



PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING MINUTES



Canadian Capt. Rob Goldstein greets a child while on patrol through Haji Baba, Panjwaili district, Kandahar, Afghanistan on Wed., Oct. 20, 2010.
PHOTO: THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jonathan Montpetit | Toronto Star

Field Notes from CMIC team leader, Captain Rob Goldstein

Rob Goldstein, a federal prosecutor and a Captain in the Reserves, was a Civil Affairs Officer in charge of a five member Civil-Military Cooperation Team in Afghanistan (CMIC). His CMIC included a high school teacher, a corporate security investigator, a helicopter technician and an army signaler. He described his training and deployment in e-mails to his Toronto office.

"The PRT's (Provincial Reconstruction Team) job is to assist the Afghan authorities in providing a stable and secure environment. The training has been interesting, and it is very professional. It is conducted by people who have come off tour and can impart 'lessons learned'. Right now we are into what is called Theatre Mission Specific Training. This is a combination of new training (last week was Afghan culture and history and Pashto language, and it was excellent) or refresher training such as combat first aid. The last couple of days have been counter IED (Improvised Explosive Device) training.

I'll finish this training block at the end of October, and then go off with the rest of the PRT to Gagetown, New Brunswick, where we will meet up with our force protection elements on a one-month exercise and practice all this stuff (soldiers have to practice together over and over and over again together until their reactions to various situations become second

nature). Later on, in January and February, the entire Task Force will be on a two-month exercise in California where we'll keep practicing and working with other members of our teams. In between and after these various exercises I'll be taking some courses, such as a two-week tactical combat first aid course, and a one-week operational planning course. Tomorrow we will receive our desert uniforms and other overseas kit. Contrary to the impression that people might have, the military is putting a lot of resources and effort into training and equipping soldiers who are deploying overseas. We are getting excellent training and first-rate equipment."

In another e-mail from Afghanistan Captain Goldstein wrote:

"So what am I doing on a daily basis? I'm in my office about half the time, and outside the wire patrolling the other half. These are not fighting patrols—I'm a civil affairs officer. I go out there and talk to people, or check on projects that my team is running, or meet workers or contractors that we have hired to do projects. I drink a lot of chai tea and eat Afghan food. We talk about the weather or crops or something like that and then get down to business. We discuss what their needs are in their village, how they feel about the insurgency, whether they have been threatened by the Taliban, and so forth. Then we try to coordinate agencies and projects that will address those needs. It is very challenging. Zhari District is one of the least developed in Afghanistan. Low levels of literacy, high levels of infant mortality, very minimal rule of law and governance and all the ills that go with those things. These problems are easily exploited by the enemy. But, contrary to what people think, we are not trying to fix their society in a six-month rotation. We are practicing basic counter-insurgency tactics here—trying to separate the population from the insurgents and then protect them in order to give their institutions time to develop. We try to give them an incentive to throw their lot in with the Afghan government rather than the Taliban."

Half way through his tour of duty when Captain Goldstein was near Nakhonay, a town about 20 km southwest of Kandahar. Insurgent bomb makers took the lives of six Canadians in this Taliban transit corridor in 2010 Captain Goldstein wrote:.

"About six weeks ago my team was transferred from Zhari District to Panjwayi District. We are now

attached to the Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group. In Zhari, I lived in a nice air-conditioned trailer. Now I'm in what is called a 'combat outpost' COP—basically a mud hut in a village. If you have a bug, scorpion or snake phobia, do not come to Afghanistan and live in a mud hut. There was a scorpion in my hut the other day. Some of the guys have found vipers in their huts. There is no air conditioning here. Laundry is done with a wash basin and a washboard and we cook our own food. At the big bases private security companies handle security. Here, we do it ourselves (yes, even captains take a turn doing guard duty). In a way, this is good old-fashioned soldiering—we patrol, we guard our camp, and we live pretty basically.

My duties as a civil affairs officer are the same as they were in Zhari, although there is much less office time and a lot more interacting with Afghans. I am on what we call 'presence patrols' about six days a week. Our purpose is to meet people, discuss issues with members of the community, monitor our projects and generally show a presence. The challenges here are vast. The population is very much afraid of the insurgents, and because of our geographical location there is a strong connection with Pakistan and close proximity to insurgent sources of funding, weapons and money. There is no question that the population prefers us to the insurgents. Unlike them, we do not impose a curfew, interfere with local customs, extort food or money, or beat people up who merely carry cell phones. On the contrary, we pay for things we damage. A part of my job here is investigating battle damage and facilitating compensation payments.

I have not encountered any of the famous supposed Afghan xenophobia, although it is true that not everyone loves us and not everyone loves having a foreign army in their country. On the other hand, the hospitality aspect of "Pashtunwali" appears to be very well entrenched. I have been invited into people's home to have tea and I've enjoyed Afghan meals. Afghans are incredibly family-centric. When people come to our COP I show them pictures of my family and that creates an instant connection.

Anyway, what is all this like physically? Just for fun, I decided to weigh myself carrying all my gear. Right now I weigh about 70 kilos thanks to my delicious COP diet and daily regimen of exercise in 40C heat. With my gear I am a spry 109 kilos. (For those who

do hot yoga, don't tell me it's great exercise until you've done it carrying 39 kilos of gear!) I don't walk, I waddle.

Frankly, it looks and feels pretty ridiculous carrying around 39 kilos of gear when it's over 40 degrees Celsius and sometimes even over 50. And, it's hard to interact with people when you're dressed up like an Imperial Storm Trooper and sweating like a hockey player being interviewed during the second intermission. There are no rivers or lakes around here to jump into—only irrigation ditches that double as sewage drains.*

Well, that's it for now”

* fragmentation vest with ballistic plates, Kevlar helmet, C7 rifle, small radio, tactical vest and small backpack with 10 rifle magazines (300 rounds), two fragmentation grenades, medical supplies, yellow smoke bomb (for marking a helicopter medevac landing site), GPS, compass, camera, notebook, pens and pencils, granola bars, night vision goggles, an English-Pashto aide-memoire and six liters of water