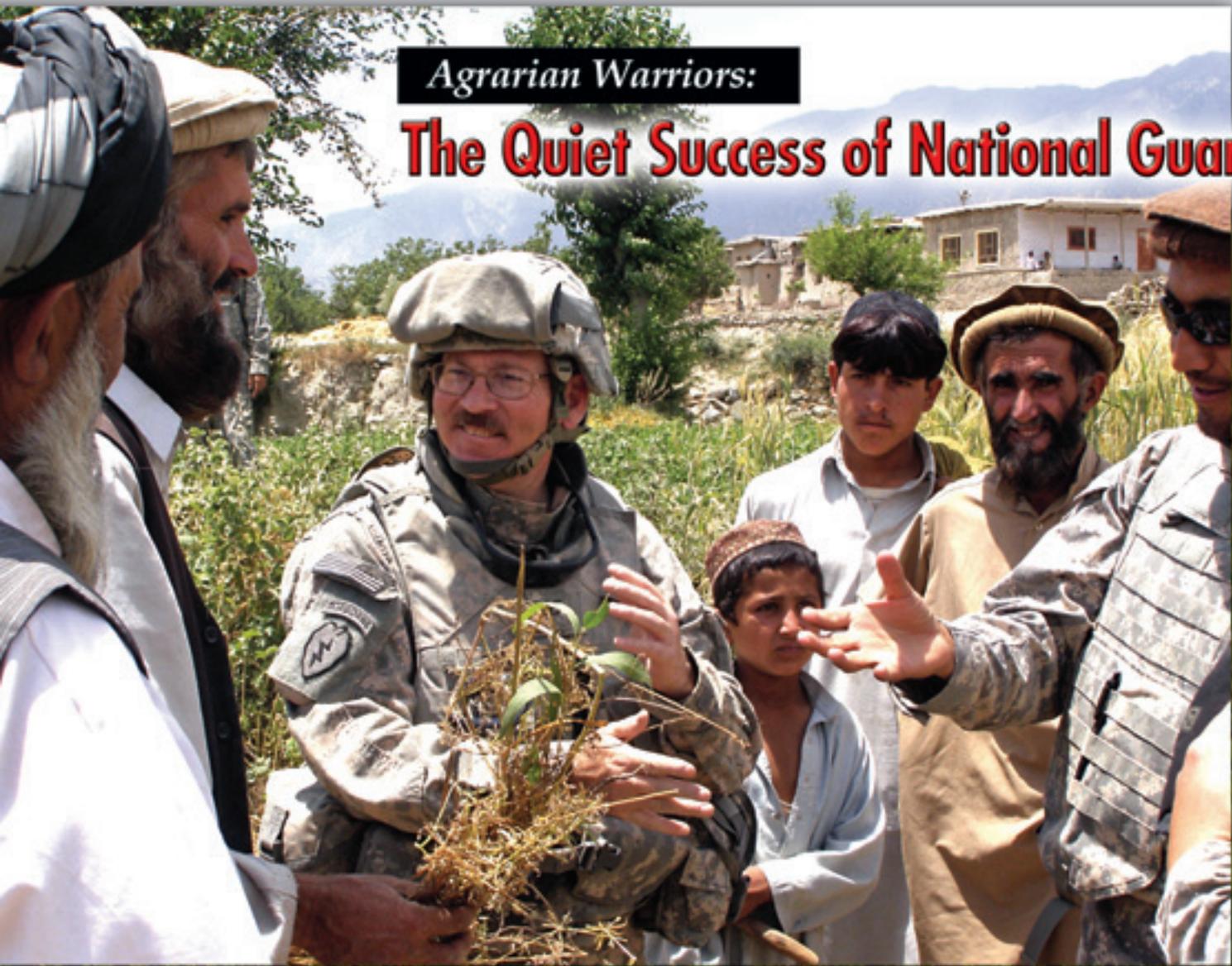


Agrarian Warriors: The Quiet Success of National Guard



U.S. Army/SFC Todd Steffen

Above, COL Jim D. Moore, commander of the Tennessee Development Team (ADT), evaluates a proposed project site with village elders in eastern Afghanistan's Paktia Province. Right, 1LT Brandon Burton (center) and SSG Erik Singasaas of Tennessee's Task Force Warrior ADT provide agricultural training—including beekeeping—to Afghans from Parwan and Kapisa Provinces at Bagram Airfield.

U.S. Army/1LT Lory Stevens



Agribusiness Development Teams in Afghanistan

By COL Martin A. Leppert

I have looked across the epic desolation of the Afghan landscape many times, pondering the country's future and how the collective power of the United States and its allies can be brought to bear to bring this ancient land back from the abyss of feudalism and chaos. Recent global conflicts continue to spark changes in military doctrine and training methodologies. Forward-thinking in their approach, these new concepts are deeply rooted in lessons learned from periods of conflict and reconstruction throughout history. Thus a look back at our proud military heritage reaps valuable knowledge applicable today in the fight for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

In 2002, I took part in a joint combined military exercise conducted on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. Despite cold, gray days and lightly

falling snow, I could not help but notice the striking similarities between the Japanese rural landscape and the southern Wisconsin farm region where I grew up. Familiar Midwestern-style farms with ceramic silos, barns and dairy cows all reminded me of the toils of my American youth.

Top, Kentucky ADT members help villagers remove soil from a farm in Parwan Province for analysis in Kabul and at the University of Kentucky. Left, SSG John Carter, California National Guard's 40th Infantry Division ADT security forces squad leader, and an Afghan veterinarian vaccinate farm animals during a veterinary civic action program in Kunar Province.



U.S. Army/SPC William E. Henry



USAF/TSgt. Brian Boisvert

CPT Jeffrey Mann, a soil scientist from the Kansas Army National Guard, teaches students from Nangarhar University how to test soil at a class at Forward Operating Base Mehtar Lam's district research and demonstration farm in Laghman Province.



U.S. Army/PFC Elizabeth Raney

Noting the commonalities, I asked a Japanese officer if he knew of Hokkaido's early development; his response was a revelation. In the late 19th century and during post-World War II occupation, development advisors from the U.S. Army, academia and the private sector poured into Japan. Journeymen from America's heartland particularly reshaped the agribusiness sector of Hokkaido. Together these outsiders partnered to profoundly influence every facet of a nation's rebirth. I shelved that bit of information regarding Japan until fate—and the Army—ordered me to southern Afghanistan in 2006 as an embedded training brigade commander and senior advisor to an Afghan army brigade.

Throughout my tour, I experienced firsthand how decades of civil war and conflict with the Soviet Union devastated the once prosperous fields, farms, herds and remotest villages of the inner valleys and rural plains. In the late 1970s, Afghanistan had a sustainable-agriculture economy that provided for its population and competed in international markets. Soviet occupation strategy targeted *mujahdeen* support among this very infrastructure. Scorch-and-burn tactics decimated the land and effectively incapacitated formerly profitable agrarian livelihoods. The Soviets incinerated and poisoned orchards and destroyed ancient canal systems and wells that were critical to irrigation.

Combined with natural effects of drought, these led even the toughest

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Afghans to flee centuries-old hereditary homesteads for Soviet-controlled urban areas. Refugees also migrated to neighboring countries and the United States, creating a drain of generational knowledge still affecting Afghanistan. Inevitably, Soviet strategy failed, their troops withdrew and the resultant systemic void left the door wide open for the emergence of corrupt warlords, the extremist Taliban and, ultimately, an influx of drug traders with their seed of choice—the poppy. Afghans struggling to survive and subsist quickly succumbed to the easy, low-know-how, high-profit crop. The poppy invaded Afghanistan, supplanting traditional and indigenous staple harvests, and became the illicit cash crop of insurgency.

Engaging an unconventional enemy requires unconventional solutions. Upon my return from Afghanistan, LTG Clyde Vaughn, then director of the Army National Guard, approached me with a novel idea for establishing teams of National Guard members uniquely equipped with civilian expertise in agribusiness. Our National Guard personnel



SGT Jason Stevens, a horticulturalist with the California Army National Guard's 40th Infantry Division ADT, gathers a soil sample from a field alongside the main road in Marawara, in Kunar Province.

USAF/TSgt. Brian Boisvert

represent a diverse and unique pool of military and civilian skill sets.

Like generations of citizen-soldiers and airmen before them, members of today's Guard are mature, responsible, versatile, competitive and entrepreneurial. Many who muster in hail from jobs associated with agribusiness. The practical expertise of the production farmer, the agriculture education instructor and the agronomy researcher simultaneously serving in uniform is a very positive force-multiplier for the current mission in Afghanistan.

These "agrarian warriors" were raised in and have worked in a sector that requires developing technical knowledge and building supplier and marketer partnerships to stay competitive in a global economy. With time and patience, they can—and are—transferring those skills to Afghan farmers.

LTG Vaughn understood that regenerating agribusiness is critical to neutralizing extremist influence and enabling a self-sustaining Afghanistan. Bottom line: Agriculture determines whether Afghanistan flourishes or fails, and National Guard agribusiness development teams (ADTs) would ensure that success.

"Agriculture," Afghan Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) Mohammad Asif Rahimi has averred, "is the dominant factor in the Afghan economy, in food security, in livelihoods, sustainable resources and national security."

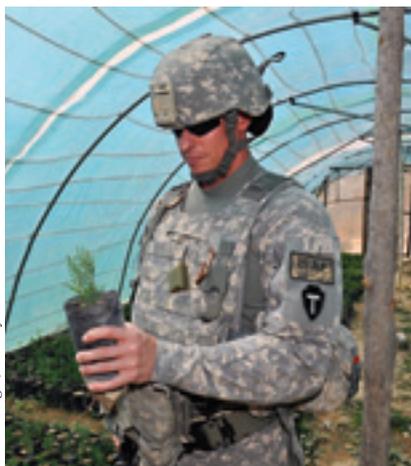
The versatile citizen-soldier and airman could deploy, establish good relationships with farmers and villagers, and begin to revitalize the agricultural sector of Afghanistan. The reliance on ADTs is critical in initial phase development. For agile team members are not only agriculture experts, but are also military professionals able to secure hostile areas of operation; this is a full spectrum capability not yet actualized in civilian counterparts.

In a November interview, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates articulated the unique capabilities that only the Guard brings to this stability mission: "It seems to me [it is] often the situation where the Guard and the expertise in the Guard can provide the initial response in areas in Afghanistan until the security situation is stabilized enough for the civilians to come in." This joint operation hinges on precision warriors who ensure full access and the ability to reach out and make a difference deep in the wild and remote river valleys of the country.

Use of military personnel for ADT missions is part of the overarching counterinsurgency strategy designed to protect locals, improve their lives and unfetter them from extremist influence. This strategy is based on a pragmatic assessment of the global security interests of the United States and our belief that representative national governance and a sustainable economy in Afghanistan are essential to success in the region. A centralized, effective government lessens support for insurgents and reduces the pool of unemployed men from which extremist groups recruit. It further under-



ARNNG/CPT Robert Cavaniss



USAF/Tsgt J.T. May III

Above, LTC Ruth Graves and LTC William T. Ewing, of the Kentucky ADT, inspect barrels of cattle feed in a root cellar near Camp Atterbury, Ind., before deploying to Afghanistan. Right, CPT Charles Peters, Texas National Guard's ADT, inspects a greenhouse in Ghazni Province in April.

girds governmental authority and the capacity to provide basic services. To this end, rebuilding the farm sector is imperative.

In the 21st-century security environment, the whole-of-government approach is the way to effectively prevent and deter conflict around the globe. ADTs implement this inter-agency strategy through partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. land grant colleges and universities, the Afghan national and provincial governments, Afghan farmers and businesses, and nongovernmental organizations. This collective endeavor provides training, rebuilds Afghanistan's agribusiness sector and MAIL capacity, and enables a viable economy capable of providing for Afghans.

Seeing Afghanistan's natural condition as a perpetual state of war and conflict is understandable, but it is not correct. It is just as easy, and just as wrong, to think Americans lack common bonds with the Afghan people. Our National Guard ADTs clearly lock into a shared agrarian connection, working hard with Afghans to grow not just crops but also trust and hope in remote regions. Theater requirements for the mission initiated from Headquarters, Com-

Right, members of the Missouri Army National Guard's ADT visit with a farmer and discuss agricultural assistance in eastern Afghanistan. Below, SSG Daniel Salcedo, Nangarhar ADT, provides security during an agricultural assessment in Nangarhar Province in May 2009.



USAF/SSgt. Shawn Weismuller



ARNG/COL. Martin Leppert

bined Joint Task Force-Afghanistan. The National Guard Bureau (NGB), in a collaborative effort with the Army, structured teams of approximately 58 troops to provide training and advice to Afghan universities, provincial MAIL employees, Afghan agriculture extension agents and, most importantly, local farmers. Together they formulate a five-year agricultural development plan. ADTs use their developed educational farms to conduct training programs to introduce sustainable-agriculture practices.

All National Guard ADT projects are planned and executed in a combined effort with the provincial directors of agriculture, irrigation and livestock using local labor. These efforts produce not just an achievable, legal subsistence but also long-term relationships, building capability and professionalism at all levels of Afghan agribusiness. Additional partnerships with Afghan universities will further bridge ties with U.S. land-grant universities, similar to historical cooperative efforts in Japan.

After more than two years working in some of the harshest, most volatile areas of Afghanistan, the progress of both the ADTs and Afghan farmers is evident. NGB has supported 18 ADTs on 11-month rotations, with 1,080 National Guard members deployed. To date, teams have collectively trained more than 2,115 farmers and 435 Afghan agriculture extension agents in various agriculture best practices and have provided practical learning experiences to 1,600 Afghan agriculture students. Simultaneous with the education focus of the ADT mission, Guard members work to improve basic agriculture infrastructure. Teams have supervised construction of 282 check dams to reduce erosion, control release of mountain snowmelt, and improve quality and quantity of water in irrigation canal systems.

They have also overseen construction of multiple cool-storage facilities to better stock fresh produce and help multiple slaughter facilities preserve more wholesome,

sanitary meat products. The ADTs have also worked with Afghan farmers to plant more than 1,000 *jeribs* of grape plants, properly trellised and irrigated with trickle irrigation systems.

While the increase of 30,000 American troops attracts media attention, a surge of civilian agriculture expertise in Afghanistan is also occurring. U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry told Congress in December that he is marching in lockstep with military commanders to put a civilian strategy in place: "We aim to increase employment and provide essential services in areas of greatest insecurity, and to improve critical ministries and the economy at the national level. ... Our overarching goal is to encourage good governance ... so Afghans see the benefits of supporting the legitimate government and the insurgency loses support."

In all likelihood, current ADT structure will make the transition from military to more civilian-centric, with a core of civilian and military agriculture advisors in support of the greater effort. This whole-of-government approach focuses on improving key ministries. This is achieved by increasing the number of technical advisors and providing more direct development assistance so that the ministries, in turn, can stand up and take over.

Efforts will be bolstered by *in situ* rule of law, including law-enforcement institutions fighting corruption, organized crime and drug trafficking.

More than 370 years ago, the call to duty beckoned the first American citizen-soldiers away from farms and families. Leaving plows in fields, they picked up muskets and forged a new nation. The fruit of their labor is now a global superpower possessing the world's most technically advanced agricultural economy. Today the modern citizen-soldier and airman have been asked yet again to step forward, away from farmsteads; take up arms; and volunteer to facilitate the rebirth of a nation—this time, Afghanistan.

As always, America's citizen-soldiers and airmen, men and women from 54 states and territories, stand ready to serve and support one of the most unique and successful missions in Central Asia: American farmers reaching out to Afghan farmers through a common bond to harvest freedom from a once fallow land. Soldier in war, citizen in peace, this is America's National Guard at its best. ★