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The Afghan Joint Operation Experience

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### Abstract

In a remote part of the world over three thousand miles away, there are forces at work. This author chronicles some of the experiences in a combat zone that shaped his life for ever. Here we examine four events that shaped and created a comradely within a company that nothing but war could do. From the cold hills of nangalam, to the scorching heat of Shin kay, there are relationships forged with our joint partners that touch your heart and can save a life. This is a snapshot of the great 28. Bravo 412th

### The Afghan joint operation experience

As the Company entered the country under the guise of night, the sound of mortar fire was evident. There we were the great 28., Civil Affairs at its best. The teams of Bravo were made up of extraordinary individuals with the heart of sacrifice in each member As a Special Operations Company, our assignment to the Combined Joint Special Operation Task Force would have us assigned and attached to Special Forces soldiers through out the country. The general mission was to provide force multiplication in the form of civil military operations. Civil Military operations is seen as the workings of military and civilians as a method of legitimizing a government , reducing the amount of combat forces that have to enter a conflict and sift the bad from the good of the populace. Bravo Company would have its work cut out for them. Within 12 hours of arriving in to country, the four teams would be gearing up to be flown out in direct support of their Operational Detachments. With varying specialties, each team would be sent to an Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) and assist in formulation and identifying spheres of influences in several provinces throughout the country. For operational purposes, we will call each team Civil Affairs Teams (CAT –As), CAT –A1 was fitted with the old man medic and three civil affairs specialist. Along with a physician’s assistant, this team would be charged with roaming the country from village to village making medical calls or “MEDCAPS” wherever the missions dictated. CAT -A1 had a knack for running into hot spots. After only two months in country, CAT – A1 had seen four to five incursions with anti coalition forces and this would only be the beginning. CAT A2 was made up of the psychologist a communications specialist, two Civil Affairs (CA) specialists ,and a medic. CAT A2 has missions in many of the eastern villages.His team’s chemistry had not yet jelled, oh but it would in the near future. As CAT A1 met up with their ODA, it was determined that there were several spheres of influences that would be beneficial to the success of the CJSOTF’s mission. In attempting to demonstrate the real value of the civil affairs asset, CAT A2 split and sent their medic to a remote part of the

country with a team from the ODA and that will begin another part of this chronicle. CAT A3 was comprised of two CA specialists, a passive team leader and hard charging SFC . This team's mission was to work with the ODA in the northern part of the country and influence the local populace in support of civil military operations. In the rear, the CAT B worked to ensure that all the logistical pieces were in place. Rings were identified and teams were manifested, equipment accounted for and signed out to those who would need them the most. The CAT B was an animal all of its own. Its mission was not as simple as it looked. The CAT B would consist of the Company Commander, XO operations NCO, First Sergeant and two support personnel for supply and motor operations.

In Afghanistan there are various regions which have varying climates which call for soldiers to dress accordingly. In the early part of June as the summer sand storms were starting to raise, many Soldiers who had been in country for five or six months would start to get complacent. In the heat of the summer, not wearing all of your armor when you went out on missions or carrying only the minimum load of ammunition. Was complacency. One of a Soldier's biggest enemies in the combat zone is boredom. The failure to keep focused can be a costly learning experience. As the Operations SGT, I was responsible for assisting the teams with identifying projects in their areas that would help reduce civilian interference and obtain passive intelligence. Being assigned to the JSOTF meant that many of our teams were attached and assigned to units which also had other joint forces working side by side. In one part of the country , CAT A 1 would be working and teaching the Czechs how to apply civil military operations. In the south another CAT A would be working jointly with the Danish. As a soldier and civil affairs soldier specifically, you discover that the concept of civil affairs means different things to different cultures. One of the best experiences that one of the CAT A, s had was its multiple coordinated missions with the Czech Special forces unit. In fact these missions were

recorded as the first ever joint operation between the US Civil affairs team and Czech Special Forces. The trust was not immediately realized, but the willingness of the Czech soldiers to engage the enemy if necessary was clear. This joint experience by itself set the tone for the rest of the tour. A band of soldiers from different parts of the world, bound together and willing to support one another. As the year moved on many more missions were conducted many wells drilled, schools built and relationships solidified. One of the most valued lessons had been in progress and all seemed to recognize it.

Cooperation from all makes for great success, no matter what country or culture you may be from. Meanwhile back in Nangalam, the medic assigned there from CAT A2 had done great things. He had saved the life of the local Mullahs son who had been injured and in gratitude he was granted the title as Junior Mullah. As Junior Mullah, SSG T was give the authority to resolve minor disputes in the village and was sought after by the locals for all kind of services. Thus arose the name “King of Nangalam.” Sgt T had done exactly what he was supposed to do. HE had developed deep relationships with the locals and trust was evident. Sgt T, s job was not over though, although they loved him he still had to convince them that the new Karzi led government was for real and that they would support them as a central government.

### Conclusion

As civil affairs soldiers one learns not to promise anything but deliver all that you can. As a force multiplier it was evident that the relationships built by the members of B Co would have lasting impressions and create memories for years to come. Millions of dollars spent, roads built and border patrol officers trained, these were just a handful of the great things the CAT As and joint forces did together. It was clear that hard work and dedication to the mission can pay dividends. But don't get me wrong, these things that were done for the country were not just out of the goodness of the team's heart. They had to yield results. Results like reduced roadside

bomb injuries, reduce ambush casualties and continued passive intelligence which lead to mission advancement. I said it before and Ill say it again Bravo 412 and the great 28 left an impact on Afghanistan, its joint partners and themselves, forever. All the purple hearts, bronze stars and joint medals were nice, but the real reward was our returning, still the great 28.



Bravo Company, 412 Civil Affairs Company (Special Operations) Airborne

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Airborne

Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan

Name Roster

(From Left to Right - Front Row)

Major Kenneth J. LaVoy — Commander

First Sergeant James R. Cook — First Sergeant

(From Left to Right - Second Row)

Staff Sergeant John Gloeblek — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant First Class Jackson — Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge

Captain Eric VanFossen — Physician Assistant

Sergeant Leanne Sliva — Supply Non-Commissioned Officer

Corporal Jason Campbell — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant First Class John Smith — Civil Affairs Team Sergeant

Sergeant Matthew Merino — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant First Class Raymond Bereljung — Civil Affairs Team Sergeant

Captain Paco Morera — Civil Affairs Team Leader

Sergeant Brian Porter — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant Robert Barger — Personnel Non-Commission Officer in Charge

(From Left to Right - Standing)

Major Michael Roerk- Executive Officer

Corporal Kevin Nichols — Mechanic

Staff Sergeant Andrew Hickey — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant First Class Richard Mitchell — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant David Wilson — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Captain James Pickart — Liaison Officer

Sergeant First Class William Sellers — Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge

Sergeant First Class Joseph Mollinger — Medic

Staff Sergeant James Trusty — Civil Affairs Sergeant

Sergeant First Class Gregg Becker — Civil Affairs Team Sergeant

Captain Paul Sanders — Civil Affairs Team Leader

Captain Gregg Seese — Civil Affairs Team Leader

Major Pete Sullivan — Operations Officer

Major Lance McCartney — Civil Affairs Team Leader

Sergeant First Class Ronald Wright — Civil Affairs Team Sergeant

## CJSOTF-A CIVIL AFFAIRS IN ACTION

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## References

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Personal interview, SSG James Trusty, 412th Ca Bn

Personal interview, SFC Richard Mitchel 412th C Bn

Personal interview, MSG Joseph Mollinger, 412<sup>th</sup> Ca Bn

Personal interview, SFC Ronald Wright, 412<sup>th</sup> Ca Bn

Personal Interview, Captain James Pickart , 412<sup>th</sup> Ca Bn.