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HELPING HANDS ARM AFGHAN SOLDIERS WITH WEAPONS THEY NEED

By US Army
Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

Pol-e-Charkhi, Afghanistan — There were a lot of busy hands from several countries around the United Nations Weapons Storage Area in Pol-e-Charkhi on September 6-7, 2004.

United States, Romanian and Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers conducted a first ever draw of weapons from a disarmament of militia weapons storage site. It was much more than just transferring weapons from one storage site to another, though.

It was a classic example of agencies working together to provide the best solution for a nation with security problems. The results were a win-win all around: the ANA received 1,300 AK-47 rifles and RPK machineguns and 700 RPG-7 weapons for graduating soldiers from Kabul Military Training Center while the UN freed up storage space needed for their Disarmament Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program's weapons storage site.

Approximately 30 coalition and ANA soldiers were involved along with UN personnel. The project consisted of removing the weapons from the UN containers, examining the weapons for serviceability, and properly

recording them onto the ANA's Central Corps property books.

As the weapons were removed from the containers they were field stripped and inspected by a group of Romanian Army soldiers.

"We are the resident subject matter experts on these types of weapons; therefore, we are training the U.S. and conducting the initial inspection on the weapons," said Romanian Army Lt. Sorin Clobanu.

The weapons were inspected and categorically divided into three groups: serviceable, serviceable repair, and repair

parts. Serviceable weapons were sent to four tables where U.S. soldiers from Camp Black Horse, Camp Phoenix, and the Office of Military Corporation - Afghanistan, cleaned and prepped them for storage in an ANA Central Corps container. The weapons found to be unserviceable were stripped down as repair parts for future use. The serviceable repair weapons were put aside to be repaired later.

According to Montana Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Michael Blum, the ANA 3rd Brigade Embedded Training



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

A United Nations storage container filled with AK-47s, RPKs and RPG-7s. The weapons are part of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program for the Afghan militia.



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A United States and a Romanian soldier work together to remove spare parts from a weapon deemed “a repair part weapon.” The items removed will be used to service existing weapons in the Afghan National Army’s arsenal.

Team’s Master Gunner, who assisted in the weapons inspection and cleaning, some of the weapons were pretty ragged, dating back from the years 1947 through 1995 and some were like new. On the other hand, he added, as in the U.S. Army, with proper Preventative Maintenance Checks and Services, these weapons should last for some time.

Second Lt. Chris Stillions, Indiana Army National Guard, Direct Support Platoon Leader, Task Force Phoenix III, was on site to assist Safi Bakhtyar, a DDR representative for the UN storage area. Stillions and Bakhtyar verified the extraction of weapons from the UN storage containers, recording serial numbers and ensuring all weapons removed were added to the Central Corps property book.

Lt. Col. Arnie Marquart, Montana Army National Guard, the Commander of the 3rd

Brigade ETT, said it was like completing phase II of the DDR process; not only are we getting weapons off the streets, but new graduating soldiers of the ANA will be able to receive a weapon and we’ll be able to service existing weapons in the ANA with the spare parts.

This situation is like locating a rainbow and following it through to find the pot of gold.

“This all started while I was looking around Afghanistan for D-30s, an artillery piece used in the 3rd Brigade,” Marquart said, “when I spotted a United Nations truck and I told them about our search for the Soviet D-30 gun. We soon began discussing the abundance of weapons stored at the Pol-e-Charkhi DDR site and agreed to meet at the location the following day.

“After seeing the vast amount of weapons at the DDR site, Gen. Zameri, Commander of the 3rd Brigade, and I told them [the UN personnel] of the need for weapons for the ANA. The UN representative

commented that they could use more room in their storage area where the weapons were being kept.

“That’s when we began to break the code”, said Marquart. “The code question was: what happens to the DDR weapons after they are gathered at the storage and how do we get them in the hands of the Afghan Army?”

The request was routed through Task Phoenix III and eventually ended up at Phoenix’s higher headquarters, OMC-A, specifically OMC’s Defense Resource Sector directorate.

Col. Jack Stankiewicz, U.S. Army Reserve, is the director of DRS at OMC-A. His office is responsible for all Afghan defense sector logistics plans and operations, or in other words, his directorate obtains all vehicles, weapons, ammo, and major items to support the ANA and Ministry of Defense.

When he received the information about the location where vehicles and weapons were being turned in, Stankiewicz realized that it seemed to be an opportunity to get good equipment back to the ANA quickly and for little-to-no cost.

“This began the ‘code breaking process’ by our Logistics Plans (Log Plans) section,” said Stankiewicz.

Arrangements were made by contacting the UN and the



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

Second Lt. Chris Stillions, Direct Support Platoon Leader, Task Force Phoenix III, and Safi Bakhtyar, United Nations representative, verify a serial number of a weapon removed from the UN container and being added to the Afghan Army Central Corps property book.

International Observation Group for representatives to initiate a process to inspect, clean, and account for weapons that will make their way to the ANA rather than purchase the weapons or wait for donations.

“This will save greatly on the time to get critical shortages of weapons back to the new ANA graduates without additional expense,” said Stankiewicz. “It is even quicker and cheaper than getting donated weapons since they take time to arrive and can cost millions of dollars to ship.”

In addition to the weapons, also discovered were several bunkers throughout the area that contain thousands of rounds of ammunition, ammunition that the ANA lacks for training.

According to Air Force Maj. Gen. Craig P. Weston, Chief of

the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan, the mission being conducted at Pol-e-Charkhi are two significant security pillars in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, namely drawing down the Afghan Militia Forces and building up the national army.

“To get the weapons from the militia and transfer them to the Afghan National Army is an immense achievement to providing peace and security for the Afghan people,” Weston said.

Soon more ANA soldiers will have weapons in their hands with which they can defend their nation and their people.

Few of them will know of the hard work and effort by American, Romanian and some of their fellow Afghan soldiers to put those weapons in their hands.



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

Sgt 1st Class Michael Blum, Montana Army National Guard, and the 3rd Brigade (Afghan National Army) Embedded Training Team’s Master Gunner, inspects and cleans an AK-47 rifle prior to it being stored in the Afghan Army’s storage container.