

LTC Garrett Yee's Update #11
(November 1-6, 2006)
Greetings from Jalalabad and Kabul

Dear Family and Friends,

Wednesday, November 1, 2006. Today is my 100th day deployed to the middle-east and the beginning of the 17th month stationed away from home and family. I called Maria on her cell phone and spoke with her at Cyndie's annual Halloween party (remember, I'm 1/2 day ahead). My parents were there, so I spoke with them also, and of course, Cyndie. There are two striking differences between central Iraq and this region Afghanistan—the geography (including terrain and vegetation) and the people. Of course, Afghanistan has the Hindu Kush Mountains while Iraq's central region is for the most part comparatively FLAT. In addition to the mountains and high elevation, there is vastly different vegetation in this region of Afghanistan. Central Iraq is covered for the most part by Date Palms, while here in this region; there is tall grass, corn, and deciduous trees. As for the people, although the Muslim greeting is the same, the physical characteristics are visibly different. Another difference in this region is the weather. The weather here this time of year is great! Try mid-70s. However, once winter hits, you are going to want your snivel gear as it gets very cold. Here is some info on Afghanistan that I found on the web:



Often called the crossroads of Central Asia, Afghanistan has had a long and turbulent history. The invasions started in 328 BC with Alexander the Great, who was followed in succeeding centuries by the Scythians, White Huns and Turks. In AD 642, Arabs invaded the region and introduced Islam to present-day Afghanistan. The Persians were next to rule, but then Genghis Khan led a Mongol invasion in 1219 that resulted in a massive slaughter of the population and destruction of many cities.



Following the death of Khan, Afghanistan was ruled by a series of chiefs, princes and kings. During the 19th century, Britain was eager to use the nation as a buffer against the ever-increasing expansion of the Russian Empire. But after three Anglo-Afghan wars, the Afghan people were able to claim their independence from British rule in 1919. The Soviets finally invaded in 1979, but they were

forced to withdraw ten years later by anti-Communist guerrilla fighters (known as mujahidin) trained and supplied by the U.S. and other outside powers.

After the Red Army retreated, a bloody civil war erupted when the various mujahidin factions turned on each other. Fighting gave rise to a state of warlordism that eventually spawned the Taliban, who ultimately seized power in 1996. The Taliban's ultraconservative interpretation of Islam created a harsh way of life for the nation's citizens. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the Taliban's suspected support for terrorist groups and its refusal to help in the fight against Osama bin Laden caused a U.S.-led international coalition to launch an attack against Afghanistan. The Taliban surrendered within months, and an interim government was established.



It's Afghanistan's legendary rugged terrain that makes warfare so difficult. The Hindu Kush Mountains run down the center of the landlocked country (peaks can soar as high as 25,000 feet, and the nation's average elevation is 5,000 feet). Occupying an area slightly smaller than Texas, Afghanistan plays host to an ethnically and linguistically mixed population—with a wide variety of ethnic groups and languages represented.

Enough history. My counter part in Afghanistan was able to get us a Black Hawk flight to the Jalalabad (Jbad for short) Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), which is located in the north along the Pakistan border. The flight out of Bagram Air Field over the Hindu Kush Mountain Range was awesome. We actually flew through the mountain passes along river valleys rather than over the mountains. The landscape was amazing. The helicopter dropped us off at the PRT compound. After a quick tour and a few meetings we had dinner. I was told that before the US occupied this facility, the Russians and Taliban used it as an R&R facility. The place is picturesque. There is also a pool where the Taliban used to execute people and you can see the bullet marks on the pool floor. The pool is now drained and used as a basketball court. The next day, we started off in the morning with breakfast in the DFAC (pronounced “dee fack”). There we meet Air Force Technical Sergeant Anderson, who works with the Afghanistan Police as an advisor. They are shooting the Mossberg 12 gauge assault shot gun this morning and had asked the day before if we wanted to shoot. Are you kidding? So, after breakfast, Scott and I meet him at the range, which is nothing more than a few piles of dirt.



Shooting shotguns is always a great way to start off the day. We then met up with our convoy to head over to JAF (pronounced “jaf”) which stands for Jalalabad Air Field, where we got to meet the Deputy Governor of the Province and the Mayor of Jalalabad. Very interesting meeting.



After convoying back to the PRT, we met with the representative for the US Agency for International Development and then walked out to the entry control point and handed candy out to the kids. Two of the kids have permission to be inside the compound and their job is to empty the trash and cut the grass. For this, they get snacks. One of the kids shows me that he needs a new slipper and so one of the guards says that he’ll take care of him when finance comes through. One kid is Jamie (he is in a blue outfit) and the other kid is Khyle (in yellow). Jamie writes his

name in Pashtu (I think) on his hand. The kids are Pashtun, which is the primary ethnic group in this region of Afghanistan. After dinner, we met up with a gentleman that works as the dean of a business school in New York who is trying to establish a program to connect graduate students and Afghanistan businesses. This is a very interesting concept and so I look forward to hearing more about this in the future.



Friday is bazaar day here at the PRT compound in Jalalabad. After breakfast, we go out to the bazaar where I buy a few scarves and souvenirs. The venders are a bit pushy and it is something you just have to get used to. The



power went out for most of the day, so lunch would have been an MRE (meal ready to eat), but I wasn’t hungry. Around mid-day, we rolled out of the FOB in armored HMMWVs to see the town of Jalalabad and the projects that the PRT had been working on. We visited a new bus terminal which also attracted businesses, we stopped to see a media center that the PRT uses, we stopped to see a building under construction, and we saw a facility

that was intended to be used as an agricultural coop. Unfortunately when we got to the coop, there was only a family living there and no coop. This will require some follow-up.





While at the coop site, all the kids from the village came to see us. They all had smiles on their faces and gave us the thumbs up. Later that day, Scott wanted to pass candy out to the kids, so we did this at the PRT gate. We got mobbed so say the least. After dinner, the power came back on and I was able to get to one of the recreation center computers and send out a few emails. It was a most interesting day. The people in this part of Afghanistan have a long way to go to reach western standards of living. They need better roads, electricity, water systems, and education. Yet, the people are hard working and very pleasant.

Back to Bagram. On Saturday, we wrapped up our visit to Jalalabad. It was a great opportunity to see a functioning PRT in Afghanistan. This was truly worth the effort to come out and see. There are significant differences in PRTs in Iraq versus Afghanistan. Unfortunately, travel in Afghanistan is not easy either. We had been trying to book a flight back since we arrived in Jbad, and have been unsuccessful. We decided to take our chances and convoyed down to JAF and were lucky to catch a flight on a small plane flying back to Bagram



Air Field. Once back, Scott and I walked over to the Pat Tillman USO center and got a cup of coffee then checked on flights heading out to Kabul the next day. As luck would have it, there is a flight that I will try to go stand-by. The show time is 0230 in the morning. Since it is already 2300, I guess I won't be getting much sleep...

I lay down on the mattress, but I really didn't sleep. I got dressed about 0200 and walked down to the PAX (passenger) terminal to report for the space-A flight to Kabul. Kabul is not that far from Bagram, but if you need to get there, you take whatever you can get. This day, my option is an Air Force C-130 cargo plane. We load the plane about 2 hours later, and then we sit on the runway for another hour. This is when we find out that there is something wrong with one of the propellers. So, we wait until it is fixed. In the meantime, the sun rises over the Hindu Kush Mountain Range. What a sight. Finally the plane is fixed and we fly to the Kabul International Airport. There we get a great breakfast. I heard it is the best DFAC in Afghanistan—they use real plates and real silverware (as opposed to cardboard trays and plastic utensils). This part of Afghanistan is truly an international flavor. There are so many NATO countries assisting in this mission I cannot keep track.





I catch a ride with someone on the plane from the airport to Camp Phoenix. There, I catch a ride with another Soldier to Camp Eggers. I'm not sure where the name "Eggers" comes from, but in any event, this military installation is small and everything is walking distance. The unique thing about this place is that rather than building a FOB, it is essentially a section of town that has been blocked off and converted into offices and work areas. I meet up with Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Greg Gecowets who allows me to use his office space while I'm in Kabul. Later that day, I met up with

Colonel Robert Visbal, who was my boss back in the 91st Division G3 Section. COL Visbal is now in charge of a directorate that oversees the training of the Afghan National Army. He is the only one in Afghanistan that I've met so far that I've known from before. We grab a cup of coffee together and talk about people that we knew back in our prior assignment with the 91st. I drop my bags off in the USAID compound, which is a converted house, "down the block." I get the key to my room, which is a large bedroom on the upper floor overlooking the street, "Gator Ally." This is the nicest place that I've stayed in Afghanistan so far. I then meet with the USAID representative who initially recommended that I come out to Kabul and we discuss Provincial Redevelopment Teams in Afghanistan.



On Monday, I have a meeting at the US Embassy. Although walking distance, you need to get a ride due to security reasons. So I took a shuttle from Camp Eggers to the Embassy and traded my Baghdad Embassy badge for an Afghanistan Embassy badge to go in. There, I met with the deputy director for PRTs in Afghanistan. This was an extremely useful meeting. The result of the meeting is that I will travel to Mazar-e-Sharif, a Swedish-led PRT in the northern region of Afghanistan. Following this meeting, I had to make my way to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters, which is somewhat like NATO, but not quite. ISAF truly has an international flavor. Looking around, you see Canadians, Italians, Mongolians, Australians, French, Bulgarians, and several others. There, I met with Major Bryan Gilford, who is a British Soldier that does GIS mapping

for Afghanistan PRTs. I get a ride back to Camp Eggers and do some work before heading to dinner at the "Goat House" (another converted house). Tomorrow is Election Day in the United States. We'll see what happens.

That's it for now.
Cheers!

Garrett