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One Week With Task Force Buffalo: Changing the Face of the Arghandab

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A rebuttal to Sean Naylor's *Army Times* Article, "Stryker soldiers say commanders failed them."

ARGHANDAB RIVER VALLEY, Afghanistan – Sitting on the banks of the Arghandab River is the Baba Sahib Shrine. It provides a great view to the verdant Arghandab Valley, which is in stark contrast to the rest of the dusty province.

One can see the magnificent Baba Sahib shrine from the Arghandab District Center, which is where Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment (Task Force Buffalo), 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) centered their counterinsurgency efforts. While one can enjoy a lush view of the Arghandab River Valley and its beautiful sites from the district center- that is probably the last thing on the unit's mind.

Task Force Buffalo has suffered a lot of casualties and has therefore been the subject of over a dozen articles over the past few months. Through the fog of war and the emotional loss of comrades, it is difficult to see the good being done. Yet, facts show that Task Force Buffalo has helped many Arghandab residents who braved staying in the district while the Taliban campaigned to infiltrate Kandahar City from the north. However, it is discouraging to not see any articles in relation to their stability and development efforts. Here is a one-week snapshot at the activities of Task Force Buffalo in Arghandab.

One Week Snapshot: October 6th – October 12th

On October 6th, Mohammad Wali Agha, from the Saidano Kalacheh village, went to the Arghandab District Center to seek help concerning his six year-old son who had unknown medical problems. According to Agha, his son had no clear problems with his hands or feet, but he could not walk. First Lieutenant Kevin Turnblom, the Fire Support Officer for Charlie Company, asked Agha if he could bring his son to the District Center so that Charlie Company medics could examine him. Agha returned with his son two hours later.



Mohammad Wali Agha and his son at the Arghandab District Center

His son was very small and frail. Although six years old, the boy smaller than a healthy two year-old. There were no obvious injuries; he was very skinny and probably malnourished. In addition, he appeared to have some sort of chromosomal or nervous disorder, possibly downs syndrome and/or autism. The child was also clearly incontinent (the involuntary excretion of urine or fecal matter), as indicated by stained clothing and a pad which his father wrapped him in and sat him on. Charlie Company lead medic, SGT Julian Galaz, examined the child and spoke to the father. Agha indicated that he had taken his son to several Afghan doctors and the hospital in Kandahar City, but had never received a positive diagnosis. SGT Galaz recommended having the Battalion Physician's Assistant or Surgeon examine the child to further diagnose and determine a course of action.

SGT Galaz wrote a referral note for Agha to take his son to Strong Point Jelawur to visit the Battalion Physician's Assistant CPT Nicholas Harrison. 1LT Turnblom gave Agha 200 afghani to reimburse his travel to receive medical care. In addition, 1LT Turnblom provided Agha with two blankets, one bag of rice, and one bag of beans.

On October 7th, Bravo Company distributed 200x2kg flour, 100x3L cooking oil, food, and winter clothing to displaced families of the Arghandab. Five days later, on October 12th, Charlie

Company distributed five 1,000 liter water tanks, 1,000 bags (2kg) of flour, 1,000 jugs (3 liters) of cooking oil, 1,000 bags (1kg) of rice, 1,000 bags (1kg) of beans, 300 bags (500g) of green tea, and 1,000 blankets at the Arghandab District Center.



Soldiers from Task Force Buffalo unload 6000 kg worth of humanitarian aid

Unlike some units or agencies, Task Force Buffalo wasn't standing on top of trucks handing out humanitarian aid; they let the Afghan National Security Forces do it because Task Force Buffalo soldiers aren't looking to be in the spot light. They are quiet professionals. You won't find one Task Force Buffalo soldier in the distribution crowd. They were busy getting some much needed rest, out of sight, after moving some 6000 kg or 13228 lbs of materials in the blistering heat. And that's Task Force Buffalo in a nutshell: mourning the loss of close friends one day and having the moral fortitude to get up the next morning and do the right thing- not trying to seek revenge. This is the very thing that separates the insurgents from the population.



The Afghan National Army is at the forefront of distribution with no US forces in sight.

Conclusion

This is just a one week snapshot of Task Force Buffalo. One can only imagine how much they've done during their four month journey in the Arghandab. Even though Arghandab district was the most "kinetic" district within Task Force Stryker, it is very heartening to see that there have been around 24 projects started in Arghandab. It is even more surprising in light of the fact that there has been around 24 projects completed in Spin Boldak District as well, which is widely acknowledged to be the safest district in Kandahar Province.

It is acknowledged by most of the civilians working at the Arghandab District Center that they are on a glide path now. On December 28th, civilians working at the Arghandab District Center started adding improvements to two schools: Baba Wali and Khoshal Khan. Aside from getting blankets (pictured below), these little Afghan girls will be getting a much needed education they deserve now. Task Force Buffalo can feel at ease as they hand over the district to 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment because all their hard work has snowballed into measurable performance and effects.



An interpreter working for Task Force Buffalo hands out blankets to Afghan girls

Even though the District Leader cried as CPT Jonathan Burton, Fire Support Officer and key civil-military liaison for Task Force Buffalo, left for his new mission in Shah Wali Kot and Daman, he will be in good hands with the 2-508th who has been closely working with Task Force Stryker even beyond the relief-in-place timeframe. The two units have forged a working relationship that'll flourish for the rest of the deployment.

As far as Task Force Buffalo is concerned, they seem to be focused on their new mission already. CPT Burton called me the other day and told me of his plans of meeting with the district leadership of Shah Wali Kot and Daman districts to replicate his efforts in Arghandab. Burton, and Task Force Buffalo, has not skipped a beat. Drive on Buffaloes.

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