history of suicide...previous attempts [and/or] recent losses or setbacks, (like a relationship break-up, arrest, or job problem), are all risk factors for suicide deaths and attempts.”

Ultimately, the Harvard study suggests that “feeling hopeless is probably the most common theme.” The study also points out that “suicide attempts (whether fatal or nonfatal) rarely occur ‘out of the blue.’ Attempters typically face multiple problems—some long term, some short term. The moment when action is taken, however, is often during a brief period of heightened vulnerability,” (Source: The Harvard School of Public Health, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/basic-suicide-facts/why/index.html>). What can be done during these “heightened periods of vulnerability?” At moments when

life seems to be so frustrating and unpleasant that self-annihilation seems to be the only way out, what alternatives are available?

First, we need to broaden our perspectives. Self-destructive thoughts have been compared to tunnel-vision or “blinders” on a racehorse – all we can see is the bumpy, seemingly impassable road directly in front of us and our ability to keep going is severely challenged. But if we consider the “bigger picture,” recognize that there’s more to life than our immediate difficulties, we’ll be better able to navigate the fleeting obstacles of disappointment and despair. I remember receiving a lousy grade in one of my classes at undergraduate school. I saw my academic life “flashing before my eyes” and began to think, “What if I really am a dud?” Fortunately, I had a friend with a warped sense of humor who was able to make me laugh, and in so doing, I was able to broaden my perspective.

This leads to the second thing we should do when self-destruction seems to be “the only answer” -- we need to talk with somebody. Suicide prevention is a “team” effort, even if the ‘team’ is just one other trusted person or friend. There’s a reason why ancient wisdom has suggested that we “bear one another’s burdens,” (Galatians 6:2). The English poet, John Donne, was right when he observed that “no person is an island unto him or herself.” We’re in this thing called “life” together, we might as well help each other while we’re at it!

Finally, we need to practice healthy habits. Suicidal thoughts tend to be more prevalent when we’ve been neglecting proper sleep patterns, a proper diet or regular physical exercise. Dr. Karl Menninger once had a patient suffering from depression. Anticipating what the doctor would prescribe, the patient was surprised when Menninger said, “I want you to begin riding your bicycle to the other side of town and volunteering at a homeless shelter.” Predictably, the patient thought that Menninger had lost his mind!

But the depression was daunting so the woman did what the doctor suggested. To her amazement, her depression began to subside and within weeks, she actually began to feel happy and vibrant again. What Dr. Menninger knew, and the young woman soon discovered, was that by practicing healthy habits the potential for a more positive life view is greatly enhanced.

September is “Suicide Prevention Month.” May we stay open to the positives, foster good friendships and continue to practice healthy habits in all that we do, both now and in the days to come. Stay well!

Combat Engineers: Cleaning Afghanistan

*Story by Pfc. Charles Wolfe
3rd BCT, 1st ID Public Affairs Office*

Roads in Afghanistan are few and far between and the few roads that cut through the rugged terrain have only recently begun to be paved. Most of the roads are still winding, narrow gravel pathways. Given the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices, missions on these roads are becoming more dangerous, however, there are a group of Soldiers out there almost everyday making the roads safer.

Thanks to the efforts of Baton Rouge, Louisiana's 927th Engineer Company, working with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's Special Troops Battalion, Soldiers can travel these roads with a greater sense of security. These "Sapper"-tabbed unit clears roadways of explosives throughout Afghanistan.

Using modern sensory equipment, the company conducts frequent patrols throughout Regional Command East, detecting and disarming IED's and other hidden dangers.

"We're one of the top units in a battalion that oversees all the Route Clearance Patrols in theater," Sgt. 1st Class Paul Mounts, 927th Engineer Co. operations noncommissioned officer, also from Baton Rouge, said.

The company's record speaks for itself. During their six months in Afghanistan, the 927th has fallen victim to three IED strikes and successfully neutralized double that amount. With the volatile nature of the job, the engineers are pleased with their performance.

"We have many more finds than we do hits," Mounts said.

The engineers of the 927th belong to a young unit, which stood up their colors only two years ago. The Soldiers guiding the company, however, are a group of experienced combat veterans, each of them bringing experience and wisdom from prior deployments into their current operations.

"I'd say probably about 70 percent of them have been deployed two or three times before this. Only [a small percentage] of our Soldiers are on their first tour," Mounts said.

The route clearance mission is a crucial part of operations in Afghanistan. It is a difficult and dangerous job to travel in to knowingly unsafe territory to make the



Photo by Spc. Casey Ware

A Soldier with the 927th Engineer Company, performs maintenance on a military vehicle for upcoming missions.

roads safe for passage. A solid group of NCO's help the company overcome the daunting obstacles of their task with their knowledge and experience.

"We have a very strong NCO corps. The Soldiers know no matter which NCO they have, they're going to take care of them," Mounts said.

Soldiers of the 927th are very proud of their unit's success in freeing Afghanistan's roads from explosives, to which all of them have contributed. Given the company's size, there is very little room for an engineer who doesn't take part in the regular route-clearing patrols.

"It's a great unit," Mounts said. "The Sapper label gives us a lot of credibility. Regardless of your MOS here, you can count on going on an RCP mission."

"We're one of the top units in a battalion that oversees all the Route Clearance Patrols in theatre."

*Sgt. 1st Class Paul Mounts
927th Engineer Co. Ops. NCO*

A big guy with an even bigger heart

*Story by Capt. J. Elaine Hunnicut
Nangahar PRT Public Affairs*

When the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team in northeastern Afghanistan rolls out the gate to win hearts and minds in their province they are sometimes faced with challenges.

Once they arrive at their location there is always one Soldier who breaks the ice. He can be perceived as the biggest, scariest member of the team, but he has a heart of gold.

Sgt. Michael Darrell, a native of Connellsville, Pa., who is part of a security forces element that allows the PRT to move freely and safely about the province to accomplish their mission, is referred to as the mayor of Jalalabad by members of his team and as John Cena, the famous wrestler, by the children he meets.

Darrell, big and broad, stands 6 foot 3 inches and is a mountain of a man in comparison to the local Afghans and his team-mates and when he smiles, everyone smiles with him. Darrell is a big man, but he is much more than that.

"It is not just his physical size that is big, it is his presence ... his heart; you can't miss him in a crowd," Air Force Lt. Col. Donovan, Nangarhar PRT Commander deployed out of Kadena Air Base, Japan, Mass. native, said.

Darrell helps share the word that Americans are good people through his friendly interactions with the local nationals.

"Darrell has helped the children of Nangarhar Province understand that Americans are not bad people; we are caring and helpful and want to see Afghanistan succeed," Staff Sgt. Robert Tracy, Security Forces squadron leader deployed with the Pennsylva-



Courtesy photo

Sgt. Michael Darrell, security forces for the Nagahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, interacts with local Afghan children.

As a way to give something to the locals, Darrell put together a local soccer team made up of select children in the neighborhood surrounding the base.

"Playing soccer with the kids gives me an opportunity to learn Pashtu, the native language, and the kids the opportunity to speak better English," Darrell said. "It also allows me to enjoy some physical activity other than the traditional push ups in a combat zone."

Darrell teaches the kids soccer skills, but there are even bigger lessons he teaches through his interaction on the field.

"I try to teach them manners. I try to teach them the difference between begging and asking for something," said Darrell.

Tracy said by helping young kids and teaching them the difference between right and wrong, he helps establish good relations for the future. It teaches teamwork and respect. It helps two cultures understand each other better.

Darrell says he wants them to understand that someone is not always going to be there to give them a handout.

"If they truly want something out of life, then they have set out to get it," Darrell said.

Darrell's family often sends care packages from home for the children.

"They know when 'John Cena' is around that the wrappers get picked up and the trash goes directly into their pockets ... and a 'thank you' is given or no more candy for them in the future," Darrell said. He says he was taught manners by his mother and that is how he expects his team to behave.

Darrell believes the Soldiers are here to teach the Afghans to use what they have to make a better life for themselves.

"From my perspective, we are not here to build a whole new world for the people of Afghanistan; we are here to help them use the tools and resources available to them," Darrell said.

Darrell's mother, Nancy Nicholson, is not surprised by his involvement with the children in Afghanistan; she said most of his free time is spent with children back home as well.

"He has spent countless hours coaching, mentoring and tutoring children at the Midway Boys Club in his hometown.

"Michael's famous line is, 'I haven't always been a law-abiding citizen,' and yes that may be true," Nicholson said, "but he feels if he can help anyone by learning from his mistakes, he will."

Avenger supply convoy delivers supplies



Photo by Spc. Brandon Sandefur

A noncommissioned officer with 201st Brigade Support Battalion scans the area as a truck commander while on a resupply convoy. The supply convoy dropped off necessary supplies and equipment to several Forward Operating Bases and Outposts in the Nuristan Province of Afghanistan.

*Story by Spc. Brandon Sandefur
3rd IBCT, 1st ID, PAO*

Everyone knows success in combat depends on the skills of troops and superb tactics of its commanders. An often overlooked aspect of battle is providing Soldiers with the necessary supplies and equipment to fight. Without these things it is very difficult to successfully fight a war.

Soldiers from the 201st Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division are making sure that Soldiers in the remote combat outposts and forward operating bases of northeastern Afghanistan do not have that problem. 201st BSB regularly performs its AVENGER convoy to provide many of the combat arms Soldiers the supplies and equipment to keep up with the very combat environment of northeastern Afghanistan.

“Providing the troops with supplies is a key part of our efforts here in Afghanistan,” Capt. Gretchen Gardner, 201st BSB, said.

The Soldiers whom take part in this convoy have a difficult mission because it is in a very dangerous area of Afghanistan so the Soldiers don’t just drop things off; they must also be combat effective when they go out.

“The Soldiers in the outposts couldn’t fight or survive without the efforts of guys who risk thier lives on convoys to supply the outposts,” Gardner said.

The route is through very difficult terrain and is very long, but a necessary mission for the Soldiers of 201st BSB.

Soldiers must remain alert for sometimes up to five hours at a time on the convoy and due to the time constraints of the convoy they regularly miss a few meals.

Soldiers drop off a wide variety of supplies including, but not limited to water, fuel, food, ammunition and sometimes new and/or repaired weapons systems. In addition, the convoy occasionally has local nationals accompany them to assist in moving supplies and equipment safely through dangerous areas.

Scouts patrol rugged Nuristan terrain



Photos by Spc. Brandon Sandefur

Spc. Andrew Miller, 6-4 Cav. performs a tactical descent while on patrol in the Nuristan Province.

*Story by Spc. Brandon Sandefur
3rd BCT, 1st ID Public Affairs Office*

Afghanistan provides some very difficult terrain for anyone to negotiate. For Soldiers from the 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, it's all in a day's work doing routine patrols and operations around the very remote combat outposts.

Doing the patrols is essential to building relationships with the locals to establish trust with them, show a military presence in the area and to ultimately find anti-coalition and AAF forces in the area along with the possible hideouts they are using. Staff Sergeant Justin Edmondson from Harker Heights, Texas, shares his thoughts on patrolling in the Nuristan province.

"Patrols in this region are tough, long distances over rugged terrain with the enemy hiding anywhere and everywhere," Edmondson said. "They are however, very rewarding because we know every time we go out we make this a better place."

Soldiers have to use a wide variety of their training and skills to do their job in such difficult terrain. They had to draw back on training from such

specialized schools as Mountain Warfare School and the training they received at the National Training Center which simulated several of the mountains they now have to regularly traverse while on patrols.

Much of the training at those specialized schools is reminiscent of what they do now in actual. Squad leader Sgt. Brian Creed from Siloam, N.C. explains how the training at those places is paying big dividends where they're at now and the things they need to do to be successful in combat.

"We are able to observe a large area because of the elevation. By patrolling here we show the locals that we are here to help them and show the Anti-Afghan-Forces that we aren't scared of them," Creed said.

The Soldiers of 6-4 CAV will continue to conduct regular patrols thru the winter months, where not only the terrain will provide a challenge, but the weather will also make things more difficult. The Nuristan province has very harsh winters and blizzards regularly occur.



Spc. Dustin Jones, 6-4 Cav. pulls security along a creek in the Nuristan Province.