

Weekly Update

January 20, 2008

Wolf Pack II finished another successful week of Mentoring at MOD. This should be the last time that I need to distinguish between the two Wolf Packs, as Wolf Pack I departs (the weather and the Air Force willing) tomorrow.

Bala Hissar



We continue to patrol with A Kandak and visit their physical security points. This week we visited their security points at Log Pac Headquarters (in the northwest part of Kabul) and at Bala Hissar. Bala Hissar is the ancient citadel of Kabul (initial construction was started in the 5th century b.c). The citadel was attacked and occupied by the British during the two Anglo-Afghan wars in the 1800's. The Russians occupied the Bala Hissar after they invaded in 1979. However, it was not the scene of fighting until battles of the Afghan civil war reached Kabul. The destroyed armored vehicles in the pictures (while Russian made) are actually remnants of the Afghan civil war.



As you can tell, the weather on the day we travelled to Bala Hissar was cold and clear. However, it snowed almost 8 inches the night before—so the roads were very icy (it should not be a surprise that there is no plow, salt, or sand service in Kabul). We were able to make it to the middle level of the ancient citadel.



However, the poor road conditions made it impossible for us to drive to the upper portions or the citadel (pictured below).



Nevertheless, the view from the middle portion was spectacular. Remains of the ancient wall that surrounded the citadel in ancient times were clearly visible—despite

the snow. Portions of this wall are more than 150 feet thick!



In addition, significant portions of the old city of Kabul were also visible.



Given the citadel's steep slopes, thick walls, and almost unlimited fields of observation and fire, storming Bala Hissar was not an operation to be taken lightly.

Afghan Driving



One of the greatest challenges that we face is simply driving along our patrol routes. Afghan drivers tend not to look when they pull into traffic. Given that each of our Up-Armored HUMVEE's (or UAH) weighs

about 15,000lbs, colliding with our UAH almost always ends badly for the Afghan involved.



Afghan roads—even those in Kabul—play host to far more than vehicles. Farm animals are often found being herded down Kabul’s main streets.



Vendors seem to set up shop wherever they want—with little regard to traffic.



Accidents, however, are not the main concern. Colliding with a coalition vehicle is a favorite tactic of suicide VBIED’s (or Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices). A single VBIED can carry more than a 1000lbs of high military-grade explosive (often in the form of 2-4 heavy artillery shells) and successful detonation next to a coalition vehicle (even a UAH) can destroy the coalition vehicle. Thus, Afghan drivers pulling into our convoy or heading towards or vehicle (even accidentally) force our gunners to make immediate ROE decisions. With only seconds to make an ROE decision (and having to make a dozen or more significant ROE decisions during a MCP), gunning is the most stressful job in the vehicle.

The Market

Every other week (on Friday), the Bizarre or Market visits Camp Phoenix.



Merchants selling all manner of Afghan products (primarily rugs, antique firearms, gems (mainly lapis lazuli, amethyst, tourmaline, and emerald) furs and pelts, and marble tiems) set up shop on Camp Phoenix. Also available are brand-name electronic devices (like I-Pods) and sun glasses—all of dubious origin.



Haggling is required for a good price. I have to admit, however, I feel like the Afghan antique merchants remain amazed that Americans will pay them good money to take junk off their hands.

Live-Fire with the ANA

Despite the cold, we attended our first live-fire range with A Kandak today (Sunday).



As an aside, my vehicle, pictured below is HQ 56 or Wolf Pack 56. It is an 1114 (meaning it is not as powerful as the newer 1151's). However, it has the newer electric turret with ballistic glass (which offer more protection for the gunner) that the 1151's do not have. I generally ride in HQ 56—unless it cannot run for mechanical reasons. Today, the heat failed to function, so we will not be driving it tomorrow.



The ANA ran the range surprisingly well. While the range did not test the soldiers' marksmanship skills

to the same degree as an American range, they endeavored to do the best with what they had.



Sorry this Newsletter is so short, but as we begin to fall into our battle rhythm, I will likely have fewer new things to write about.

Thanks again for everyone's support. All of the boxes and letters I have received are greatly appreciated.