

7/19/09

### Losing the War One Doctrinal Mistake at a Time

Wars are not always won and lost on the battlefield. Military doctrine is written to help shape the battle before the first round is fired. Doctrine is written to capture the lessons learned at the expense of the servicemen and servicewomen lost in the last fight.

Doctrine provides the intellectual foundation to buttress strategic, operational, and tactical decision making. Ignoring doctrine is one way to lose a war in spite of the best military efforts. These observations are based on one year of experience on the ground in Afghanistan working at the ministerial level where doctrinal disconnects are often most obvious.

Before going further a disclaimer. These observations are offered in the spirit of healthy self-examination – NOT as a criticism of decisions past or present. This is in NO way intended as a political argument; these observations are NOT intended as criticisms of decision makers or implementers. There may be no more difficult environment for decision making than under the duress of war. Without a clear understanding of the context of a decision meaningful criticism of the decision making process is impossible. These observations focus on the outcomes of that decision making process.

That being said, there are four doctrinal disconnects observed in the past year.

1. Too few military forces in theater to effectively prosecute an insurgency
2. Losing the information battle space fight
3. Lack of unity of command it MOI
4. Military management of MOI development

Let's look at each of these briefly.

1. Too few military forces in theater to effectively prosecute an insurgency.

The US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, FM 3-24, calls for a 20:1000 ratio of boots-on-the-ground to local population. In Afghanistan with a population of ~32M that works out to about 640,000 boots on the ground for a chance at a successful counterinsurgency effort. For Kabul alone, with a population of ~3M, we'd need 60,000 troops to help secure the city.

These doctrinal numbers make it very clear that the US and its coalition partners have not dedicated near enough manpower resources to effectively operate in the counterinsurgency environment. Once again, this observation is not intended as a criticism of this decision. We may simply not have the resources necessary to fight the battle doctrinally after the fight in Iraq. But, that being said, if we don't have the resources to effectively prosecute an insurgency – then why are we here? What is going on? What are we spending our national treasure on? What geopolitical goal is so important that choose to

remain in an untenable situation? Do AQ and its surrogate the Taliban still represent an existential threat to the United States and its national interests? If so, that case needs to be clearly and unambiguously made to the American public.

## 2. Losing the information battle space fight

“To mobilize their base of support, insurgent groups use a combination of propaganda and intimidation, and they may overreach in both. Effective counterinsurgents use information operations (IO) to exploit inconsistencies in the insurgents’ message as well as their excessive use of force or intimidation. (FM 3-24)

Control and exploitation of the information battle space in Afghanistan represents a singularly large failure. Time after time, tactically and operationally sound engagements by coalition forces are turned into failures in the public eye by superb disinformation campaigns by the enemy and inept and too little, too late efforts by coalition Public Affairs and/or Psychological Ops units. This assertion is easy to make but difficult to support without breaching classification issues. The reader will have to decide for himself if the repeatedly negative media coverage of coalition force efforts accurately reflects the professionalism, superb training, high morale and uniformly sound morality of coalition forces.

## 3. Lack of unity of command at MOI

Unlike the previous items, this issue deals exclusively with the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) organizational structure. One of the nine principles of war every young officer learns in basic training is Unity of Command. This principle of war tells us that a chain of command should be short and direct. The rule of thumb is that most leaders can handle only four or five direct reports. Beyond that and a leader's ability to control and supervise the activities of subordinates is severely compromised.

The current MOI organization for administration and support splits the chain of command for the procurement and logistics efforts between two commanders. There is an administrative and management organizational structure at the headquarters. However, this command structure must rely on operational police forces to accomplish any of the myriad of tasks that must be accomplished or implemented at the provincial level. So you have the DM for Administration and Management who must rely on the efforts of the police who work for the DM for Operational Forces. The police working at the Provincial level do not report to the DM for Administration and Support so they ‘get to the paperwork’ when they have time.

The upshot of this institutionalized disconnect in command structure is reflected in the annual effort to get food contracts in place to feed the provincial police. The DM for Administration is completely reliant on police forces that work for the DM for Operational Forces to get this task done. Having been through this cycle twice it's been painful to watch an effort that should be finished before the budgeting year begins drag on through most of the year. The results throw budget planning efforts into chaos and have a direct, immediate, negative impact on the morale of the police force across the nation. And we haven't begun to assess the opportunity for corruption and bribery this organizational disconnect introduces into the system.

## 4. Military management of MOI development

This disconnect is particularly troubling since it creates two immediate problems which we will discuss. As it stands right now both the DoD and the DoS have a vested interest in the development of the Ministry of the Interior. Both services manage contractors who support the Ministry. The DoS has DynCorp on contract to provide day-to-day operations oriented mentoring services while DoD has MPRI on contract to provide systems development mentoring services. On paper, this approach makes sense, one contractor handles day-to-day details, and the other builds the systems within which daily activity is constrained. In practice, the results achieved leave much to be desired since neither contractor is obligated to work with the other, nor does DoS nor DoD make any effort to coordinate and mesh the activity of their two contractors. The net effect is occasionally the two work together; more often than not they are at odds with one another.

But neither of these issues gets at the core problem of having the DoD involved in the development of the Ministry of the Interior. The reason the DoD is involved now is because EuPol Germany failed so miserably in training the police that the DoD agreed to take over the program. But developing a police force is far outside the military's traditional skill set and there is absolutely no doctrinal foundation for this effort.

As it stands now the Afghan National Police has a distinctly Army feel. The systems are Army and the forces are being employed as typical Army units. In fact, at the last Police Zone Commanders conference the West Police Zone commander from Herat complained publicly, vociferously, and correctly, that he was being required to employ his police in support of army unit clearing operations and was finding it increasingly difficult to provide daily police holding operations in the villages in his area. The commander's comments actually drew a round of applause from the assembled commanders and support staff.

That the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) does not recognize the law and order community (civil law enforcement and civil jurisprudence) as one of the primary seams being attacked asymmetrically by the Taliban is devastatingly apparent when one considers that CSTC-A ONLY mentors the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. They have no responsibility for mentoring the Ministry of Justice. And they should not.

In fact, it makes very little practical sense for them to be mentoring the Ministry of the Interior. This should be a DoS and DoJ combined effort – law and order. DoD should NOT be involved. The sad fact is that DoD has been saddled with the mission, is doing the very best it can given the lack of directly applicable experience in civil law enforcement. And most troubling, there is NO coupled effort to develop the civil jurisprudence efforts.

This disconnect is where the Taliban has its most spectacular successes. From villagers to senior government representatives make the same assertion that villagers want the Taliban back because they can't rely on either the police or the courts to protect their best interests. This is the seam the Taliban exploits daily. This is the asymmetric seam that will continue to cost us precious national treasure. Unless we make an explicit, carefully planned and coordinated DoS and DoJ effort to develop BOTH the law enforcement AND civil jurisprudence arms of local government this lack of effort may prove our undoing in this graveyard of the empires.

6/14/09

### An Open Letter to the Class of 2009

While home on leave from a tour in Afghanistan as a contractor supporting the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) I was prepared to speak to the 20th company firsties at their dining out. Unfortunately my schedule and their dining out didn't synch up, but I thought perhaps the comments I prepared for that auspicious occasion might be of interest to my fellow Shipmate readers. Herewith those comments:

There is more to the relationship between the 2009 firsties of the 20th company and us old farts of the class of '72 than a wardroom and a common alma mater. Thirty seven years ago, when my classmates and I still had hair and a waistline that allowed us to see our belt buckles, our beloved country was at war, just as it is now. Like you, we ran toward the fire, not away from it. Perhaps unlike you, when the selection process was finished, there were only ten of our peers left on the bench – that's a measure of how unpopular the Vietnam War was, and more importantly I like to think, a true measure of my classmates' patriotism. Even though very few of us ever saw combat – we were, each of us, just like you, eager, ready, and willing to do our part in the defense of our country and our way of life.

Along the way we've all learned invaluable life lessons that we want to share. Tonight you have been kind enough to give me the bully pulpit. I'm deeply honored and more than a little humbled by this opportunity. Thank you.

I'd like to use this wonderful opportunity to talk to you about three things. First I want to give you a 30000 foot view of the fight in Afghanistan based on my personal experience in that combat zone. Then I'd like to share some thoughts on the warrior's trade craft and finally, I'll teach you everything you'll ever need to know about leadership in under 30 seconds – and I guarantee you'll never forget the lesson.

So what's it like in Afghanistan?

Let me answer that question briefly on three levels, strategic, operationally, and personally. Strategically the question on everyone's mind is can we win? That's a tough question that doesn't depend on the quality of our troops. You will soon lead fine young warriors eager to do their part in defeating our enemies. But their equipment is worn out. Make no mistake, it's the finest equipment in the world – but after almost a decade of combat ops, O&M and replacement expenses are an increasingly onerous part of the DOD budget. So our military budget is strained at exactly the same time our nation faces a significant economic challenge. That's two out of the five traditional instruments of national power that are challenged. But military and economic challenges are only part of the strategic picture.

The instruments of national power have been identified as Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economy, and Law Enforcement. Years ago the US Information Agency was disbanded as a national asset and made a subordinate organization within the Department of State. So if we look at the universe of instruments of national power at the disposal of our national leadership, three of five are compromised or strained. So President Obama is faced with significant challenges on many fronts. Can we win in Afghanistan? Only one thing's for sure right now – we'll find out. I'm not trying to be cute – the

outcome right now hangs in the balance and depends on how our national and military leaders finesse a hugely complex constellation of problems.

One more thing about strategic issues. As important as Afghanistan appears to our world right now – it is only one of many geopolitical challenges. Lest those of you who will serve at sea or in support of those at sea, never forget that the US control of the world's oceans remains one of our primary geopolitical strengths. Each of you donning Navy blue will play an important role in wielding that power. I cannot recommend highly enough for each of you, regardless of your service pick, to read George Freidman's fascinating book, *The Next Hundred Years*, for a fascinating look at what your career and your life might look like. Good stuff.

OK, operationally, what's it like in Afghanistan? This is perhaps one of the most challenging physical environments in the world. From the Hindu Kush to the deserts of Helmand and Kandahor the physical challenges are huge. Those of you who think you may end up leading Marines in that environment – start doing squats and lunges – strengthen your core and your legs. Mentally, start thinking asymmetrically. Let me give you an example of what I mean. The traditional application of force in Afghanistan has ALWAYS failed primarily because symmetrically applied force must overcome the terrain as well as the enemy. And the terrain is an ass-kicker. It's like Napoleolean marching on Moscow. The terrain and weather beat him as much as the Russian resistance.

So how do you neutralize the terrain? We know for instance that the Taliban use the same ambush sites over and over. So one way to use that tactic against the enemy, to act asymmetrically, is to first map every ambush site in an AO, then employ hunter-killer teams to provide an overwatch on a particular site, use a Marine squad as bait to trigger and ambush, and then have the hunter-killer team rain death and destruction on the exposed enemy using on call close air support. This kind of action requires substantial communication and coordination skills and the equipment to support it – but all of that is meat and potatoes for our Marines.

So what's it like for me personally. It took me 36 years but I am finally getting my first combat tour under my belt. It's not what I dreamed about when I was your age – but I have had to face some of the fundamental challenges that everyone of you will face when you enter a combat zone. First, I had to come to terms with my own fear. I go outside the wire every day with a set of body armor and a prayer. As a contractor I'm not armed. I ride in a soft side vehicle. Fortunately that vehicle looks just like a thousand other little vans that are used as taxis in the city. It's not uncommon for our vehicles to be hailed by the locals. So we are hiding in plain sight. But the chance of encountering a suicide bomber in the city is very real. The personal tactic I've adopted if I come face-to-face with a suicide bomber and have any chance to do something about it before the blast is to lean into it and smile. Not much else I can do so might as well go out with a smile as well as a bang.

When I first got to Kabul, it took me almost two months before I had a solid BM. Partly the diet, mostly my fear. Every one of you will face the same challenge – and if you find yourself in an extreme stress situation during that period, don't be surprised if your CHT system does a complete system discharge. That's just part of the drill. Your job as leaders is to ensure no man or woman is ever belittled for that bodily response during or immediately following close combat.

How many of you have an Xbox, Playstation, or Wii? Anyone ever played a first person shooter? Anyone ever NOT played a first person shooter? These games are actually high fidelity training packages

and raise some serious questions for parents. But they also highlight and emphasize the absolutely essential basic training rule – train like you will fight.

Let me give you several examples taken from the Absolutely superb book On Combat by LTC Dave Grossman, USA (retired) and Mr. Loren Christensen. There have been a rash of school shooter's over the past couple of years. Everyone knows about Columbine or Virginia Tech. But there are other incidents that didn't make the news. In some of those, a kid enters a school with a gun, a teacher sees the kid and orders him to put the weapon down. So he does. Think about it. He's been playing first person shooters for years – and every time mom or dad calls him for dinner or to a chore, what does he do? He responds to the voice of authority in his life. That's the way he trains – that's the way he fights. When the stress levels reach close combat levels our autonomous nervous systems kick in and we go on auto pilot.

In another example, several policeman were found dead at the scene of a shootout. Curiously they all had spent brass in their breast pocket. When the investigator looked into the training procedures for that department he found that these police, all armed with revolvers, routinely stopped shooting during live fire training exercises to unload spent brass into their breast pockets so they wouldn't have to be bothered picking it up later. Train like you will fight ladies and gents.

Ok, two more things. Now I want to teach you a simple breath control technique that will help calm your nerves and settle the blood coursing through your veins when the stress levels reach close combat levels. This technique is combat proven. Practice it and it will serve you well someday. Simple stuff. Everybody breath in to a count of four, hold for a count of four, exhale to a count of four, hold for a count of four, inhale to a count of four. Think of a square with sides of unit 4. As stress levels increase use this technique to settle your nerves and clear your mind.

I told you I would teach you everything you need to know about leadership and you would never forget it. Several years ago aboard the USS Mahan DDG-72, the ship my classmates and I sponsor, I had the opportunity to teach this very same lesson. With the entire crew, less watchstanders, assembled aft on the helo deck, I told them I could teach them everything they needed to know about leadership in three seconds or less. I even told them I could do it while they were standing on one foot on a swaying deck. "Raise one foot!" I commanded. As everyone tentatively lifted a foot I said "Set the example! Put your foot down!"

Ladies and gents, that in a nutshell is what you should have learned over the past four years. The things that go unspoken, the example we set, is often much more powerful than anything we say. Set the example for your sailors and Marines and I guarantee they will follow you to hell and back. Don't rely on your position of authority, rely on the example you set.

Ladies and gents, thank you for your kind attention and this wonderful opportunity. I envy each and every one of you the adventures you face in the coming years. Be alive to the challenges, don't ever be afraid to try something outside your comfort zone, take care of your sailors and Marines.

Most of all – thanks for your service to our great nation.

5/25/09

### Memorial Day 2009

It started out quietly enough. A simple email from my lovely bride who'd visited dad's grave to pay her respects and place flowers on his grave. She sent a picture snapped with her cell phone - dad's headstone, red, white, and blue flowers and a small national ensign. She explained that the national ensign was provided by a group of Rolling Thunder bikers at the cemetery to put flags on their buddies graves. She asked if she could have one for dad's grave and they willingly complied.

Then today, Memorial Day, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) held a memorial service to commemorate the day. But this was no ordinary service. It's difficult to describe, colored as it was by the emotion of the loss of two CSTC-A comrades to an IED only a few days earlier.

It was a beautiful spring Afghan day - moderate temperatures, blue sky, white, wispy clouds, a slight breeze. The ceremony was held in front of the 24 national flags flown 24/7 outside CSTC-A headquarters. Today the US and Brit flags were at half-mast - honoring recent combat deaths. These flags provide a sober daily reminder of the dangers our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines face daily serving along-side their Afghan counterparts.

The service itself was punctuated by a number of speeches honoring the service of the two most recently killed in action, 1LT Roslyn L. Schulte, USAF, and Mr. Shawn M. Pine, (LTC, USAR) MPRI.

LT Shulte and Shawn Pine both served as intelligence mentors to the Afghan Army and were enroute to Baghram AFB along with their Afghan counterparts to participate in an intelligence symposium when their convoy was attacked by a command detonated IED. The make-up of their convoy provides a capsule of the fight here. In this three vehicle convoy rode military and civilian mentors and Afghan Army intelligence officers. The two killed, one a young officer just beginning her career, the other a senior civilian mentor, in the prime productive years of his life. Women, men, Muslims, Christians, Jews - all part of this small convoy - all part of the fight to provide Afghans the necessary time and political space to stand on their own as a sovereign nation.

There were four extremely powerful moments in the ceremony. One of the speakers described some of the "small miracles" that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the attack. She related the events that ensured an inspection team on a trip to a nearby province was able to divert to Baghram Air Force Base and beat an approaching storm into the area. Had they not made it there would have been no senior CSTC-A leadership represented at the departure ceremony for these two fallen heroes. But the storm lost the race. Another small miracle, the presence of a Jewish rabbi in theater at precisely the right moment. And a final powerful miracle, as the aircraft carrying our heroes home taxied out for takeoff, not one, but two rainbows in the sky framing the aircraft on the taxiway. There may be no other natural phenomenon more breathtaking, more powerfully moving than the vision of a rainbow within a rainbow.

After the speeches the closing benediction and prayer for the deceased -provided by a Jewish rabbi. What an amazingly symbolic moment. A rabbi canting a Jewish benediction for the dead in the very heart of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. What an incredible moment - one I suspect everyone in attendance will treasure all their lives.

Then a symbolic roll call. The Command Sergeant Major sounded off, "COL Dorr!" and from out of the crowd an anonymous voice, "Here SGTMAJ!!" Then, "PVT Lane!" And again an anonymous voice, further off, fainter, "Here SGTMAJ!!" "LT Schulte!" No answer. "1LT Roslyn Schulte!" Silence. "Mr. Pine!" "Mr. Shawn Pine!" The tears tumbled freely down my cheeks.

Then taps. As powerful and evocative a moment as I've ever experienced.

During the rabbi's benediction he observed that there was simply no way to answer the question "Why?" Why these two at this time. He observed that God called each of us to His side according to His plan and discerning that plan might be impossible for us. But I think there is more, there is a way to come to grips with the situation.

The rabbi is right, there is no satisfactory answer to the why question, no matter what your religious belief. But there is a question we can ask that honors those recently departed.

"What next?" We can answer that question. Indeed, we must answer that question. We must each answer that question in our own way, in a way that honors the sacrifice of those who gave their all to preserve our legacy of freedom and liberty.

Therein lies the sure path forward.

Therein lies the sure future of all mankind.

Andy Wehrle  
MPRI, Sr. Mentor

2/14/09

### On the Street

It started off like any other trip to the Ministry of Interior. Leave the Bull House office space, walk a quarter mile to the South Gate, find one of the MOI shuttle vans, board and go. Usually about a five to ten minute ride to MOI depending on time of day and traffic.

But today, 11 Feb, was to be more than a little different. Roman, my translator, and I boarded Shakar's van. As we left the Camp Eggers compound and passed through the barrier and first traffic circle the traffic seemed normal. We drove the 300 meters past the Iranian Embassy to the next traffic circle and encountered traffic backed up into the circle. Not too unusual and the driver executed a nifty round the circle, inside the traffic, move and we were headed back the way we came on our way to an alternate route.

We got to the turn to put us on the alternate route and the road was blocked by traffic being held up by a member of the NDS (similar to our FBI). Our driver worked his way to the front of the line, again with some nifty decision making and driving, only to be almost physically accosted by another highly agitated NDS agent. The driver pointed to the company vehicle pass that normally gets us through these occasional bottlenecks but to no avail. We were turned back with some nebulous explanation about a suicide bomb somewhere up ahead.

That was our first implication of a problem but, not having heard the explosion, we interpreted the warning as typical bombast to get the job done and turned around heading for a third alternate.

I told my interpreter the way I thought would get us there - past the Lee House and in the north end of the street past the Indian Embassy. Roman calmly relayed my suggestion and off Shakar went. Past the left turn to our primary route that was still backed up - now the first note of concern sounded in my head. Why is that? What the heck's going on down there?

On past Lee House where I lived when I first arrived. Traffic normal, no big deal on this route as I had suspected. Arrive at the turn on the north end of the street leading to MOI and the road is blocked by an armed police man with a scowl. Uhoh. Third strike, better head back.

"OK, good job Shakar, let's go back to Eggers, doesn't look good." Roman again calmly translates my direction and Shakar once again turns his vehicle around and heads back toward Eggers. Only now the traffic is a problem. Still haven't heard any explosions but Shakar's phone rings and he gets an earful from the dispatcher. Roman patiently translates, "There's been a suicide bomber and we have to get back to Eggers immediately." "Seis [OK!]" Let's go!

What follows is about a half-hour adventure ride through parts of Kabul that I'll likely never see again. Every time Shakar approached a traffic back up he'd turn on to the nearest side street and weave through local neighborhoods bouncing over unpaved roads toward the next closest throughfare. Shakar never drove out of control, never drew attention to our vehicle by driving in an unsafe manner. This is important in the city when things get exciting. It doesn't take much for a crowd to start looking for an outlet for their frustration, fear, and anger. Anything foreign that draws their attention is at risk. So Shakar's professional, under-control, heads up driving was instrumental in finally getting us all back to the safety of Camp Eggers in record time given the conditions.

I was deeply impressed by the calm, professional response of both young Afghans with which I was traveling. Both men are in their mid twenties. Both men represent the future of Afghanistan. Both men did their country proud.

And the Afghans have much to be proud of based on the response of their first responder community to the Taliban suicide attacks that day. The Taliban threw the best punch they had.

Multiple suicide bombers in the city on the same day to deliver a huge simultaneous blow designed to send a clear message to their fellow Afghans and to the rest of the world about just who was in charge.

But a funny thing happened on the way to their seventeen virgins. Most of those men met untimely and unplanned ends before they could pull the pin on their own death. Most of those men were shot and killed by Afghan police and soldiers manning security check points that worked exactly as they were designed. Most of those wannabe suiciders died at the hands of professional first responders that went into the buildings and killed the attackers.

The loss of life and destruction of property was horrendous to be sure. But the demonstrated professionalism and proficiency of the first responder community in Kabul sent a stronger message than the Taliban anticipated. Too bad the media didn't pick up on that.

Andy

12/25/2008

### Christmas 2008

“One man, who sold goats to the Hazara policemen, would say hello to the patrol when it walked past his home; his corpse later turned up in the next village.”

Years ago one of my best friends who flew Cobra's in Vietnam told me the story of how his religion was compromised by his combat experience. He related a combat mission on Christmas day. He and his co-pilot were listening to a much beloved Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, as they rolled in to conduct a strafing run on enemy troops in the open. He told me that he can't hear that carol now without thinking of the effectiveness of that strafing run – the two are linked indelibly in his mind's eye. And the beauty and serenity of his childhood memories of the season permanently scarred.

Today, as I sat in my office in Forward Operating Base (FOB) Eggers I had my Zune cranked up, ear-buds firmly embedded, listening to Xmas music, reading a report on the fight here in Afghanistan. “We Three Kings” was playing when I read the sentence that opens this missive and I was suddenly struck with the similarity of my experience with my friend's. Mine lacks the kinesthetic element, lacks the life and death urgency and danger, but is similar in the connection of a much beloved Christmas carol with a jarringly out of context connection with the real world.

I don't for a minute think my experience of the Christmas season will be permanently scarred by this experience, but it highlights so many levels of why this season, THIS season, will always be an important memory for me.

For my entire adult life I worked and dreamed of serving in a combat zone in service of my country and my Corps. Finally got there and THIS Xmas season will always be associated with that service.

THIS Xmas season my son-in-law is home safe with his wife and three kids after an action packed eight months in Farah Province. His memories of that time are filled with kinetic, life and death encounters I'm sure. I wonder what music is coupled with his encounters and how that will change him? But mainly, I am deeply thankful that he is in the arms of his lovely wife and their ‘full of life’ children during THIS season.

THIS Xmas season I'll have the opportunity to meet my lovely bride of 33+ years in Jerusalem where we will walk the streets and county side where our Lord and Savior walked two millennia ago. THIS season we will connect our Bible reading and our faith with the reality of the geography of the Holy Land.

THIS season, we will all wonder and pray about what the financial future holds in store for us as we move into a new year. We will all survive physically, but how will our world be different – because it will be.

THIS season we look forward to the inauguration of President Elect Barack Obama, this nation's first black president. And we all pray for his success. And perhaps just as fervently we pray that his election and service as our president will help bring to a close the ugly history of slavery in our nation. I pray that

collectively white's and black's can move beyond the guilt and victimization that have characterized our relationship for too long now. Perhaps THIS season is the prelude to a great healing of the national soul. That is certainly my prayer for THIS season.

But my primary prayer for THIS season is that each of you will experience the season as it was intended, as a period of quiet self-reflection, of genuine gratitude, of cherished family reunions, and a well of future, deeply satisfying memories. May our Lord and Savior bless each of you individually and all of us collectively as we celebrate His gift of redemption.

11/8/08

#### Four Year Dance With Democracy

Well, the election season has mercifully passed. We have a new President. Many of us are overjoyed at the prospect of the first black President in our nations long and storied history, others of us are still in a resigned state of shock from which they will recover slowly.

But I got to thinking about our every four year dance with democracy. The recent history of electing our President has been - exciting. So bear with me a moment as I recount some of that to make a point.

When our current president was elected for the first time we had a foreign exchange student staying with us. This young lady was from Sevastopol, Russia, just up the Volgograd River from the old Stalingrad - now called Volgograd. In any case, as we all remember only too well, this election ended up in the Supreme Court. During one particular evening news broadcast our young friend observed as how she thought this whole thing was just so 'messed up.'

Nonplussed, I replied, "Oh really, Dasha? Let me ask you a question, have you seen any tanks on the streets of Washington, are there armed soldiers on every corner?" It was like I hit her between the eyes with a 2x4. She got a far away look in her eyes and then said quietly, "No, I guess not." Several nights later she blurted out a similar criticism of the situation and once again I reminded her about tanks and soldiers and this time her eyes sparkled and she said, "You're right Andy, no tanks!"

Then the next go around, President Bush lost the popular vote to Mr. Kerry but won the electoral college vote. There was great wailing and gnashing of teeth that somehow the election had been stolen - but - no tanks!

Now fast forward with me to yesterday at the Ministry of the Interior, in beautiful downtown Kabul, Afghanistan, the other mile high city. The new Minister of the Interior summons all local MOI employees to the auditorium, the place fills with 400+ expectantly awaiting the minister. Instead the gathered masses are treated to a civics lesson delivered by the Director of the Voter Registration Process and he specifically mentions the elections in the United States and pointedly remarks about how in a mature democracy power is passed without force, that after the election the opponents shake hands and try to work together for the good of the country. And this lesson followed by the Imam in charge of the Hajj who exhorts all those present that Islam and democracy are compatible, that they should strive to emulate the example set by the United States.

And fast forward once again to today, when a convoy of Afghan National Police transporting completed voter registration materials from Wardak Province to the capital were ambushed by Taliban insurgents. A four hour battle raged over those documents - 3 Taliban were killed, 3 wounded and amazingly no ANP casualties.

Lest we forget, we live in a nation largely defined by a state of civil peace - a blessing we must NEVER take for granted.

We are now faced with a largely unknown quantity, elected by both the popular and electoral college vote. If nothing else, the next four years will be a grand adventure of discovery. I understand only too well that there are huge issues to be dealt with, that Mr. Obama will be tested as few Presidents have ever been tested. It's a scary prospect, but it is what it is, and we can play chicken little or buckle down and do our individual parts to make things work.

One man that I work with is a fourth generation descendant of Kunta Kinte. He and his extended family are planning on attending the inauguration and after the ceremony they are going to a local cemetery to share the glad tidings with their ancestors, slave and freedman alike. My guess is that this small scene will be played out in various fashion all across our great nation. It's my fervent prayer that these small and great celebrations within the black community will help heal the ugly scar of slavery and racism that has festered all these centuries within our country.

And may God continue to bless this great nation.

Semper Fidelis, Andy

10/11/08

#### Promotions and Fundamentals

It's hard to write about the day-to-day detail occurring here in Afghanistan given the financial turmoil now saturating the news cycle. But as they say, life does indeed go on.

A few days ago it was my privilege to participate in the promotion ceremony for several junior grade police officers from within General Khenjani's directorate. Despite the language barrier there were several striking similarities to promotion ceremonies attended in the past. Picture the general's spacious office crammed with 25-30 fellow officers and one or two guests. Once assembled, the general called for every one's attention and invited the resident imam to chant the blessing. As Christians we would have all bowed our heads, indeed that was the posture I assumed. The Muslims all held both hands in front of themselves, palms up in a gesture of supplication. When the blessing was complete, every man reached with his right hand to smooth his beard. I've yet to determine the significance of the gesture but I've observed it several times now. After the supplication, the General's deputy, Col Shah, called for the attention of those assembled and read the promotion order with due dignity and gravitas. Then each officer was summoned forward individually to have the new rank pinned on. The police wear their rank on soft shoulder boards so the rank was slid over a cloth keeper on the shoulder. General Khenjani invited me to assist in placing the new rank on one of the officers and I was both humbled and pleased to oblige.

At the completion of this action a huge bow wreath shaped roughly like a heart was placed around each officer's neck and he stood at rigid attention and spoke plainly and clearly a pledge to serve his country, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. This was perhaps the most moving moment of the entire ceremony - each man pledging his allegiance to the country. The similarity to our oath of office was both striking and disorienting. The deep, emotional content of the declaration was no different from what I'm sure most of us have felt when either taking, administering, or simply observing the oath of office. That deep resonance was on the other hand counterbalanced by the notion that these men were declaring allegiance to a country founded on a constitutionally mandated religious ideal. We declare allegiance to an idea divorced from mandated religious affiliation. That difference has never been more dramatic or real to me than during this ceremony. To be sure our love of country in the US is part and parcel of the emotional backdrop of the oath of office. To be sure our individual religious ideal suffuses our devotion to country and Constitution. But in the end we pledge our lives to protect an idea and a set of ideals, a Constitution - not a country based on religious tradition, tribal affiliations, shifting political boundaries, and vague notions of the rule of law. It may seem a small thing - but clarity on that small point is, in my opinion, part of what makes our armed forces such a strong fighting force.

Moving on, one of the things I've been trying to do since getting here is to get some idea of how the General gets a feel for the effectiveness of his offices efforts - what reports does he see, what kind of data does he collect, how often, what action does he take? Recently I stumbled across some data left behind by my predecessor for the previous contract year so I asked the General if he had a summary of that same data for the current contract year. Turns out he did and was able to provide me a print out with the data. I took that and combined the two sets of data to get a feel for how much his work load has increased since the previous year in terms of the contract load and the value of the contracts handled. When I gave him that back he was like a kid with a new toy. Obviously had not thought to use his data in that way and very appreciative of having a tool he could use during budget negotiations, T/O discussions, etc. I asked him if he had the detail that made up the summary data he'd given me and he was more than happy to print that out for me - probably 30 or 40 pages of what looked like excel spreadsheets. A line item summary of every contract his shop has handled over the past year. I asked and got a soft copy of the data. Imagine my surprise when I got back to my computer and opened the file on my computer. Remember we're talking hundreds of line items - and all stored in a Word document table - not an excel spreadsheet. There's no way he can use the data - not only that there are multiple types of data in a single cell (document number and date it was processed for example). So the good general knows the value of keeping good records - but his staff hasn't got a clue how to use the computer to store the data in useful way. This is an excellent example of what I was trying to say when I said things here are just plain hard. Now the drill is to get the computer operator trained and then get the data translated into an excel spreadsheet - then train the general on how to use the data - everything is hard!

One final vignette and I'll close. A training class for both Afghan National Army and National Police procurement and acquisition types was arranged and is being conducted at the ANA Logistics Command - on the other side of the city. The MOI officers, all from BG Khenjani's office showed up late the first day - and whined to me that they were embarrassed about getting late and that I should get them a vehicle for the rest of the training. I told them that was not my function and that it was incumbent on them to get their own transportation. Then I called General Khenjani to give him a heads up that his officer's were having trouble getting transportation. He told me through the interpreter that I should call the chief of logistics and secure his officers a vehicle - then hung up on my interpreter. My interpreter was obviously embarrassed by the General's actions when he translated them. My response was, "Oh is that right, OK got it." Upon my return to the MOI that afternoon I saw General Khenjani and his first

question was whether or not I'd secured a vehicle for his officers. My response was to look him right in the eye, thank him for his confidence in my ability to handle those details, and tell him in no uncertain terms that I thought it was more appropriate for him to make that call. After some initial harrumphing - he made the call. A small thing that will pay dividends when it comes to the larger issues I'm sure we'll face together during the coming year.

That's it for now - hang in there.

9/19/08

### Interesting Numbers

Whew! Hard to compete with the financial news coming out of the US these days.

Last night, Thursday night, is kind of like Saturday night in the States. Here in Kabul we work Saturday thru Thursday since Friday is the Islamic sabbath.

Anyway, here in the Lee House where I stay there are about fifty of us and Thursday night is dinner and a movie on the roof. It's a great opportunity to relax and shoot the breeze - enjoy the scenery from the roof along with a good meal and afterwards a movie. We usually have steaks and a salad. I fixed a cole slaw recipe that Eva sent me last week and everyone liked it - peanuts, ramen, sesame seeds, w/vinegar and oil. Eva even toasted the peanuts and ramen so all I had to do was shred the cabbage and dump every thing else in. The guys liked it a lot - it was something different!

Anyway, after dinner last night we set up the computer and projector and all watched "Oh Brother Where Art Thou?" Oh brother, it was enough to make your head spin. I'm sitting on a rooftop in Kabul, a city besieged, (as is every city in Afghanistan), here as part of the attempt to save the treasure of Afghan sovereignty from the ravages of Taliban facism, watching a movie based on Homers Odyssey, the tale of a man's return to society from years at war to recover the treasure of his past life, after listening for a week to the apparent dissolution of a large part of the US financial system, the treasure of the free world. It's enough to make a guy's head spin! In the movie, the three main characters have just escaped from prison and jump a hand car on the nearest rail line. The car is being powered by a blind 'sage' who warns them that they will experience many adventures during their quest for treasure - and the treasure they seek will not be theirs - but they will find treasure.

Struck me as kind of where the US is now - our way of life is kind of a treasure hunt - working for a better life. And we sometimes experience set backs on our travels - sometimes the treasure we seek becomes unattainable for a variety of reasons and we discover that we're actually better off.

Sorry for waxing philosophical - just my attempt to put all this in perspective after one heck of an interesting week. No doubt there are some tough times ahead financially for some of us - but for now all we can do is hunker down and wait for the dust to settle.

Now here's some interesting numbers - this started out as an exercise to help put minds at ease over the IED threat over here. That can be a scary thing - particularly the way it is portrayed in the media stateside. Here are the numbers that I thought would help put things in perspective. Since 2003 the US has lost 1722 brave soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines to the scourge of IED attacks. That's five years

worth of fatalities. In the same period of time - 171,000+ Americans have been killed on our nations highways (that number is actually low since the 2007 and 2008 stats haven't been published yet - if you include those the number killed on our highways is over 200,000 for the same time period.)

OK so the threat of losing anyone to an IED over here is miniscule compared to the risk of being killed on the road in the US. OK, OK, I guess you need to do a comparative stat for population size (# of deaths/100,000) but that's too hard for me right now - but even then, my gut tells me the risk is lower here than there.

Then I got to thinking about the billions of dollars, not millions, billions of dollars our government has spent to combat the IED threat and it made me wonder more - why is 40,000+ deaths in a year on our highways acceptable when 400 deaths in a year due to IEDs are not? Tis a puzzlement!

OK, enough waxing philosophic. Takes too much mental elbow grease!

Hang on to your hat - next week will probably be filled with as much momentous financial news as last - it's gonna take a while for this to shake out. In the end, whatever happens, happens and our best response is a simple question, "OK, what next?" What do we do to make the best of whatever our situation.

Love you all.

Stay strong,

My butt is down and my powder is dry