



# DESERT DEVIL DISPATCH

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**Artillery expands lethal  
range of munitions  
along border.  
More on Page 3.**



U.S. Army photo by Cpl. Keith Kluwe

# Avoid Looking at Progress with 'Western' Eyes

Commentary and photo by Spc. Jim Wagner  
109th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

A couple hundreds yards outside the perimeter, loud-speakers blasting Afghan music permeate the night air. Faintly, the sounds of laughter and shouting come from the compound housing the local Afghan Military Forces (AMF) there.

For the past three hours I've been stretched out on my cot, tossing and turning and trying to sleep despite the noise. It's now 1 a.m. in the morning and my first thought is, 'man, in the States they'd be getting a visit from the police for partying like this.'

Then, upon reflection, playing loud music – any music for that matter – would have resulted in a lot more than a \$100 fine two years ago in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. In fact, a ticket would be a blessing in a country that only two years ago ruled with an iron fist.

Laying there I considered how my "Western" eyes looked at everything going on in the country right now, most especially the progress of coalition forces to bring peace and stability to a region that in many ways came to a stop decades ago.

It's easy to look around and say Afghanistan today is exactly the same as it was 100 or even 500 years ago, a living breathing time capsule in the middle of technological and social advances throughout the rest of the world.

Most Afghan cities don't have decent plumbing, electricity or adequate housing; most women still walk about town in full burka and won't speak or look at anyone but their husband or immediate family and wouldn't even think twice about baring their faces or any part of their body, despite the lifting of that ban by the central government. Despite their own standing army for the first time since the

1960s, in many remote areas regional commanders still rule over their particular tribe or region.

Progress doesn't seem to have come to the country, despite the time and effort coalition forces have put into stabilizing the region so far. But that measure of progress is seen through the eyes of a Westerner, and doesn't necessarily apply here.

Exactly one hundred years ago, the Wright brothers conducted their first airplane flight. It would be another 17 years before the first commercial radio goes live, 24 years before the first television and 36 years before the first digital computer.

I can remember like it was yesterday when I first saw cable TV and it's whopping 36 channels; my parents remember when they saw the first color TV broadcast; my grandparents remember the first TV; my great-grandparents remember a time before both TV and radio. My son won't remember a time when you couldn't watch TV, download movies and music, or use the telephone through a computer and a high-speed Internet connection.

More than one-third of the past 100 years in Afghanistan has been spent in constant warfare. When it wasn't civil war, it was the Russian invasion and occupation, or the Taliban rule that drove off or murdered most of the intellectual elite in the country. It's no wonder they are behind the curve when their progress is measured against Western standards of today.

Progress is taking shape in Afghanistan – incrementally, but its coming. According to many experts true progress will take at least a couple of generations; or about the generational difference between my grandparent's 'talking picture box' in the living room to my MTV.

Outside, the AMF compound has grown quiet and the music has stopped. It's reassuring to know I and all the soldiers, airmen, Marines and sailors here have played a part in making sure progress hasn't also stopped.



An village in Afghanistan, looking much like it did 100 years ago.

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# Putting More Firepower Along the Afghan Border

by 1st Lt. Cory Angell  
109th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

**A FIRE BASE ALONG THE PAKISTAN BORDER, Afghanistan** — The soldiers of C Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319<sup>th</sup> Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, are providing crucial support for missions along the Afghan border with Pakistan.

The range and firepower of their 105mm howitzers is a large increase over the 120mm mortar and is hampering the enemy's ability to launch rockets on U.S. forces.

"The rocket attacks have slowed down quite a bit," said Staff Sgt. Andrew Stockert, the senior enlisted man for the two-gun section.

Stockert said that they have not only been firing counter-battery and targets of opportunity — when enemy soldiers have been spotted in the open — but have also been put to the test by supporting troops in contact, and having to fire dangerously close.

A fire mission called by troops in contact allows for very little error on the part of the artillerymen because although speed can save the lives of friendly troops, a fault in accuracy is even less forgiving.

"It was just so surreal and these guys had never seen anything like that before," said Stockert. "I just want everyone to know how well these guys did."

"Every time (the forward observer) keyed the mike you could hear it," he said. "You could hear the grenades going off, you could hear the MK19's (40mm grenade machine gun) firing, .50 calibers in the background and you could hear the AK's firing."

Sgt. Konrad Reed, who is part of the unit, serves as a forward observer and travels with the ground elements that the artillery supports in order to call for fire.

"It was more of an adrenaline rush," he said.

"It was a mixture between nerves and just wanting to help these guys out," said Cpl. Joshua Owens a soldier in the Fire Direction Center (FDC). "Sergeant



U.S. Army photos by Cpl. Keith Kluwe

**An artilleryman from 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, tightens the fuse on a 105mm howitzer shell.**

Reed and I have been in the battery about the same amount of time so it kind of hit me pretty hard when it was all over with. We knew what we had to do and once we got the rounds down range that's when I was more concerned about what had happened."

"You could hear the excitement in Reed's voice but he was methodical about it," said Stockert. "We fired a to-

tal of eight rounds. We fired it; he gave us an adjustment and then he gave us a repeat and somewhere in there he said, 'I'm wounded' and he was still calling fire."

Reed suffered wounds from grenade shrapnel, for which he was awarded the Purple Heart. He has recovered from his wounds and returned to duty.

Stockert said the speed and accuracy of all the artillery soldiers from the forward observer to the FDC and the gun line may have saved the lives of some of the soldiers who were in close contact with the enemy.

"I think the first round hit within 200 meters and his correction would have brought it about one hundred and fifty meters from him," said Stockert. "I imagine some of our shrapnel was probably coming by."

Stockert attributes training to their success.

"The training here is a lot harder than any unit I have ever been in," said Stockert. "That's why we train so hard — because of that day."

The soldiers said they were pleased to see the hard training come together in combat and glad it played an important roll in the war on terrorism.

"I was waiting to come over here since September 11<sup>th</sup>," said Spc. Michael Teen of the FDC section. "I finally get to go home and say I've done something."



**Artillerymen from 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Artillery Regiment fire their 105mm howitzer in support of U.S. troops in the field June 17 near the Afghanistan border.**

# Getting More Power to S. Afghanistan

by Spc. Jim Wagner  
109th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Coalition civil affairs specialists and engineers visited the Kajaki Dam Hydroelectric Plant Monday to find out how to get more electricity to power-starved southern Afghanistan.

Making matters worse, the dam feeding the power needs to nearly one million people hasn't been properly maintained for more than 30 years — and it shows.

Soldiers from the 450<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs (Airborne) Brigade and Romanian 812<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion found that while the dam was in good condition structurally, one of the turbines converting water power into electrical power was in danger of shutting down.

That would be bad news for the residents of Kandahar city and the Helmond province that depend on the hydroelectric power for irrigating their fields, powering their electric wells and heating their homes in the wintertime.

“If this dam goes out, many parts of southern Afghanistan go dark,” said Sgt. Michael Rathje, a civil affairs sergeant with the 450<sup>th</sup> CA BDE. A power plant and electrical controls expert, he found the bearings used in one of the two massive turbines almost completely worn out and in need of immediate replacement.

The shutdown of even one turbine would have immediate ramifications for Afghans in the region.

Two turbines supply 33 megawatts of power to southern Afghanistan, which coalition and government officials here agree is not nearly enough; the shutdown of one would halve that figure, making a bad situation even direr.

The dam was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1950s, one of many projects of the time to bring infrastructure to under-developed countries around the world. Because the massive turbines play such an important role bringing electricity to the people, they were constructed with the expectation of a major maintenance overhaul every 10 years.

But because of a number of reasons – civil war, Russian occupation and the Taliban regime to name a few – it has



Romanian army photos by Maj. Ursuleam Gheorghe

**U.S. and Romanian engineers inspect the structure of the turbine house at the Kajaki Hydroelectric Plant in southern Afghanistan.**

only been overhauled once, when the U.S. Agency for International Development completed one in the early 1970s.

One of only four dams in the country, the shutdown of the Kajaki dam or even the loss of one turbine would grind southern Afghanistan's fledgling industries and Army projects to a halt.



**Sgt. Michael Rathje, 450th Civil Affairs (Airborne) Brigade, talks with local engineers about the condition of the turbines at the Kajaki Hydroelectric Plant in southern Afghanistan.**

Three major manufacturing companies in the province – blanket, vegetable oil and plastics factories – would have to rely on generator power for electricity, a prohibitively expensive alternative, Rathje said.

Also affected would be CA's mission in Afghanistan, which is to rebuild the country through funding support for projects. All of the agricultural wells funded by CA run on electrical power.

Rathje's initial assessment of the dam and power plant calls for more power.

“The fastest way to alleviate the problems in Afghanistan is to put another turbine in to bring more power online,” he said. “It was originally built to house three, so the room's there.”

Funding for the turbine, which would cost millions to install, fall well outside the purview of the CA mission in Afghanistan, requiring the central government in Kabul to come up with the financing.

In the meantime, however, Rathje has e-mailed Siemens-Westinghouse, the dam's parts manufacturer, to find out more information on the bearings and cooling system and come up with a way for a temporary fix to the failing turbine.

Officials plan to visit the dam and power plant in the near future to conduct more assessments.



CW2 Tyler Kipp, C Company, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment pilot, looks over the aircraft's cargo manifest on a yellow ring flight through southern Afghanistan recently.

Story and photos by Spc. Jim Wagner  
109th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Clearing a mountain ridge, the nose of the CH-47 “Chinook” dips abruptly to the ground.

The longitudinal cyclic trim (LCT) computer controlling the twin rotors overcompensates while at the same time the pilot makes incremental adjustments, resisting the impulse to haul back on the stick, causing the nose to swing to the sky, a see-saw act that causes the stomachs of passengers to drop while their hearts simultaneously leap into their throats.

In the back, a soldier retches into a garbage bag. All in all, it’s just another day on the “yellow” ring for C Company, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment (AR).

The downdraft is common in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan during the summertime, said pilot CW2 Tyler Kipp, when air flowing up and over the mountain (called convective air flow) “sucks” the helicopter down the lee side. If uncorrected, the see-saw effect could result in 45-degree swings and a crash onto the desert floor.

With a casual command to the other pilot to switch the LCT from auto to manual, Kipp compensates for the swings and swiftly settles into a level

flight again. In the back, you can see the 20 pale-faced soldiers sitting in the cargo seats quietly sigh in relief, although the one soldier continues to throw up into the improvised flight-sickness bag.

Downdrafts like this are just one of many challenges aircrews face when flying the re-supply routes from Kandahar Air Field to the fire bases scattered along the Pakistan border.

# Routine Ring Routes Anything But Routine

The green, yellow and purple rings are re-supply routes run once a week each by CH-47 aircrews, delivering food, water, mail – whatever is needed – to fire bases along the Pakistan border.

Chinooks give every impression of being unwieldy, slow-moving troop and cargo transports. It’s dubbed by many as a “flying breadbox.” In reality, the

see **CHINOOK**, page 6



Spc. Christopher Ford, C Company, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment flight engineer, plots the CH-47 “Chinooks” route on the yellow ring recently.



82nd Airborne Division paratroopers load cargo onto a C-47 "Chinook" Friday.

### **CHINOOK**, from page 5

Chinook is faster than a Blackhawk and Apache – Chinooks need to slow down to allow the escort helicopters to keep up – and anyone who has flown the Chinook on an air assault can testify to the aircraft's mobility when it's flying "knap of the earth," the contour-hugging maneuvers used to avoid detection by enemy forces.

The constant flying schedule plays havoc on the CH-47; the combination of dust, heat and flying schedule result in perpetual "on-the-fly" fixes to unavoidable maintenance problems en route. Despite maintenance before and after every flight, as well as phase maintenance every 200 flight hours, it's unavoidable for little problems to crop up during a flight, said Sgt. Robert Farmer, C Company, 7-101st AR, crew chief.

"Generally, there's always going to be something little to fix," he said. "There are different types of faults – flyable and non-flyable – a very small percentage are non-flyable faults."

Upon their return, crew chiefs consult with other maintainers to fix the problem.

At every stop along the yellow ring, cargo and personnel are unloaded or



ABOVE: Sgt. Robert Farmer, C Company, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment flight engineer, watches as a dust devil chases their Chinook outside of a fire base in southern Afghanistan. BELOW: CH-47 "Chinooks" refuel at Camp Harriman, located near the Afghanistan town of Orgun-E.



loaded for fire bases along the route. Despite three mission briefs before each ring flight to determine cargo and personnel loads, last-minute modifications seem to be inevitable.

These modifications put a lot of pressure on the crew chiefs to make room for the changes, since they affect the weight being transported by the Chinooks, which can handle only around 12,500 pounds maximum with Afghanistan's altitude and temperatures.

"It can be very frustrating for the flight engineers," said Kipp, "to get everything onto the aircraft."

Despite the challenges, or maybe because of them, Chinook aircrews are close and very loyal to the "flying

breadbox" they fly. Talk of the rivalry that exists between Chinook crews and their single-rotor peers, it's all a matter perspective according to one pilot.

"I think this is the life," said CW2 Mordicah Thomas, a Chinook pilot for the past three years. "We have an outstanding crew; it's the right community for me. I don't know if the Apache pilots are as close with their crews.

I'm sure if I was a Blackhawk or Apache pilot, I'd say the same thing," he added with a grin.

The 7-101<sup>st</sup> AR is currently training their replacement unit from the Connecticut and Pennsylvania Army National Guard to take over Chinook operations at Kandahar.