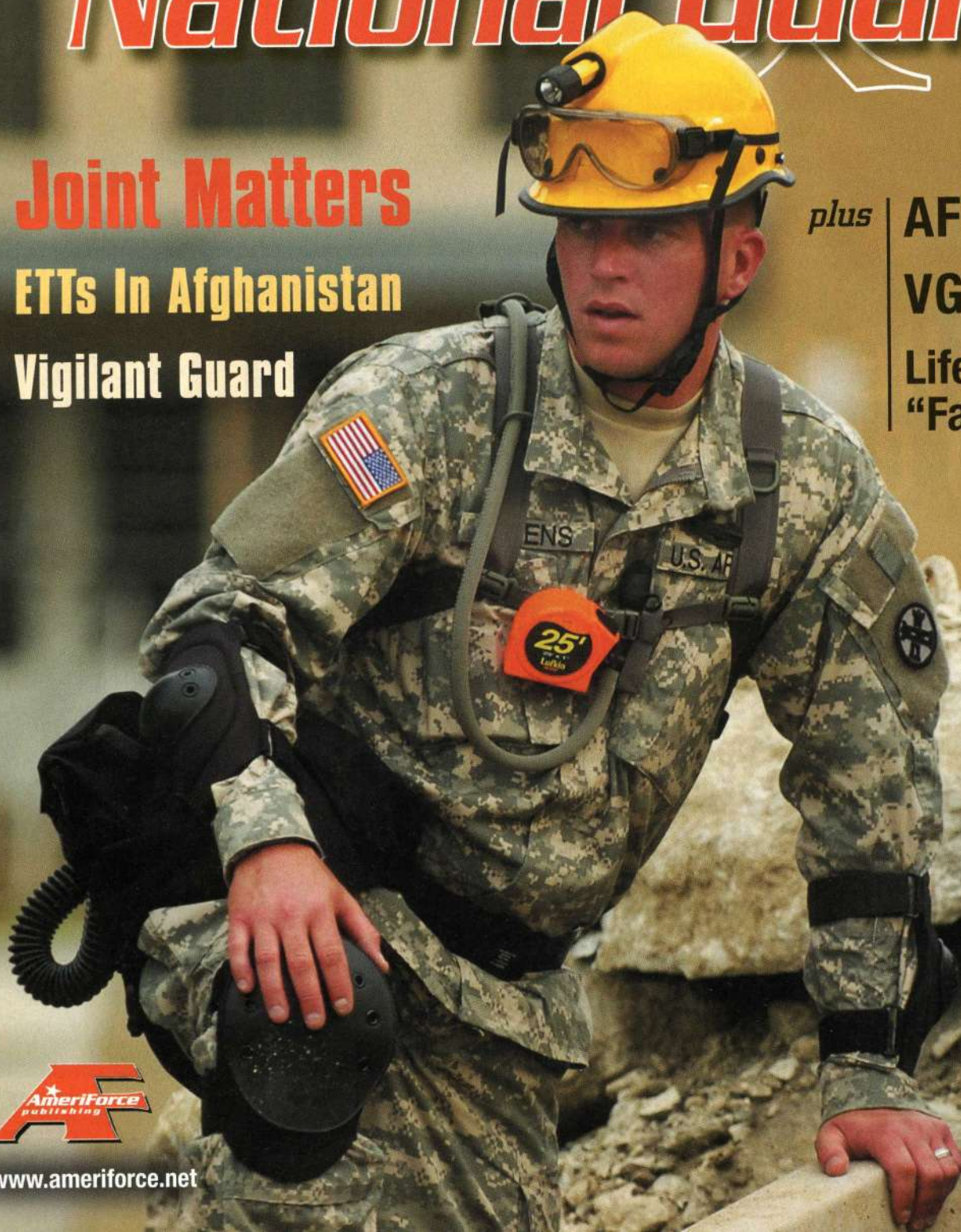


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An ETT In Afghanistan

Text & Photos by Paul Avallone

While covering the 2-87 Infantry Battalion of the 10th Mountain Division in eastern Afghanistan, freelance journalist Paul Avallone spent a some time with the Embedded Training Team (ETT) mentoring the Afghan National Army (ANA) battalion co-located at Forward Operating Base Orgun-e with the Americans.

That ETT is made up entirely of members of the Oregon National Guard's 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, from Tigard, Oregon. All volunteered for the one-year deployment to Afghanistan. Along with the commander, Major Noel Hoback, the ETT consists of a second major (ANA battalion HHD advisor), three captains (advisors to each company) and a handful of senior NCOs.

Two of the ANA companies joined 10th Mountain's 2-87 in a week-long mission patrolling the passes along the Pakistan border, and during the mission Avallone had a chance to get the impressions of the two captains and two NCOs mentoring those two companies. They are:

Captain Dawood Luqman. Commissioned from ROTC from the University of Portland, with as B.S. in Life sciences, he is full-time AGR, Assistant Administrative Officer of the battalion. Born in Pakistan, and raised there until he was 12, he is a naturalized U.S. citizen, and he is married, with a son, 5, and daughter, 3.

Captain Jack Gillentine, Jr. With five years of active duty as an MP, he is presently a Portland, Ore., police officer. He is married, with a daughter, 15, and a stepson, 8.

Sergeant First Class Roosevelt Bradley, Jr. His 22 years combined

active and Reserve duties have included stints as an infantryman, a tanker and a drill sergeant, as well as his present position as an MP in the 41st. On the civilian side, he is an environmental technician in hazardous waste removal. Married, he has three sons, ages 21, 12 and 4.

Staff Sergeant Dave Bowman. His active duty was in the Navy as a diver. In the Oregon National Guard he is an MP, and his civilian occupation is a corrections officer in the state prison system. He's married, with a one-year-old son.

R&NG: What is the mission of the ETTs?

Capt. Luqman: Our job basically, is to be a part of an ANA unit and train them on everything from military tactics to logistics to how to clean the barracks, how to maintain their FOB, to how to pull base security. Pretty much anything that has to do with military operations that are up-and-coming. We are here to assist them, and teach them how to operate on their own without any foreign assistance.

Capt. Gillentine: They get their basic training at the Kabul Military Training Center, but they don't get AIT training, like our soldiers do, like at Fort Benning. When we get them, they're like new soldiers. As I understand it, the Germans train the NCOs, the French train the officers, and the Americans train the enlist-ed. And they kick them out of KMTC, and they come to us, and you can imagine what kind of a goat-rope that creates for us, to try and deconflict all the stuff they've learned there.



SFC Roosevelt Bradley, Jr.



Staff Sergeant Dave Bowman



Capt. Luqman: They are only taught basic skills, not unlike our own basic training. What we do here is mostly on-the-job training. I would say it's similar to an NTC rotation—a JRTC rotation—where they have mentors and OCTs and whatnot, who are actually traveling and doing their mission with them.

SSgt. Bowman: We like to say that these guys learn and move a lot of the times like glaciers. There are moments when we look around and we smile at ourselves and we say, "That is exactly what I was looking for." We saw that just in the mission yesterday, in which we saw some of the development that Captain Gillentine and I had done. We saw our guys do some of the things that we would do as Americans. So, for us, we see these moments of triumph. Then we might see moments where we might be somewhere and go, "Why are they doing that?" Because we don't know, we're where we are, we're not with them at all times, there's not one of us for each NCO and each officer that's in the company, so for us sometimes it's frustrating to see some of the things and we wonder why they're doing it, and then we work hard to correct those issues mostly. We see the stuff where we've made some success and we kind of back away from that, they've learned it and don't need us there anymore.

R&NG: What would you say are the biggest problems you have in the process?

SSgt. Bowman: The multi-ethnic, multi-tribal thing. The intent is to make it [the ANA] one army, not to separate them into their tribes. We Americans have only been here with them, trying to build them as an army for about five years. And they've had the multi-ethnic, -tribal infighting or tension between tribes

or ethnic groups for thousands of years. That, I think, is going to be one of the major obstacles for us to overcome throughout time. That still, the guy who is a Hazara who doesn't like his squad leader who's a Pashtun. And the Pashtun squad leader says, "Go up that hill," and he's like, "No, I'm a Hazara, I'm not doing what you tell me what to do." That's just something that for us, this just isn't an issue in our Army. It's just something that's not even thought of.

SFC Bradley: Like, you have HHC drivers who are Pashtun, then you have other guys who are in the company and they're Hazara, and then you get a conflict. On a mission up in Nacu, we had a conflict where the drivers didn't want to do anything with them because they were Pashtun, and the Pashtun guys called the other guys stupid because they didn't want to work with them, and that creates a problem. Plus, their own NCOs have to treat them with kid gloves and can't just go up to these guys, because they're all carrying AK-47s, and you don't know who's going to get mad. If a Hazara NCO, or a Tajik NCO, if they ride a Pashtun guy, his buddy's going to come in and jump on that NCO, he's going to ride on him because you're jumping on his buddy, then you've got a fight there.

Capt. Gillentine: It's something that we in America had to overcome, though. In 1776—four years later, let's compare apples to apples—in four years, there is no way that you would have the cross-ethnic culture in the army that we have now. Even 50 years ago it was still an issue. So, we have a long way to go, as far as that goes.

SSgt. Bowman: And I can imagine it's a lot like 1776. Virginians probably don't like New Yorkers, New Yorkers don't



Captain Dawood Luqman



Captain Jack Gillentine, Jr.



like South Carolinians, and they were trying to put all that together, and they probably encountered the same difficulties we do. I can imagine Baron Von Stubben walking into his cabin and saying, "Oh, these Americans, they do not listen, they do not know how to march, they cannot shoot!" I can imagine that very same frustration sometimes, but then when he gets the five best guys in the company to shoot at the same time in the direction he wants, he thinks to himself, "Aw, today was a successful day. I made some progress. I got these guys to do what they needed to do."

Capt. Luqman: A big problem, what I think is a big problem, is the huge turnover. These guys just leave. They go home and they might not come back. It could be because of the money—they find a better deal someplace else. Then two months later, they come back. To me, personally, I think it's a whole lack of national unity thing. They are more loyal to their tribe or their neighborhood or their village than they are to this whole idea of a national society which you can come from different backgrounds and still work for a single goal. That's what's pretty much causing the woes that they have now.

Capt. Gillentine: And there's no AWOL, there's no desertion, you can't make them come back. There's no law. Or, at least, no way of enforcement, if there is a law.

Capt. Luqman: There's no manual for what we're doing here. If someone tells you, you've got to do things by the book, I'd like them to show me this book.

SSgt Bowman: We write the book here.

Capt. Gillentine: Everyday.

Capt. Luqman: It's being able to think on your feet. To react almost instantly...to prevent almost anything. Because it's so varied, the environment, the working of these guys, the way they act, the way they think.

SFC Bradley: I've been through a lot of different training. I've been through two jungle schools, went to survival courses, and being a drill instructor, seeing different things, diverse backgrounds, people from all over the country, from

everywhere else. But coming here and doing this, no, this is, this takes everything away that you've learned, because you have to start from scratch when you get here. Because everything you know from back home, you've got to start from scratch.

SSgt. Bowman: Like when we were in the town of Zurik for a week conducting operations. Captain Gillentine and I, never in our career could we have imagined purchasing a goat to make sure the men got fed.

Capt. Gillentine: Never.

SSgt. Bowman: Ever. And that was something that we never ever encountered anytime in our military careers. And I know, for instance, the Special Forces Q-Course encounters things like that. You have to deal with unique problems and unique situations that don't ever really have a manual. We're in Zurik, and our ANA guys have got to eat, and we're leaning over the hood of a humvee looking, and they parade the goat in so they could negotiate a price. We thought, "Aw, we've never done that."

Capt. Gillentine: Nowhere in my 13 years in the Army have I ever learned how to teach people how to get together from different tribes. From Nuristan and Herat. There was nothing I was exposed to before in the Army. But in the National Guard we have the level of maturity and experience that allows us to reach back into our background and say, "Okay, here's an idea, let's try this." I guess that's why the Active Duty probably gave the National Guard this mission. On purpose or by accident, I don't know. I'm a cop as a civilian, and maybe that helps, because of my ability to negotiate. As a police officer, you're doing that. There is tons of negotiations that goes on here that I can reach back in my history and see where it helps. There's a lot of stuff we bring from the civilian job that helps out. Tactics, for one....

R&NG

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