

TRAINING THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY



CAPTAIN CHARLES DILEONARDO

Background

It is impossible to talk about my participation in training the Afghan National Army without mentioning the how and the why behind becoming a trainer and advisor. As a lieutenant in the 10th Mountain Division, I was deployed in October 2001 to Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, as an anti-tank platoon leader with Task Force 1-87 which was attached to Joint Special Operations Task Force North, also known as Task Force Dagger. From Uzbekistan, I was among the first regular ground troops deployed to Afghanistan in late November of 2001.

I had arrived at night, and when I awoke the following morning, I saw the majestic Hindu-Kush Mountains that surrounded Bagram airbase. The beautiful snow white capped mountains, dotted with gray and black rock faces that towered all around the airbase, hid the reality that something so beautiful was in fact one of the most dangerous places in the world.

The primary job of my platoon at Bagram Airbase was as a security element for the Special Operations forces who were also staying at the airbase; this included manning joint checkpoints with the local Afghan Militia Forces (AMF) around the airbase. This was my first interaction with the people of Afghanistan. We did not have interpreters, so most of the conversations were limited to games of charades and trying to express ourselves through hand gestures. I was really taken by the dedication of the Afghan men who were manning these checkpoints with my Soldiers. Most were in their mid to early thirties and were veterans of years of combat.



The local militia commander was a man by the name of Kwani; he showed me the scars he had received from being shot three times and blown up twice. He received the first set of wounds during Afghan fighting with the Mujahideen against the Russians, and he had received the last three sets of wounds fighting against the Taliban as a Northern Alliance fighter. I was very intrigued by him and these people; they had gone through so much and had done it purely out of love for their people and their country, not for money or personal gain.

After a few months of pulling security around the airfield, my Soldiers and I participated in Operation Anaconda. I saw three towns: Marzak, Serkhenkel, and Babakhel destroyed by fighting. I was extremely taken by the beauty of the countryside and the great fighting instinct and abilities that these people possessed. I came back to the airfield after that and two subsequent missions and returned to manning my check points with a new-found respect for the people of Afghanistan and the hardships they endured. I left Afghanistan later that month, but I made a promise to myself that I would return if I ever had the opportunity.

That opportunity came in January of 2003 when I was asked if I would delay attending the Infantry Captain's Career Course (ICCC) to become a trainer for six months with the newly formed Afghan National Army (ANA). The ANA's first battalion was stood up and completed its initial training period in July 2002, and the Army was starting to stand up its third brigade. I thought about the beauty of the country and the people from my last deployment, but initially I was not attracted to the idea of going

over there purely in the function of a trainer. However, I was then told I would not only be in a trainer role, but I would also be taking the trainees out on combat operations. I liked this idea and had read the books of Generals Powell and Schwarzkopf and how they had enjoyed doing this same type of mission during the Vietnam War. So with these grand visions, I jumped on board and was told that I would be leaving the end of May to become a trainer.

I learned that my responsibility would be with the weapons company of the battalion, which included training the officers and NCOs in combat operations using U.S. Army tactics with Soviet-era weapons. The weapons company consisted of a scout platoon, 82mm mortar platoon, and an SPG-9 anti-armor platoon. My responsibilities included instructing company-level logistics, range preparation, proper execution of live-fire exercises (LFXs), walking through the orders process, and finally taking the company out on combat missions throughout Afghanistan. This could have been an easy task, but the ANA provided many unseen factors that I had to take into consideration, to include multiple languages, ethnic rivalry in the unit, a low literacy rate, and pay issues.

Camp Phoenix and Other Important Areas

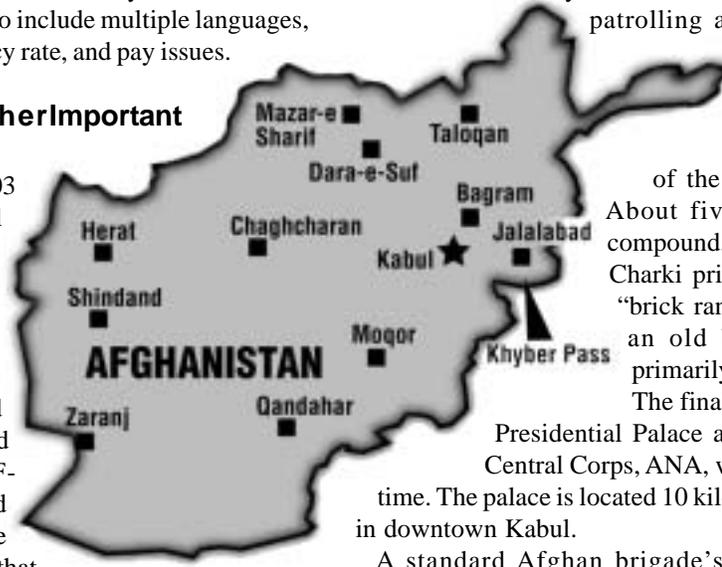
I left Fort Drum on 27 May 2003 and flew into Kabul International Airport (KIA) 31 May in the middle of the night. From the airport, it was a five-minute trip on a large green German bus to Camp Phoenix. Camp Phoenix was built for the purpose of housing the trainers and the support elements of Combined Joint Task Force-Phoenix (CJTF-Phoenix) until other more fixed compounds were completed. The significance of the German bus was that it was blown up 800 meters from Camp Phoenix a week later by terrorists, killing three German peacekeepers and once again reminding me of the seriousness of the situation.

Camp Phoenix is a small camp that was a truck parking area, so it is totally paved. There were significant security measures in place, including a whole wall of Hesco Barriers around the camp and a more fixed cement wall that had guard mounts and vehicle search checkpoints that were manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week by a company of light infantry Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division. Inside the camp were many buildings, most consisting of wood "Sea-Huts" and tents. The camp also had a huge dining facility (DFAC) and a laundry service, and local national workers did a variety of jobs around the camp.

Camp Phoenix represented one of the most interesting conglomerations of nations ever formed. Each of these countries and contingents was responsible for a school, maintenance, or training task that would help to benefit the ANA in some way: a contingent from the Vermont National Guard was responsible for Basic Training and Range Control; the British were responsible for training the ANA NCO Academy; the French were responsible for training at the ANA Officers Academy; the South Koreans were responsible for maintaining the Troop Medical Center (TMC)

at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC); the Mongolians were responsible for the training of the field artillery; and the Romanians and Bulgarians were responsible for maintaining all the wheeled and mechanized equipment and training the mechanics in the third brigade.

There are many different training areas, and the locations of several important camps are important to understanding the training of the ANA. Camp Phoenix is where all the trainers initially stayed, and later it became a logistical center. It is located on the eastern edge of Kabul. The Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), located five kilometers east of Camp Phoenix, contained the Officer School, NCO Academy, Range Control, Central Issue Facility (CIF), Basic Training, and the Central Corps Headquarters. It was also where Forward Operating Base (FOB) 31 was located until the Special Forces left after the relief in place (RIP). Right across the road from KMTC and FOB 31 is where the Kabul Multinational Brigade (KMNB) is located, which is part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), responsible for patrolling and maintaining security in



Kabul. About 10 kilometers east is Pol-e-Charki, which contained a lot of the ranges and the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the Afghanistan Central Corps. About five kilometers south of this compound, just past the infamous Pol-e-Charki prison, are what was called the "brick ranges." They were located by an old brick-making factory and primarily used for live-fire exercises. The final location of importance is the Presidential Palace and home of the 1st Brigade, Central Corps, ANA, where I spent a majority of my time. The palace is located 10 kilometers east of Camp Phoenix in downtown Kabul.

A standard Afghan brigade's table of organization and equipment (TO&E) consisted of three light infantry battalions and one brigade headquarters and headquarters company (HHC). Within these three battalions, there were three light infantry companies, one weapons company, and a headquarters company. The three light infantry companies contained three light infantry platoons and a mortar section, and each of the three light infantry platoons contained three light infantry squads with nine men each. The headquarters company consisted of all the staff sections, a support platoon, a cook section, medical platoon, and a Mullah (chaplain in the U.S. military). The weapons company consisted of the scout platoon with three squads each; the SPG-9 73mm recoilless rifle platoon, with three sections or two guns per section; and the mortar platoon with six 82mm Hungarian mortars or three sections with two mortars in each section.

The Training Teams

Task Force Phoenix training teams consisted of three brigade training teams with each team broken down with the same allotment of trainers. At the brigade level, each team had a lieutenant colonel, whose counterpart was the ANA brigade commander, a brigadier general; a major, who was responsible for the brigade XO; a sergeant major responsible for the ANA

brigade sergeant major; a Transportation captain to cover the ANA brigade motor pool; a Signal captain to cover the communications for the ANA brigade; a Quartermaster captain to help the ANA brigade S-4; and a Military Intelligence captain who would help the ANA brigade S-2 or intelligence officer.

Underneath the command of these brigade training teams, there were three battalion training teams. Each battalion training team consisted of a U.S. Army major who was the mentor and trainer of the battalion commander for which he was responsible. Underneath this major, there was a senior NCO who was the coach, teacher, and mentor of the battalion sergeant major. Then, for each of the companies, a captain and an NCO trainer to help and advise the companies. These captains also had additional duties of helping train one of the staff sections at the battalion level.

I was on the 1st Brigade Training Team (1st BTT), which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Gallant, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, Florida National Guard. He was the mentor for the ANA's 1st Brigade commander, Brigadier General Alim Shah. Underneath LTC Gallant was my immediate boss, Major Mark Kneram, the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade team chief. He was responsible for the training, coaching, teaching, and mentoring of the battalion commander. In addition, we had First Sergeant O'Brien, who was responsible for the battalion sergeant major, the S-3 or operations sergeant major, and the S-2 or intelligence section. 1SG O'Brien was a veteran of the Vietnam War and more than 50 years old; he brought a lot of experience to the team and was very much liked by the Afghan soldiers and the rest of the training team.

Relief in Place

After getting all of the trainers together from their different units and defining what their jobs would entail, it was time to execute the relief-in-place (RIP) with the Americans currently training the Afghans — Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) Team 321 from 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group. The Special Forces (SF) team had been with the 1st Kandak (Dari word for battalion) for only two months but seemed to be more than happy to turn over

the mission. The SF Soldiers picked us up from Camp Phoenix the first week of June and took us down to the palace to meet the Kandak and the interpreters who would act as our go-betweens for both the trainers and the ANA.

The first ride to the palace was very memorable. I rode in my Toyota Hilux pickup truck that was issued to me to travel back and forth to the palace. It was amazing driving down Jalalabad Road. Afghanistan had changed so much since the last time I had been there. I saw endless convoys of refugees returning to Kabul from Pakistan, and numerous rock quarries that were crushing rocks to make cement, bricks, and cinder blocks which would help rebuild dilapidated buildings and repair the scars of 25 years of war. It was amazing to see all the traffic and the people walking around; especially amazing was seeing numerous women out walking around without wearing the traditional burka (a long robe that is usually light blue that covers the females from head to toe with a screen like mask for them to see out). Under the oppressive rule of the Taliban, the females would never have walked around without wearing their burkas at the risk of death. I was extremely impressed by the rebuilding that was going on and was amazed by the amount of reconstruction that had gone on in my absence. As we started pulling through the numerous security checkpoints to the palace, I saw a larger-than-life green, red, and black flag flying high above the palace and knew that I had come back for the right reasons.

We pulled to a stop just outside a rather large building that served as the offices and barracks of the 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, ANA. The building looked brand new, but upon further inspection, it was clear that it had been refurbished and had been standing there for many years. The first people we met were our interpreters, all of them young college students or businessmen. The first one was Zahir, a young college student from Kabul who had been working with the Americans as an interpreter for about six months. The next interpreter was Wahidullah (Wahid), a 24-year-old college student studying literature; he was soft spoken and had a good sense of humor. Tahir, or "Doc" was in his early 30s, spoke impeccable English, and earned his nickname

because he was a doctor at the Kabul Military Hospital (KMH). The next interpreter introduced was Hickmat; he was a well-dressed young businessman whose father worked for the Department of Commerce. The last interpreter introduced to us was Zia, a very slight and soft-spoken 27-year-old Afghan who spoke English well but, when pressured, stuttered and was often caught on words when he was nervous. There were some initial introductions made with the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Kareem, and the battalion operations officer, Major Taza Gul.

The palace was very impressive and extremely beautiful with many buildings that were being rebuilt all over the grounds. We first looked at the barracks where the soldiers lived and slept. The barracks were open bays with metal bunk beds and wall lockers lining the walls. All the beds were neatly made, dress right dress, and the solid cement floors were neatly swept. The next thing we were shown was one of the company offices which had a dual role of serving as where the officers of the company slept and as an office where all the paperwork was done. The showers and bathrooms were the next facilities on the tour, and they were very clean and looked to be brand new. We were informed that they had just finished constructing them and that there had been a little bit of a problem when the soldiers initially used them because some of the soldiers were using flat stones for toilet paper and then throwing them into the toilet, causing the toilet to clog. The last item to see was the palace orchard or garden area which was overgrown but looked pretty with all the flowers and trees in full bloom. We were informed that the palace orchard or garden area was where the Kandak did a majority of its squad-level training.

At this point, we returned to where we had parked our vehicles, and the battalion commander invited us to eat lunch with him. We had chicken covered with rice, nan (unleavened bread), and a bowl of beans with a small piece of meat in it. I sat there patiently as the ODA team chief and LTC Kareem chitchatted through an interpreter. Eventually, the conversation ended, and we returned to FOB 31 to receive a briefing on where the Kandak stood in terms of training and leadership.



Courtesy photos

The author, Captain Charles Di Leonardo, poses for photo with ANA Specialist Ahmadullah Kahn at the Palace in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The briefing was extremely interesting and informative. The Kandak had done squad level live-fire exercises (LFXs) and had been on multiple combat missions to Khowst and Gardez. The leadership slides were very interesting to me because I had yet to meet my counterpart and was looking forward to seeing a picture of him and seeing if he was a capable leader. His slide finally came up, and I got to see who he was and see what he looked like on paper. Captain Sayeed Mohammed, commander of Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, ANA, was 34 years old and half Tajik and half Pashtun from the Parawan province. The Special Forces team assessed him as an exceptional commander. After seeing this slide, I was relieved and looked forward to meeting Sayeed Mohammed and start working with him.

The RIP continued with the special operations forces (SOF) meeting us at the palace every morning. We shadowed the SOF team for the next two weeks, observing several blocks of instruction on Russian and Eastern Bloc weapon systems and some training. The SOF team was very good about linking us up with a counterpart from its team that would give a good brief on the scope of his duties and how he had covered his particular tasks. It was amazing what the SOF team had been able to cover, considering their small numbers and the sheer size of the ANA battalion. This also made it very apparent why the SOF team was turning over the responsibility of training the ANA to the regular Army. The SOF team had taken the ANA as far as they could in terms of training, and the battalion was now ready to be taken to new levels.

Weapons Company Initial Assessments

I met CPT Sayeed Mohammed during one of these counterpart

demonstrations. He had a wealth of experience, making it as high as lieutenant colonel with a position of brigade executive officer (XO) under the Soviet puppet regime in the early 1990s. After the overthrow of the government by the Taliban, he went back to his home province and became a money trader. With the defeat of the Taliban by the Northern Alliance and the insertion of Hamid Karzai as president of the country, he heard that the ANA was forming and again volunteered his services to his country.

Initially, I believed that it was very important to learn as much as I possibly could about this man and his culture so I befriended him immediately and told him I would be his advisor and assist in training his company. Through my interpreter Hickmat, he proceeded to introduce me to his executive officer, his platoon leaders, and his first sergeant. The XO of the company was First Lieutenant Abdul Ghafar; he was 33 years old and was also a former company commander with a wealth of combat experience from the same regime of the early 1990s. The first sergeant of the company was 1SG Mostaqim, a former Mujahideen fighter from the Logar province. He was clearly battle hardened from his fighting with the Mujahideen and initially seemed very wary of me. The company currently had two platoon leaders, with the Scout Platoon leader position being open. The Mortar Platoon leader was First Lieutenant Abdul Qadir who had impressed me earlier during a mortar live-fire demonstration that the SOF forces had done for the new trainers. He was also a former company commander under the puppet regime and had numerous scars and wounds to prove it. The SPG-9 (Recoilless Rifle) Platoon leader was First Lieutenant Lotif Khan; he was 37 years old and had been a corps-level staff officer under the former puppet regime. He and his platoon had also impressed me during the earlier demonstration.

After the initial introductions I spoke to Sayeed Mohammed about the current status of the company. He informed me that it had just returned from a deployment to the city of Gardez where it had a lot of success capturing and destroying caches. The platoons had done limited LFXs while there and had been in some minor skirmishes with a local warlord. This particular battalion had been around for almost one and a half years, and Sayeed Mohammed said that he was starting to see attrition among his forces. He said that because it was volunteer army, the soldiers would occasionally leave, never to return, and that he was currently at about 70 percent strength. He also informed me that a lot of the soldiers were barely literate, and the reason a lot of the soldiers were leaving was that the pay was extremely poor.

The conversation continued over numerous cups of chi, or green tea, and later over a lunch of chicken and rice. He told me how a typical day and week would go in the ANA. The first working day of the week was Saturday. The soldiers would wake up at 0400 for morning prayer, and then at 0500 complete physical training (PT), during which they would run or do calisthenics for about an hour and then would be off until 0900. Being soldiers in a country based on Islam, they pray five times a day, which would cause some difficulty scheduling training around prayer time. The soldiers trained until about 1130 and then were off until 1330 for lunch and prayer. The afternoon usually consisted of more training and classes until about 1600. This schedule would hold true until Thursday, which was a half day and

consisted of a battalion training meeting for company commanders and staff and maintenance for the soldiers. In the afternoon, the soldiers would be off again until Saturday.

After my initial conversation with Sayeed Mohammed, I sat down with SSG Sandoval, and we tried to figure out where the company was and where it needed to go. The SOF team would be with us for about one more week, and then it would be our turn to take over the company. Based on my initial conversations with the SOF team and Sayeed Mohammed, there was one huge problem I could see in terms of the company. The NCOs in the company had no power, and the 1SG was there for making Chi tea and bringing it for the officers. This was also very apparent to SSG Sandoval based on his conversations with the NCOs in the company. We determined that the root of the problem was that the French Officer Academy, being run at KMTC, was training the officers to control all the aspects of the company. There were also trust problems between the officers and the NCOs; in addition to that, the NCOs were not formally trained in their duties and responsibilities. To counteract this problem, the British had begun an NCO Academy that would train the NCOs. SSG Sandoval and I thought we could send NCOs to this school and also manipulate training so as to help the NCOs assume leadership and responsibility in the company.

Another problem we found was that the company had no systems in place, such as training schedules, soldier accountability charts, logistics accounting, or equipment accountability paperwork. The commander did have a piece of paper that he had signed for equipment, but it was not complete and was just a bunch of pieces of paper stapled together. To help the company get their systems in place, I was going to work with the commander and his lieutenants on developing these systems. The biggest problem I saw with soldier accountability was that even though a lot of soldiers had been gone for a long time they were still on the books. So we had to get these soldiers who were gone off the books and then get a true accountability of what each platoon had for soldiers.

The next large problem to address was with the training schedule. There was absolutely nothing in place, and none of

the training was planned by the company; it was all being fed to the company by the SOF team. To change this, I decided to first show the commander how to plan training and then how to execute the training. Then the company commander would plan his own training and execute the plan with SSG Sandoval's and my supervision.

As far as logistics, there were several problems, the biggest of which was there were no combat service support (CSS) units or clear logistical lines in place. The system that the SOF were using was to just buy whatever the Kandak requested, and if the SOF team did have it, they would artificially put it in the supply system by giving it to the S-4. There was a Central Issue Facility (CIF), but it was purely for uniforms and Basic Initial Issue (BII) for the soldiers. It looked to be a daunting task of trying to establish some kind of logistics system for the company. I decided to work this issue solely with the company XO, developing supply requests and range requests and how to go through the process of submitting the requests.

Additional Duties

Just before the SOF team left, there was one last duty that it performed that we needed to assume. This job was paying the soldiers, and it was no easy task. The responsibility of paying the soldiers fell on the paying agents: me and Captain Phillips. CPT Phillips was responsible for drawing and disbursing the money, and I was responsible for maintaining the records via a computer and paper pay rosters. To do this, I had to be taught how to use a very difficult computer program that had been built specifically for paying and maintaining the records for the Kandak.

The paying process was a gigantic headache that took two days every month to perform. I would bring all of the company commanders together into the Kandak's S-1 office a few days before the payday. We would scrub the pay roster to make all the necessary corrections to soldiers' pay in terms of promotions and any other adjustments or errors. After scrubbing the pay roster with the commanders, I would go back to Camp Phoenix and make all the corrections in the database. This was not only time consuming, but it was also a really annoying process. CPT Phillips would then

draw the money, in cash, in the amount that the database had worked out was to be paid to the Kandak that month.

The process was then to hand out the money to every single soldier in the Kandak. He would sign his name and put his thumb print right next to his picture and his pay information. Undoubtedly there were corrections every time; soldiers who did not receive pay from the month before, soldiers who had been promoted and it had not been reflected on their pay ... just all kinds of problems. Initially, I hated payday because of how much time it took, but later on I looked at it as a challenge to see how correct and how quickly I could get it done. The first time we did payday, it took until 2100, and we started at 0900, I eventually got it down to about four hours with two corrections. But for seven months, we went through the exasperating process of paying the soldiers by hand. The lesson learned from this was that this responsibility had to fall on someone else eventually, like a finance team; however, the trainers would still have to be involved to ensure the soldiers were still getting paid the proper amounts. Eventually, I see the responsibility falling on the Kandak S-1 with some oversight from the American trainers to ensure there is no corruption and that everything is done to standard.

Initial Training

After determining the status of the company on paper and getting a feeling for the leaders, it was time to see the company in action. I told Sayeed Mohammed to have the soldiers ready to train the following morning. Specifically, I wanted them to set up the mortars and SPG-9s so that they could show me crew drills on the weapon systems. While this was going on, SSG Sandoval would take the scouts and have them show him movement techniques. The next morning, we showed up at 0830, picked up our interpreters, and went to the company areas. Sayeed Mohammed was waiting for us with the company XO. We went through the normal greetings, and he said that the Mortar and SPG-9 Platoons were waiting at their training area and that the Scout Platoon was waiting for SSG Sandoval in the King's Garden.

Sayeed Mohammed and I walked over to the Mortar and SPG-9 Platoons, and SSG Sandoval went with Abdul Ghafar to the Scout Platoon training area. When I

arrived there, the mortars and SPG-9s were set up, with the officers barking orders to the soldiers and controlling much of the action. I called the platoon leaders over and told them to take the mortars and SPG-9s and run through an immediate setup as fast as they could and to be prepared to fire.

I watched the mortars first. Their platoon leader was controlling the platoon. He was everywhere, yelling at the soldiers to hurry it up and get the mortars set up. I told them to set the mortar with the sight focusing on the top of a large building about one kilometer away. The times were very slow, and the soldiers' actions were very deliberate, afraid to make a mistake and catch the wrath of their platoon leader who was trying to impress his new American trainer. There were a few things that caught my eye that looked wrong. The first was that not all the mortars were the same; there were three mortars from Czechoslovakia, two from Hungary, and one from China. I knew this would cause problems later based on how mortars are fired and how each different kind of mortar fires differently based on its charts and other factors. The second thing I noticed was that the platoon leader was controlling all the soldiers and that the NCOs would just stand there looking around like overpaid privates. The last problem I observed is that there were no aiming circles or plotting boards; this was extremely bad, as it limited our fires to direct alignment and direct lay. Therefore, there was no way to fire indirectly, and this was not something we could show or teach the platoon without the equipment. This problem was compounded by the fact that there were no compasses, and it was not possible to use American compasses because they use 6400 mils and Russian and Eastern Bloc compasses use 6000 mils, as do the Eastern Bloc mortars. Overall, the motivation and training was there and the SOF team had done what they could with the Mortar Platoon, but it still needed work.

The SPG-9 Platoon was a completely different story: the platoon leader was excellent and the platoon was clearly well-trained. The platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Hafizullah, was exceptional and helped the platoon leader execute the crew drills to the best of his ability. I gave the platoon leader the same directions as the mortar platoon leader: set the guns up as quickly as possible and then put them on target. For this, I gave them a target of a building approximately 600 meters away. The setup and execution were exceptional; the guns were up extremely quickly and all of them were on target. Once again, however, except for the platoon sergeant, there was little NCO involvement and there was a problem with the SPG-9s. The problem was that some of the sights were missing, the SPG-9 has a vehicle and a personnel

sight and some of the vehicle sights were missing. Overall, I was pleased with the SPG-9 platoon and knew that it was ready for a greater challenge.

SSG Sandoval's assessment of the Scout Platoon was similar to my assessment of the Mortar Platoon. The scouts had received limited movement training; they understood the concepts but did not know the battle drills. They also did not understand the concept of a scout platoon as a result of a translation problem of the word scout from Dari to English. In Dari, the word scout translates into intelligence, so they thought they were to go forward and gain intelligence by engaging the enemy. This was a severe problem which would take some time and training to correct, so that they would go forward of the battalion and observe the enemy without being seen. One bright spot in the Scout Platoon was that the platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Ahmadullah, was in charge because the platoon leader had left the unit. SFC Ahmadullah was a former Mujahideen fighter with a wealth of experience and an interesting "can do" type of personality. He had the respect of all the officers and soldiers in the company.

SSG Sandoval and I compared our notes that night and decided to be very aggressive in our training program with the company. This would be affected by a couple of outside taskings which would effect who could train. These taskings were mainly guard posts around the palace and would take a platoon away for that particular week of training. We decided this would work well because we could handle training two platoons, but more than that, initially, would be difficult. Simultaneously, I would take the officers aside and teach them the operations order (OPORD) process and systems. This would free SSG Sandoval to work primarily with the NCOs. This would allow him to develop the NCOs to be leaders and trainers while training them in their battle drills without officer



Members of the ANA SPG-9 Platoon prepares their weapon for firing during a training exercise. .

interference. We would also send about two or three NCOs to the British NCO Academy. In addition, SSG Sandoval would lead PT for two weeks to teach the NCOs how to lead PT.

I came to the palace the next day armed with a training schedule for the next three months. I provided Sayeed Mohammed with a training schedule translated into Dari; he and I sat down with an interpreter and discussed the training schedule. He agreed it was very good and that he would have his soldiers at the training sites at the times required. I explained to him that I developed the first three months of training and that I wanted him to develop the training for each subsequent month. I also told him that I wanted all the officers in the office every day for the next two weeks to go through classes with me and to let the NCOs assume responsibility of the soldiers. He agreed that the NCOs needed to assume more responsibility in the company because the officers could not always be there and that the NCOs “needed to start earning their money.”

While I was making all of these plans, the other company trainers were doing the same. The rifle companies were planning marksmanship ranges, and HHC was planning drivers’ training, in conjunction with the ISAF/LNO. The staff sections were also learning their jobs better and were putting in better systems for tracking soldiers, supplies on hand, and training schedules for the future. I decided to “piggyback” with the rifle companies on their marksmanship ranges to see where the soldiers stood on basic rifle marksmanship (BRM) and weapons familiarity. I also wanted to see the company XO send up supply requests to the S-4 shop for transportation and ammunition to see how the logistics lines worked. He did an excellent job of requesting the ammunition and vehicles, but he did it on a piece of paper that he handed to the S-4 and did not keep a copy for himself. Of course, the S-4 shop lost it and claimed never to have received it but the American trainer in the S-4 shop said the shop did receive it but had lost the request. The XO learned several valuable lessons, and he took note of them and never made the same mistake again.

The range was a nightmare; because the request was lost there was not enough ammunition initially, but the XO scrambled



An ANA soldier zeroes his weapon prior to qualifying during a range near the Kabul Military Training Center. Notice that the lanes were marked in both English and Dari.

and found a few cases of ammunition in the arms room. The soldiers were proficient with their AK-47s and could hit the silhouette target; however, there were no adjustment tools for the AK-47s, so no one could zero his weapon. To correct it, we had the Romanians, living on Camp Phoenix, loan us 10 zeroing tools, so that we could zero the soldiers’ weapons. The American trainers ran the range, and we had some problems. We learned we needed zeroing tools and better direct coordination with the Kandak so as to not have the ammunition problem in the future. We also learned that there were things that SOF team had failed to tell us about the weapons, specifically, the need for a zeroing tool.

The lack of zeroing tools, mortar tubes from three different countries, no compasses, SPG-9s missing sights, and having no plotting boards or aiming circles forced me to find where the ANA was getting their weapons from so that I could see if I could find some of these missing pieces and parts. To do this, I had to find the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces, S-4 at KMTC to try to find where the weapons were issued. I found him rather easily, and he directed me to a first lieutenant located in a back room at KMTC. Once I found him, I told him my dilemma, and he said I could bring the ANA company commander, the equipment to be traded, and his property book to KMTC the next day. He said there was a huge cache of donated weapons that were stored in a warehouse on KMTC, and

we could see if we could find the equipment we needed.

The next day, the commander and I dug through the warehouse, and we found some brand new Hungarian mortars and SPG-9 sights; however, we found nothing else we needed. We turned in the Czechoslovakian and Chinese mortars and drew out the new mortars and SPG-9 sights. Sayeed Mohammed brought his hand receipt with him, which consisted of a bunch of pieces of paper in Dari and English with items he had signed for in the company. The lieutenant made the proper annotations on a DA 2062 hand receipt to reflect he had turned in the mortars and drew out the new mortars.

I was very wary of this hand receipt, so I directed the company commander to do a 100 percent with his officers the next day, so that we could actually see the equipment he did have on hand. This was pretty much the way it went: every time we would correct one problem, another problem would present itself. In this case, it was receiving all like mortars and discovering the hand receipts for the equipment were sketchy at best. Who was to say that the AK-47s he was supposed to have in the arms room had not been sold at the local market? I was concerned; I knew that Sayeed Mohammed was an honest man, but were the soldiers in his company honest?

The next day we did 100 percent inventory of all equipment and found that not only did he have all his equipment, he

had extra AK-47s, mortars, and SPG-9s. This was a problem but not that significant compared to the huge problem we discovered in the arms room and supply closets, where we discovered huge caches of extra ammunition. This worried me because my immediate thought was that they were planning a coup or something. It turned out to be quite the opposite; it was for the defense of the palace and the protection of the President Hamid Karzai who lived at the palace. Because of the possibility of a threat from the outside warlords, they believed they needed the ammunition. I agreed with their reasoning to a certain extent, but the amount of ammunition that I saw was excessive, so I decided to use some of it for training in the future.

Training

As a training team, we decided to do battalion consolidated PT because all of the companies were lacking in this area. The first day of PT was extremely amusing. The battalion SGM came and greeted us, wearing his ANA-issued all black PTs with green and red pin stripes and Chuck Taylor looking shoes. He went through the normal greetings and then pulled a whistle out and started blowing it in front of the barracks. As he did this, scores of soldiers started coming out of the barracks and forming up in about a thousand different uniforms. The soldiers were wearing their uniforms with sandals, or any other possible combination of issued uniform that one could imagine. This was a problem, so SSG Bivens, who was leading PT that day, pulled the SGM aside and instructed him on the correct uniform to be worn. The SGM informed SSG Bivens that not all the soldiers were issued PT uniforms, again problem solved ...another problem becomes apparent. This was easily fixed by taking the soldiers to KMTC and the ANA CIF building and getting the PT uniforms.

The biggest problem noticed was that not one officer showed up for PT! This could not be fixed because the officers lived throughout the city of Kabul, and if they were not present at the battalion for staff duty or sleeping in their offices, they were not going to show up for PT. In addition, only one officer had a car and the rest used buses and other transportation to get to the palace, so we never expected the officers at PT. This and the lack of uniforms had us put off organized PT until we could get the PT uniforms, which ended up taking two weeks.

Once the PT program started, the NCOs started stepping up and demonstrating leadership and accountability for the soldiers. The NCOs were quick learners, and the soldiers could run and road march well, but push-ups and sit-ups needed a lot of work. The benefit of the PT was that the NCOs gained confidence and showed their leadership in all facets of training. The fact that the officers were not there actually helped achieve one of the training goals we had set.

The daily training that SSG Sandoval was doing with the platoons was also starting to pay dividends. I would keep the officers preoccupied in the morning with OPORDs, developing accountability systems, planning ranges, and setting up LFXs. This would free up SSG Sandoval

to take the platoons out to train. In the afternoon, I would take the officers down to the training area, and the soldiers and NCOs would show what they had learned that morning. Eventually, it reached the point where SSG Sandoval would name a battle or crew drill or movement formation, and the soldiers would execute.

At this point, several of the key problems we were initially facing had come to resolution. The NCOs were starting to take charge of the soldiers and lead PT every morning, therefore establishing some powerbase. The officers were beginning to understand their administrative role, to include placing numerous systems in place to track soldiers and equipment. With some help from SSG Sandoval and Hickmat we took a tracking chart, translated it into Dari, and then used a plotter to enlarge it and laminate it, making a huge personnel tracking chart that the officers could put on the wall to track soldiers. Sayeed Mohammed and I made adjustments to his hand receipt to make it more accurate and easier to understand and made sure that the S-4 and CIF had a copy. I had also issued the lieutenants two very effective training OPORDs from which they learned how to issue and execute an effective order.

Ranges

To test the training the soldiers had received, it was time to execute some ranges with the platoons to continue with the aggressive training plan we had derived. The timing was perfect for these ranges. It was August, and we had entered a tasking cycle in which two platoons would be on guard duty and one would be able to train. The officers and soldiers were really excited to get the training going, and I was excited to see what the soldiers could do and put the officers to the test by putting them in stressful situations to see how they would perform.

I briefed the plan I had made with Sayeed Mohammed to MAJ Kneram and the rest of the trainers and made some minor adjustments based on their input. They all seemed surprised and excited and were anxious to see how the Weapons Company would



Soldiers with the Mortar Platoon adjust their aiming stakes during a range at Pol-e-Charki. Notice the AN/PRC-77 for communication.

perform. I had the finalized plan translated into Dari via Hickmat and made sure all the officers in the company understood the schedule for the training. I then took the XO and commander out to Pol-e-Charki and showed them how to do a range recon and set up the range. The next step was to go to range control and confirm that the ranges were reserved for the training. To do this we went to the fourth floor of the ANA Central



Captain Sayeed Mohammed conducts an after action review with the officers after completing cordon and search training.

Corps HQs where a joint range control, with both Afghan and Americans, were controlling the ranges. I confirmed with the Americans that the ranges were reserved, and I overheard a similar conversation between Sayeed Mohammed and the Afghans responsible for range control. The last preparation for the ranges was for the company XO to confirm the logistics for the ranges. This consisted of his confirming requests he had put through the S-4 for ammunition and to the HHC XO for vehicles. He confirmed these requests and that a few days before the scheduled training, he would pick up the ammunition and augment it with the ammunition we already had at the palace.

The first platoon to run through the training was the Mortar Platoon; however my personal qualifications and lack of experience forced me to bring in my battalion's Mortar Platoon Leader, First Lieutenant Dave Smith, who was a trainer in 3rd Kandak. He was Mortar Leaders Course qualified and had numerous mortar LFXs under his belt, so he was perfect for the job.

The XO had the trucks loaded with all the ammunition and the troops were ready to go when we arrived at the palace. We drove down to KMTC and signed for the range and continued down to Pol-e-Charki range 2A. The first classes had the soldiers focus on the basics and consisted of basic range estimation and registering a mortar system. The range estimation class went

well, but the mortar registration class did not go that well. There was difficulty understanding the concept. Because we were using direct lay and direct alignment, the troops could see where the mortar was landing, so they would adjust the rounds visually and get the rounds on target. Because of this, LT Smith and I decided to move the mortars down into a wadi where the mortar men could not see where the mortar was landing, and we had one of the scout teams that were out providing security call the adjustment in over the radio. This worked much better; the mortar would be directly aligned with the target, and the platoon leader would call instructions over the radio, using his charts, after estimating the range to the target, using a map. Then, they would fire a round, the scout would call adjustments, and the mortars would fire another round. Once on target, the scout would call fire for effect, the mortar platoon leader would give all the adjustments to the other guns, and then they would fire a 16-round volley or four rounds out of all four tubes. The scout would call target destroyed and then give them another target.

The Mortar Platoon also performed the mortar out of action drill that was really impressive. The drill is performed when a mortar round is dropped into the tube, and it is not shot for any of a number of reasons. The drill was executed with everyone backing off the firing line and the assistant gunner (AG) going up after a few minutes and kicking the tube to try to get the mortar

to drop if it was stuck in the tube. If nothing happened, he would come back, and after two minutes, the whole gun crew would go to the gun line, twist the mortar off the base plate and then unhook the tube from the bipod, and tip it forward until the AG could catch the live round. This was a scary drill to watch because it was extremely dangerous, but the mortar soldiers performed it more than 30 times to perfection.

The next drill we did was the mounted hip shoot which went exceptionally well. The platoon would be loaded into the two vehicles with two mortars loaded into each vehicle. They would drive up as if their convoy had just made contact, run off the vehicle, set up the mortars, and fire immediate suppression as fast as possible. We executed the drill five times, and each time the mortars had a faster time than the one before.

The last drill executed was a dismounted movement to a hip shoot. This was interesting to watch and was difficult for the Mortar Platoon, but it was satisfactory in the end. I set the movement up as a five kilometer uphill movement to the mortar firing point, with the soldiers carrying the mortar tubes and a rucksack. Being at 6,500 feet of altitude really took a toll on the soldiers. The platoon leader started the movement with gun sections together and the ammunition bearers (ABs) providing security. He used a huge wadi running off the mountain to cover and conceal his movement to the mortar firing point (MFP). Once he got within 500 meters of the MFP, he popped out of the wadi and did a quick leaders recon with his PSG. While he was gone, things got interesting. Soldiers took off their helmets, boots, and blouses and went to sleep. I made a mental note of this and continued with the training. Once the mortars got into place at the MFP, it was almost as if the soldiers had forgotten everything they had learned; there were all

kinds of problems. I decided to have them restart 500 meters back, and this time, they performed well, but I had plenty of comments for the AAR.

Sayed Mohammed had been on my hip, observing training, and I had taught him the after action review (AAR) process during one of our officer training sessions so I let him lead it, and I would add comments during the AAR. I chastised the soldiers for losing focus while their platoon leader was doing his leader's recon, explaining to them that whenever they are in a combat environment, their senses always needed to be sharp because that is when the enemy attacks. I also praised them for their improvement since the first time I had seen them go through their drills, and that it was the responsibility of the NCOs to maintain this training by doing the mortar battle drills as often as possible.

One technique I used was that after we would eat dinner, I would take the platoon out for a long foot march to a grid point and establish a patrol base. I demonstrated this for the platoon leader and NCOs the first night and had them execute the second night. It really took advantage of the time they had away from the palace to train, and they enjoyed walking at night when it was much cooler. This gave them an opportunity to work on movement formations and setting up and establishing a patrol base, but most importantly improving their field craft. I did this with every platoon, and it really boosted their confidence and reinforced the training we had done at the palace.

The SPG-9 Platoon was the next platoon to train at Pol-e-Charki and I was most confident in their abilities of all the platoons. The platoon started with digging a standard SPG-9 crew fighting position. This was intended to take a long time to show just how much time it takes to dig the position. Once the position was finished, I had the soldiers practice their SPG-9 crew drills and then conduct dismount and setup drills for the best time; the crew with the best time would be the first to fire from the SPG-9 position. The crew that won did so in an amazing fashion, demonstrating that the crew drill practice was working. The platoon used the rest of the day, engaging tank hulks from the hillside where they had dug the SPG-9 fighting position. That night, I had them do a five-kilometer movement to a wadi and, then the next morning,

do an anti-armor ambush on the tanks right as dawn was rising. The SPG-9 platoon lived up to all my expectations, and I was extremely pleased with their range time. Sayeed Mohammed made the same comments during the AAR.

The Scout Platoon was last to go through range training; it only had enough soldiers to actually train two scout teams, but we made the most of it by jamming the schedule with as much training as possible. I first had the scouts practice movement formations and then go through the break contact drill. SSG Sandoval and I had set up some silhouettes inside of one of the wadis, and we had the platoon patrol up to the wadi and make contact or "be seen" by the silhouettes. Then, the scout team would break contact by bounding back, while using suppressive fires. During the crawl phase we did not use ammunition. We did about 10 iterations between the two scout teams, and when they were finished, they looked exceptional. I would AAR every break contact drill right after they performed it and tell them what corrections they needed to make for the next iteration. It was fast and furious, but we never had a single incident where there were any safety issues.

At night, I would take the scouts out and reinforce their stealth abilities by having them observe a nearby village and report back to me what they were seeing. This went really well, and the second night, I had them go out on their own and report back to me via the radio what they observed. In the morning, I would do an AAR and tell them what they did right and what they needed to improve on for the future. Overall, I was pleased with the scouts' improvement and grasp of the concepts and looked forward to one day maybe seeing them perform their new observation skills.

Future Operations

Toward the end of August, word came down that we would assume some missions, working jointly with the Special Forces in Kandahar. The first company to go would be 2nd Company, and then at the end of September, my Weapons Company would assume the mission. SSG Sandoval and I were to go along to be the liaison officers between the SF and my ANA company. Sayeed Mohammed and I realized that we needed to do some light infantry training because we would not be used as a weapons company but rather a light infantry company. To get prepared for this mission, Sayeed Mohammed and I made a training plan where we would do two weeks of training, the first being a round robin training event with three separate stations and the second being platoon LFXs assaulting an objective. This would all be done at the Kamari Brick Ranges. The three separate stations would be establishing a checkpoint to search vehicles, patrolling, and cordon and search operations.

The ranges went very well. The most notable event was the checkpoint which we set up in a real situation on a major road and captured a few weapons just outside Kabul. The LFXs also went well, with each platoon doing two iterations and finishing the LFX with a company seizure of an objective with platoons bounding online after dismounting trucks. After the ranges, the company XO and I started gathering the ammunition and supplies we would need for the mission. Word had come down that we would fly via three C-130 flights to Kandahar in the southeast of the country, but no one had told me what the mission would be or what the ANA soldiers would be doing. Some news finally came when



Members of the SPG-9 Platoon prepare their weapon for firing during a range.

a SOF team linked up with me and SSG Sandoval at Camp Phoenix. I met the team sergeant, "Jim," and he said he would escort us down to Kandahar. He also said that he would tell us our mission when we got down to Kandahar and that we needed to focus on getting the company all set to fly down to Kandahar. This was easy, and the soldiers were excited to get on an airplane because most of them had never flown before in their lives. I was on the last flight with part of the SOF team; the soldiers were exceptionally excited and nervous, but they really enjoyed themselves on the flight.

Once in Kandahar, we stayed for a few days at the American base and ran some local security patrols to let the local people see the ANA. I was a little concerned with the sitting around and the lack of a real opportunity to do some missions, so I kept the soldiers gainfully employed by doing movement to contact drills and running checkpoints. After about three days, we moved by truck to the Zabul province north of Kandahar. Everything went uneventfully, and the soldiers did a superior job of being friendly with the locals while being professional about all their actions.

I still had not received an idea about what our mission was going to be but knew that we were going to be working in the Zabul province as requested by the local governor, Hafizullah Hashami. He wanted to demonstrate and flex the power of the central government because the local Afghan Militia Forces (AMF) had not been doing much to curb the intertribal fighting in the province and the police forces had been ineffectual. In addition, Highway 1 from Kandahar to Kabul was being paved by foreign contractors, and they kept being attacked by vigilantes and robbers. The governor believed that the presence of the troops would stem the violence and help to increase his power base, while at the same time serve notice to the AMF that its days of providing security in this particular region were numbered. I had received this information in Kabul and was looking forward to dinner that night at the governor's house once we arrived in Qalat (Zabul's provincial capitol).

When we arrived in Qalat, we went to the AMF compound in a fortress on top of a hill that overlooked the city. We arranged with local AMF commander, Sher Allahm, for some lodging for the SOF team and the ANA company. Sayeed Mohammed



ANA soldiers from Weapons Company maneuver to the objective while receiving mortar fire during a cordon and search operation in Saygaz, Afghanistan.

immediately set out security and positioned soldiers all around the fortress as if he had been doing it for years. Sayeed Mohammed, "Chief" (the SOF team leader), and I walked the perimeter and discussed defensive positions and how the ANA company should be arrayed. Chief was extremely impressed by Sayeed Mohammed and the way he had set out security and only made a few adjustments to the perimeter we had established.

After getting established, we had to go down and meet the governor and discuss his ideas of what needed to be done and what issues he had that he would like us to address. The first person I met at the governor's house was his secretary who seemed to be the person really running the province. He always seemed to know what was going on and would do anything to support our operation. I set up feeding the ANA through the secretary. He would buy the food, supply the cooks, and ensure that everything was good. Governor Hafizullah Hashami was an outsider as far as the locals of Zabul were concerned; especially after he was appointed governor of Zabul after the old governor was fired by President Karzai. He was originally from Kandahar and believed that all of the people in Zabul "were peasant dirt farmers of no consequence." I spent a few minutes with Chief and Zahir, who had made the trip with me, talking to the governor about any recent security problems in the province. He said that there had been a district police station overrun by the Taliban about six hours north of Qalat, in the town of Saygaz,

and there had been rumors of several high ranking Taliban moving through and living in the province. I took what he said and made sure Chief was informed of the information he had provided.

That night, Chief explained our mission to me, which was essentially getting the ANA out into the Zabul province and getting them as much exposure as possible to show the legitimacy of the government. In addition, we were to help secure the workers working on Highway 1 by doing daily patrols along the road. The last mission which Chief said we were to do was hunt for high value targets (HVTs), and this turned out to be the primary focus of the SOF team. It was interesting to hear the intelligence he was giving me and the information he had about the province, but I was not allowed to tell the ANA. I kind of hated how secretive the SOF operators were being about everything, but I understood the team was unsure of me, and they did not trust the ANA.

For the next week, the ANA executed a number of dismounted foot patrols that were very successful. They also established numerous checkpoints along Highway 1 and took down one illegal checkpoint that was taking money from the civilians to let them pass. There were a number of weapons collected from the illegal checkpoint as well as some from the checkpoints that we had established. I was extremely pleased with the execution of both of these operations, and the people responded well to the ANA because of their professionalism and fairness. The local

people were amazed to see all the ethnicities that were working together, that they did so professionally, and that they did not loot or mistreat the civilians. The ANA's presence was definitely paying dividends so much so that the governor came to see me and thank me. I told him to thank Sayeed Mohammed and to give him the credit he deserved.

After a week of doing minor missions around the area, the ANA set out to do a major mission in the De-Chopan District of the Zabul Province. The trip was about eight hours along a very dusty trail. When we reached the village, we did numerous cordons and searches of buildings and worked with the local government officials to help with patrolling the district. I was extremely pleased with the execution of the cordon and search. We had practiced this operation in Kabul, and I was a little wary of the execution. I was also pleased with the treatment of the civilians which was a concern to me because of the many different ethnicities in the ANA. I did not know if a Pashtun civilian would be upset to be searched by a Hazara soldier. Everything seemed to work itself out though, and Sayeed Mohammed and his officers and NCOs were the primary reason. There were numerous other operations that went on in De-Chopan, including multiple joint operations to seize HVTs and other security missions before we returned to Qalat.

When we returned to Qalat, we retrieved all of our equipment, packed up, and took the long road back to Kabul. It was mostly an uneventful trip back to Kabul except for a flat tire. Once we reached the palace, the entire Kandak had lined the streets to cheer us as we arrived at the palace. I shook the battalion commander's hand and returned to Camp Phoenix. At Camp Phoenix, I was greeted by MAJ Kneram who informed me that a Canadian training team was taking over 1st Kandak and that I would be leaving in a couple of weeks. I was disappointed about this but understood it was time to move on.

I could not have been more pleased with the accomplishments of the Weapons Company and believed that the Canadians would receive well-trained soldiers to continue in their training. I said good-bye to Sayeed Mohammed and his officers and NCOs and wished them well. He thanked me and told me I was always a welcome guest in his house, no matter where it was. I took these words to heart and told him at some point I would return to Afghanistan and looked forward to that day. I learned a great deal about myself, soldiers, the warrior spirit, and the strength of man; many of these lessons I will always remember, and I will always volunteer to try to get back and help the people of Afghanistan.

Lessons Learned

To conclude, I would like to focus on some of the most important lessons learned from training the ANA. These lessons are specific to my experiences with the ANA but can be used when training any foreign army.

The most important lesson I learned was the understanding of the culture of the Afghan people. At first, it was very difficult to know what to say and how to act without offending the Afghans. It was a learning process that was more of a trial and error scenario. It is essential that the trainer makes an active effort to learn the most predominant language, the different ethnicities and how they interact, the history of the country, and the many different cultures of the people. It would benefit the trainer to do a country study

and have language classes at home station. Unfortunately, none of the trainers had these opportunities before they left, so it was very difficult. I would spend my nights at Camp Phoenix on the internet, reading history of the country and learning the different cultural aspects of the country, but this did not compare to what I learned when interacting with the Afghans during the day. After about four months, I had taught myself enough of the language that I could hold a conversation and not need an interpreter when talking to the Afghans. Another possibility is to have good interpreters teach soldiers as much as possible about the country and the language.

It is very important that the trainers learn about the weapons systems and their capabilities. We had a huge benefit of having the SOF team there, who knew the weapons and were able to train us up on them. This is a very important; it is impossible to train someone how to shoot if the trainer does not understand the weapon system. We commanded immediate respect from the ANA by being able to demonstrate knowledge of the weapons. Once again, if the trainer can get a hold of the weapons at home station, it would be beneficial to shoot those weapons and know all the weapon's capabilities.

Paying the Kandak was exceptionally difficult. The best advice I can give is to have a system and make sure that all money given out has multiple documentations. We had a really good program, but there was nothing that could prepare us for this operation, and it is very difficult to make sure there are always proper documentations, or you will be paying out of your own pocket.

It is important to have clear cut training goals when training a foreign national army. The training should be geared toward a goal or give the soldiers capabilities to operate in the environment to which they are suited. Guidance from higher headquarters on where the unit needs to be or what exercises they need to execute to get where they need to be is always good and helps to develop the training. In all cases, you should try to teach your counterpart what you are doing so that he can assume that leadership responsibility.

Take full advantage of the operational environment for training the soldiers. This will make the jump from doing training exercises to combat missions less significant and get the soldiers used to the stress. I used roads close to where we were training to establish traffic control points and vehicle searches for practice but in a real situation. As a result, when we went out to questionable areas, the soldiers did an exceptional job of establishing these TCPs and had no problem transitioning to doing it realistically in a questionable environment.

Interpreters are key to the success of the trainer. I cannot stress this point enough; although it is a paid position, often times, the interpreters anticipated my answer or already understood what I wanted and it made my job easier. It is exceptionally important to have great interpreters who will help with translation and answer questions that the soldiers have; it saves you a lot of time. If at all possible, choose your own interpreters and make sure they are loyal and have a good grasp for all the languages of the country.

Captain Charles Di Leonardo was commissioned out of Saint Mary College-Leavenworth, Kansas, through the University of Kansas ROTC in May 1999. He was previously assigned to the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry "Polar Bears" and Task Force 1-87 Infantry of the 10th Mountain Division.
