



## Disarmament, de-mining programs aid local golf course redevelopment

By Cpl. Douglas DeMaio

**KABUL, Afghanistan** - With de-mining, a benefit of a U.N. program, and assistance from a disarmament program, heavy weapons and mines no longer thwart those who wish to indulge in recreation at the Kabul Golf Club, Afghanistan's only operational golf course.

After de-mining the full 18-hole course and removing three abandoned Soviet tanks, a few artillery pieces and a multiple rocket launching system from the fairways, the golf course that was built in the 1960s is now free of ordnance and open for business, providing Afghans a sport that hasn't been made available since before the Soviet occupation.

From the latter years of the Soviet invasion to the fall of the Taliban, golf in Afghanistan has been nonexistent. For Mohammad Afzal Abdul, the club professional, the return of golf to Afghanistan is a sight for sore eyes.

"I have been playing golf since I was 10," the 47-year-old Abdul said. "I was taught the game by American instructors in the old days."

In the 1970s, prior to the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Adolph Dubs, staff



Several heavy weapons, shown here, were removed from the Kabul Golf Club. The weapons were removed as part of a disarmament program.

from the various embassies would come and play golf, except for the staff of the Soviet Embassy, Abdul said.

Because of Abdul's association through golf with Americans, several years later the Taliban beat him and burned down his house.

Similar to having a poor lie (placement of the ball) in golf, Abdul disregards the past and focuses on his future and the potential of Afghanistan, he said.

"Although golf is not a common game in Afghanistan, lots of kids show curiosity about it," Abdul said. "I explain to them the

importance of the game and that piques their interest. Golf is a game for the future of Afghanistan. It teaches players a sense of tolerance, patience and hard work."

Lessons Abdul says will bring the country back to the days of democracy, which lasted in Afghanistan from 1965 to 1974.

In March 2004, local golfers convinced Abdul to reopen the course, a sign that proves Afghanistan is making positive changes, Abdul said. Since the course was full of mines and explosive materials, he sought assistance from the Government of Afghanistan and requested the



**Col. Bert Key, Director of Security Sector Reform, from the Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, an organization designed to aid the Government of Afghanistan with developing its military defense sector, is the first American to hit a ball at Kabul Golf Course in more than 25 years.**



**Mohammad Afzal Abdul, golf club professional, explains how the disarmament program has helped with the development of the golf course.**

area be cleared.

With the government’s assistance, the Afghan Ministry of Defense, Japanese-led Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program, and the U.N.’s Halo Trust de-mining team supported the course redevelopment by eliminating hazardous conditions.

“Golf is a safe and friendly social activity,” said U.S. Army Col. Bert Key, Director of Security Sector Reform, from the Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, an organization designed to aid the Government of Afghanistan with developing its military defense sector. “People out on the golf course, playing the game and peacefully interacting with one another, is a sign that they are gaining confidence in the stability of their society.

“A successful DDR program benefits everyone,” Key said. “It takes weapons away from combatants so that they must practice solving their differences in a more peaceful way.

“It not only takes the weapons out of use in society, but also builds in the former combatant the confidence to shift his attention away from the constant need to protect himself. He can then focus on the future with a job, career, or vocation.”

Troops of a local commander, Mullah Ayzat, have already turned in several weapons and the security in the area is improving, Abdul said.

DDR is a program designed to disarm about 100,000 militiamen across the country over the next two years, a

process that will help promote peace and stability throughout Afghanistan.

“This golf course is safe and secure,” Abdul said. “I extend an invitation to those interested in golf to come play the course and see the progress that is being made.”

Although the golf club is operational, it is short of equipment, he said, but donations of equipment and materials are helping to improve the operations of the course.

The course is located 10 kilometers west of the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on Qhargha Road near Lake Qhargha park and picnic area. It is open 7 a.m. through dusk and the cost is \$10 for the day.