



# CompanyCommand

## *Building Combat-Ready Teams*



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

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## Afghan Partnership 2012

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The 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (TF Devil) deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom (February 2012–September 2012), where they conducted counterinsurgency operations in Ghazni Province. A number of company commanders have taken the time to capture some of our experiences and

lessons learned. Because a significant part of our mission included partnering with our Afghan counterparts, we chose to focus this article on that topic. For a broader view of our experiences and lessons learned, please check out the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>).

### **Pete Anzovino**

**B/3-73 CAV**

As the deadline for coalition withdrawal from Afghanistan draws closer, more and more emphasis will be placed on the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF]. Are they capable of continually defeating the Taliban and insurgent networks while simultaneously providing security and stability for the people of Afghanistan? Will they be ready in time?

My troop partnered with an Afghan National Army [ANA] rifle company along Highway 1 in Ghazni Province. My ANA company commander seemed eager to work with us and immediately invited me and my scout platoon to follow his company on a presence patrol to a local village about 10 kilometers south of his outpost. As I walked the patrol with him that day, my platoon remained in a security posture on the far outskirts of the village. The ANA made it obvious on that first combined operation that they were already capable of planning and executing localized operations at the company level.

This ANA company had no previous long-term partner, yet they were already at an acceptable level of independent operation. They displayed the ability to execute joint operations with the local Afghan uniformed police, and on multiple occasions conducted unilateral operations without our support and did not inform us until the mission was completed. I attribute this in large part to their lack of a sustained partnership with International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] units over the years. Once my troop entered the equation, however, the company commander naturally tried to see what additional resources we were willing to provide. He seemed to know just how far he could push me with his requests for generators, furniture, boots, fuel, etc.

Many ANSF units are capable of operating independently

right now. Years of partnered training and missions have greatly enhanced their capabilities, but as long as the coalition remains, there will always be the temptation to default to them for resourcing and support. The sooner ISAF disengages from the ANSF, the sooner they will be forced to develop and exercise their own systems.

### **Trent Talley**

**B/2-504 PIR**

Living 24/7 with host-nation forces on a company-sized base proved difficult at times and was constantly a focal point for security measure consideration. The interaction with ANA soldiers was a constant balancing act of training, patrolling and daily life on a combined outpost. Though our combined defensive plans focused on the threat outside the wire, the possibility of an insider threat was always in our minds. Each day, troopers from my company stood guard alongside the ANA as well as the contracted Afghan security guard [ASG] forces. All were armed and wearing kit, providing security along the perimeter and for the entrance to our combined company-sized outpost. They interacted on a soldier-to-soldier level, telling stories of fighting, talking of family and friends, and some becoming friends themselves. Each night I would have a leader huddle with my key subordinate leaders, the ANA company commander and his executive officer. We would discuss future missions, make final preparations for the next day's mission and share ideas on how to plan effectively. These nightly conversations built relationships and helped us all learn and be more effective.

Late one August morning, a disagreement between the ASG and the ANA resulted in one guard with a broken nose and an ANA soldier with four staples to the head. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that it was Ramadan, and the Afghans were tired and hungry from fasting. The ANA

*A driver with the Afghan National Army's 6th Kandak assists another driver in repairing a Humvee. The soldiers are getting lessons in preventive maintenance from mechanics with the 307th Brigade Support Battalion.*

tried to swarm the ASG section of the base. My troopers and I stepped between the ANA and ASG and attempted to reason with them. There was no reasoning with the frustrated ANA, though, and the situation escalated to the point that ANA forces drew weapons on their American counterparts—my men, who had fought and bled alongside them.

The situation was at the brink of a catastrophe. A few other leaders and I told our men to move back to the opposite side of the Hesco wall that separated the U.S. side from the Afghan side. Although withdrawing, my men placed themselves up on the wall and remained in a position to support their leaders if weapons fire erupted. The ANA finally began to see that we were lowering our weapons and no longer trying to match their level of aggression. It took making ourselves vulnerable by turning our backs to them to calm the ANA down.

Though our partnered activities resumed after this incident, the level of trust was never the same. We withdrew Americans from the entry control point, posted guards near the entrance to the operations center and moved the ASG to our side of the base, where they would continue living for the remainder of their stay on the base. A short while later, we removed the ASG from the base entirely to prevent any future situations from developing.

For me, this incident highlights the importance of discipline and standards. Had one of my Soldiers fired a round, it could have jeopardized our mission and turned into an international incident.

**Jared Larpenteur**  
D/2-504 PIR

The greatest challenge that my company faced during operations in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, was partnership with the ANSF. We deployed to an area that had not seen heavy ISAF partner-



Photographs: U.S. Army /SCT Michael J. MacLeod

ship in more than five years, and so our assumption going in was that the ANA would not be well-trained.

Upon arrival in theater, my company partnered with the heavy weapons company of the 6th *Kandak*, 3/203rd Corps. We quickly realized that they were more trained than we had anticipated. The problem, however, was that they were reluctant to patrol with us and were not as well-disciplined, especially on long-range patrols that were two and three days long. During these patrols, in patrol bases at night, they would play music and smoke cigarettes. We would tell them to stop, which had an immediate positive result, but 15 minutes later the music would start again.

We spent every day doing some type of partnered activity. Those days that we did not have scheduled patrols we



*A U.S. Army lieutenant with the 1st Brigade Combat Team greets his Afghan army partner before their soldiers patrol together.*





*SPC Louis Morales, a mechanic with the 307th Brigade Support Battalion, explains to Afghan National Army drivers how to properly read a dipstick during preventive maintenance.*

would go and hang out with the ANA, share meals, play games and so on. By doing this, we got to know them better and realized that the problem was that the ANA felt they were good enough to lead their own patrols and did not need our assistance. We stepped back a bit and shifted to focus more on skills that would allow the ANA leaders to better plan their patrols. We taught them troop-leading procedures and the OPORD [operation order] process, focusing initially on how to read maps and plan routes according to terrain and threat analysis. Developing relationships and our shift in focus created a positive connection. The ANA leaders became more capable and confident. Not only that, but there was a significant increase in motivation and discipline during patrols.

Our partnered ANA clearly enjoyed being in the lead. Respecting them and establishing a relationship opened up the opportunity for us to better understand them and make an impact.

### **Nicholas Carelas**

**B/307 BSB**

My company was assigned the task of teaching the 6th *Kandak* how to properly maintain their vehicles—mainly old U.S. Army M1151 up-armored Humvees and Ford Rangers. Their operational readiness rate for the vehicles when we arrived was below 30 percent; barely one in five vehicles functioned. They basically used their equipment until it broke, and then it just sat there. The ANA mechanics didn't have the training they needed. Case in point: one mechanic poured engine oil into a radiator—not maliciously, but because he really didn't know.

Working with the security force assistance team [SFAT], we conducted key leader engagements with the *Kandak* S3 and HHC [headquarters and headquarters company] commander. We found out that their maintenance bay was being

used for storage. Once the ANA cleared that up, we executed our first class with 10 ANA soldiers. Our focus was to instruct them on preventive maintenance checks and services [PMCS] as well as common 10- and 20-level tasks on the M1151 and the Ford Ranger. The first obstacle we encountered was the high illiteracy rate. ANA soldiers were very smart and caught on quickly, but they were never taught how to read and write. Two of my leaders, 2LT Grant Thayer and SFC Jesse Thompson, overcame that obstacle by creating a picture book. They took pictures of an ANA soldier conducting a step-by-step PMCS and included short phrases in Dari for those who could read. The hands-on training was especially effective. A couple of ANA soldiers started standing out among the others. They were always first under the vehicle and quick to push the instructor away so they could do it. We used their motivation and eagerness and had them assist in instructing the next class in a train-the-trainer format. The ANA exceeded our expectations, and, in the end, a maintenance program was established. As a result, the operational readiness rate rose to around 75 percent.

At the heart of our success was the ability to bridge our cultures together. In the mornings, the ANA provided breakfast for the U.S. mechanics and would regularly serve lunch as well. Second lieutenant Thayer and SFC Thompson were there every day, showing them that we cared. The Afghan soldiers are smart individuals and are heading in the right direction. With continued partnership operations, the ANA will one day be able to defend and support their nation.

### **Jacob Jones**

**E/1-504 PIR**

When our battalion arrived in Ghazni Province in early March, it became obvious after the first few interactions with our partnered *kandak* that their operational readiness rate



*A platoon sergeant with the Afghan National Army's 3rd Brigade, 203rd Corps, ensures proper spacing of his troops with paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team during a partnered patrol.*

and systems to sustain themselves were broken. While we had anticipated this, the scale was such that the *kandak* remained essentially stationary along Highway 1 and could not project any combat power beyond their immediate spheres of influence. The three-man SFAT working with the *kandak* had little time to invest in mentoring the ANA on logistical issues. We decided to augment the SFAT with organic sustainment personnel from within the forward support company. We placed a small forward logistics element [FLE] consisting of mechanics and cooks at COP [command observation post] Moqor, where two of our infantry companies and the *kandak* headquarters were based. The FLE's task was to increase the capabilities of the *kandak* while simultaneously providing logistical support to all coalition forces on the base. In approximately four months, this partnership effort increased the readiness rate of the *kandak's* rolling stock by more than 300 percent.

We learned several things from this experience.

1. It is important to select the right individuals for the job. The FLE never

consisted of more than five mechanics because of competing manning requirements. It was multifunctional, however, with three light-wheeled-vehicle mechanics, a generator mechanic and a clerk. The NCOIC [noncommissioned officer in charge] was a staff sergeant. The maintenance platoon leader split time between COP Moqor and FOB [forward operating base] Warrior, where the majority of our sustainment assets were located. Each individual was chosen based on expertise, ability to operate with minimal supervision and interpersonal communication skills.

2. Assess the Afghan capabilities and then equip them to do the work. Although the *kandak* was authorized mechanics, there were none. Therefore, we made training Afghan mechanics a priority. Each ANA company provided one soldier for the initial training. We envisioned these six not only as being trained as mechanics but also as being liaisons to their companies and able to train others. While the *kandak* had several vehicle types, the course focused

on eight 20-level topics on the M1151 and like variants. All classes were conducted via hands-on instruction on non-mission-capable ANA equipment. Simultaneously, the "students" often led training sessions on basic PMCS skills with the soldiers in their companies. This helped build the ANA mechanics' confidence and gave them increased visibility with their leadership.

3. The program had to be phased. Initially, we focused on what we viewed as quick wins. We set a minimal essential equipment list of 12 M1151s for the ANA to execute partnered operations. Jointly, we conducted a fleet-wide techni-



*An Afghan soldier directs fellow soldiers during a firefight near Combat Outpost Giro while a paratrooper with 3rd Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, fires on insurgent positions.*





SPC Jason Schmid, a para-trooper with 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, shares photos with soldiers of the Afghan National Army at their post along Afghanistan's Highway 1.

cal inspection and through controlled substitution were able to reach this initial benchmark. Our generator mechanic was also able to assist the *kandak* with running power to their headquarters. Once we reached an initial capability, we then turned towards increasing the number of vehicles that were operational as well as sustaining the ones that had been repaired. We knew that obtaining parts through the ANA logistical system would remain a challenge, so the priority was placed on educating the ANA. As none of the ANA mechanics were literate, we developed a flowchart diagram that corresponded with the manuals their S4 had so that when they diagnosed a fault, they could take a visual representation of the issue to their *kandak* to get the part ordered. The primary goal throughout this part of the program was to increase the confidence of the ANA in their own systems.

4. Finally, the commander's true priorities determine success. Our first *kandak* commander paid lip service to the importance of maintaining his equipment. The commander who replaced him made improving his maintenance status his number-one priority, to include directly calling his superiors and requesting assistance. That call led to an ANA contact team arriving with parts, which our partnered *kandak* mechanics used to repair many of the small faults that they had identified. This ANA-led effort was a successful culmination of our initial maintenance partnership efforts. With the arrival of a larger SFAT and our RIP [relief in place] unit mirroring our FLE, the stage was set for the ANA to continue to increase their ability to maintain and project combat power throughout the Moqor and Gelan districts.

*The reality is that the ANSF in Ghazni Province are quite capable at the company level and below (the level described in this article). A case can be made that they would benefit from not having coalition forces to lean on. At the battalion level and higher, however, there are more issues that could undermine the potential for long-term success. The recently*

*developed security force assistance brigade concept is designed to address this. In other words, less partnering at company level and below and more focus on developing capacity at the higher levels.*

*Again, members of the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>) are invited to access a broader set of lessons learned that we have shared online. Please join the conversation.*

*If you are a currently commissioned officer, we invite you to join the conversation in the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>).*



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Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?