

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GARY PATTON, MAJOR GENERAL,
UNITED STATES ARMY/DEPUTY COMMANDER GENERAL-ARMY, NTM-A) VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM
AFGHANISTAN SUBJECT: EXPERIENCE AND PROGRESS IN TRAINING THE AFGHAN NATIONAL
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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): And I'd just like to welcome you all to the Department of
Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, April 19, 2011. My name is Petty
Officer William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public
Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today.

We are honored to have as our guest from Afghanistan Major General
Patton, Deputy Commander of Army with NTM-A. We are honored to have you as our
guest today, sir, for our Blogger -- or, I'm sorry, for your final Bloggers
Roundtable at the end of your 19-month tour in Afghanistan.

A note to the bloggers on the line: Please remember to clearly state
your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Respect the
general's time, and keep your questions succinct and on the topic of the NTM-A
Army. When you are not asking a question, we ask that you keep your phone on
mute as a courtesy to the rest of our callers.

With that, sir, if you have an opening statement, the floor is yours.

GEN. PATTON: Thank you very much. This is Major General Gary Patton,
and I've spoken with a number of you in the past. I regret to say that this is
probably my last Bloggers Roundtable, as the petty officer said.

This is my 18th month, not 19th, unless he knows something I don't know
about being extended here, but I am planning on redeploying here in about mid-
May, and I head home after 18 months, working for NATO Training Mission-
Afghanistan.

I would like to just make a couple comments and then take your
questions as we've done in the past. First off, you know, I've looked -- I
spent this morning at a breakfast with a U.S. congressional delegation led by
Speaker of the House Boehner and several other members of the U.S. Congress.
And the question that the congressional delegation asked me, I think, is
relevant for tonight. And the question was, how is the Afghan army is doing?

And the way I answered that question this morning, I'll just start out with you all as well, and then we'll go in any direction you want to go. But I really broke my answer down into two parts: quantity and quality. You've heard me say that before, but I'm going to speak today from a perspective of 18 months and also some things we've seen just over the last month.

From a quantity perspective, the Afghan army is growing. This past month, between February, March, the army grew by 4,749; currently sits at strength of 159,363, on the way towards the growth objective of this year of 171,600. Every indication is the Afghan army will make that goal and then some. The -- so the army is growing not only in end strength but also in officers and NCOs. This month, the officer ranks grew by over 700. It was largely due to the graduation of the national military academy class. It graduates every unit in March. The officer corps grew by a total of 740. And 29 of those graduates were graduates from the national -- those new officers were graduates of the national military academy.

NCO corps grew by 262 in the month of March. As we've talked about in the past, there's still a deficit in the officer and NCO corps. We continue to grow them every month, and we expect that the current deficit for officers and NCOs will be at about a 90 percent -- will be at a (fill ?) of about 90 percent of the officer and NCO requirements by October of 2012.

So that's a projection, but we continue to make progress in growing officers and NCOs into the army and filling those ranks.

On the quality side -- well, one more thing on quantity: Also on the quantity side, the army continues to make its retention goals. The Afghans have set a goal of between 60 (percent) to 70 percent as success for a month's worth of recontracting or retention.

This past month, they made that goal -- exceeded that goal, rather, at 77 percent and on the -- for the year, their year, solar year, which ended in the end of March, I'm able to give you the solar year retention rate, which was 69 percent for the year. So it fell squarely within their 60 (percent) to 70 percent goal (bank ?) for recontracting. Those of course are soldiers and NCOs who have chosen to re-enlist and remain in service. So they're making their retention goals.

Similarly, on the recruiting side, they're making all the recruiting goals. This past month, the army recruited 6,800 into the army's ranks and only with a goal of 6,800, filling all available seats for -- (inaudible) -- in the military.

We do turn away a number of recruits -- I can talk about that if somebody wants to get into that -- due to a medical screening and other screening techniques.

Over the course of the year, the solar year, again, which runs from March to March, the army met its recruiting goals by 104 percent, a total of 75,000 Afghans recruited into the Army, and again, meeting recruiting goals for every month of the -- of the solar year.

So growth, retention and recruiting are on pace and on track and making good progress.

On the quality side, a couple of things that has occurred here over the last several months that I just want to bring you up to date on is literacy. Literacy is the process of educating soldiers that come in the army and prepare them, taking them from illiterate status to initially the first grade level and continuing education to a third grade level and then continuing education while they serve in the army to elevate them to whatever level they can reach.

It's -- we've been teaching reading and writing and arithmetic in the basic training now for several months, and it's starting to really pay off. We've -- also introducing a prevocational school literacy program where before soldiers go to branch schools where they learn to be experts in supplies, (signal ?) or engineers, they attend preliteracy there to raise them to higher levels. So literacy is paying off (as a ?) recruiting initiative -- incentive, rather, and it's also a recontracting incentive -- (audio break) -- the soldiers I talk with are thrilled about their literacy opportunities.

And this -- lastly, we've completed and opened 11 or 12 vocational -- (audio break) -- focused on specialization of soldiers in their respective army branches, and we've just initiated in the last several months a train-the-inspector program. We are bringing Afghan NCOs and officers into a speciality program where we certify them as instructors and then take them through a series of levels of certification by which they attain essentially the distinction as premier trainers in the army. Today we have about 136 who have been through our premier trainer program equal -- equivalent to what we would know as our drill sergeant program in the United States Army.

And we (see ?) -- infusing them back into the training base, and they are training Afghans to train themselves. They have Afghans taking the lead more and more in both the individual training base, the leader training base, the collective unit training base across all of Afghanistan -- today 23,000 soldiers in training, and that's part of the overall growth program.

And so with that, I'd be glad to take your questions about anything I just talked about or really -- or any reflections over my time here in Afghanistan. Back to you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

And we'll go ahead and start with Shelle Michaels.

Q: I don't have any questions right now.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Roger that.

Anand?

Q: This is Anand Choudhuri from Registan.net. At the projected end state of the ANA, could you please break down the number of ANA combat battalions with three combat companies and the number of ANA combat battalions with four combat companies?

It appears that the plan to increase the size of every ANA combat battalion to four combat companies has been delayed to grow the number of ANA combat battalions. Over.

GEN. PATTON: OK. That's a -- that's a good question. Let me -- I'm going to do some mathematics here while I'm talking to you -- add up the battalions. But it's a fair question. I can address what the -- what the bloggers referred to -- (audio break) -- is a program by which in the past year we generated a number of -- it was an (infantry ?) focused year, and the units that we built, generated and fielded into the Army, new units, were primarily infantry battalions -- infantry battalions with three companies of about 600.

So this year our focus is on fielding enabler units, and by enabler I mean support units, engineers, military intelligence, (ground-clearance ?) units, supply units and so forth. And also our focus -- (audio break) -- that this year is to generating and fielding fourth companies with the battalions which had previously been -- (audio break) -- and by this, you essentially add 25 percent greater combat or -- (inaudible) -- formation. And the infantry battalions are about 800 strong. And the reason obviously is to increase the combat power -- (inaudible) -- battalions.

So this year, while we're building enablers, we're also potentially thickening and increasing the combat power of the existing (three ?) battalions by additional companies. We're about three quarters of the way through that process. We still have about -- (audio break) -- to generate. And then that will give every battalion -- and this gets to the caller's question -- this will give -- every single infantry battalion in the Afghan army will be comprised by four infantry companies, a heavy weapons companies and a headquarters company, and that's because of this year's project to add fourth companies into the existing three-company formation.

I'll take another question. And in the meantime, I'll count up the infantry battalions and I'll give you a good number as to how many that -- those apply to. Again, 100 percent of the battalions at the end of this year will have the fourth companies added into their formation.

Back to you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. And Chuck Simmins.

Q: Yes. General, thank you for talking with us. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

Earlier -- well, probably late last year, there was some discussion about holding tribal leaders and tribes responsible for the conduct of their men in the (police ?) and in the army. With the highly publicized event where soldiers are turning on NATO and American troops, is there any follow-up going on where these soldiers' villages, their tribes, their tribal leaders are being visited and there's some sort of discussion about their behavior or reparations asked for?

GEN. PATTON: So the blogger there -- I guess part of that question -- I want to make sure I understand it before I answer it. I think you're asking about the process by which there have been several events here in the past where Afghan soldiers essentially turned on their coalition and Afghan partners and engaged them, and what is the method by which those individuals have been screened, vetted, accepted in the service and so forth. Is that -- is that the

gist of the question? I'm prepared to answer that. I just want to make sure I have the right -- framed the question correctly. Over.

Q: Yes. That, and is there any pushback to the Hiljus (ph) tribe or tribal leadership about their conduct?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. OK. All right. Fair enough.

What I'd like to answer this question is really talk about the -- there's a -- there's a three-pronged approach to ensuring the integrity of the -- and the -- and screening and vetting of the -- of the soldiers brought into the army and those that serve in the army. So let me take you through a couple of the -- the three-element approach.

The first element is the vetting process by which a new (recruit ?) comes through. And that's an eight-step vetting process. Part of that's -- one of the steps is a step that Carl (sp) referred to, and that's tied back to the village of the recruit. That's called a guarantor letter. Every soldier coming in the army has to have two guarantor letters from village elders, educators, mullahs and that sort of thing from their home village. It's a key part of the recruiting process. It's an Afghan cultural tradition that village elders testify in this (manner ?) to the recruit's identity -- (audio break) -- to serve in the ANSF, the security forces, and also certifies the recruit, (but more importantly ?), reminds him of his responsibility to bring honor to his village or tribe during his service. That's one of the eight-step vetting process.

Another step -- I won't go through all eight, but another step is the tazkira. The tazkira is an identity card (that ?) in each the regions provides each Afghan a means to show their registered name, date of birth, location they -- (audio break) -- and their tazkira number, which is essentially their equivalent Social Security number, and their picture. So that authenticates their (essentially ?) home of origin.

Another step in the vetting process is medical screening and drug testing. And part of the medical screen (sic) is to look for ailments that would prohibit military service, in a series of ways in which a doctor (examine ?) an individual and determine their age, so as to prevent underage or overage -- (audio break) -- from (assessing ?) into the military. I mentioned the drug test is part of that.

And then the last step I'll just mention is the biometric collection. I know many of you are familiar with that. That's the retinal scanning (thing ?) that enters into a biometric database. It's -- (inaudible). Afghans have their database, and it has some cross information shared with various U.S. database where criminal matches are -- that -- all that information in the biometric database is examined for -- (audio break) -- matches, which leads to further investigation with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense.

So that's the screening process. And just to give you a data point, in the month of February, we had 6,270 recruits come through recruiting stations and 5,540 were accepted into the military. So that left out, if my math is right, about 730 that were not accepted. That's about an average number, about 700, 750 that are not accepted every month that apply as recruits but not

accepted into the army due to, again, medical screening, drug testing, underage, overage, failure to have all their documents, or just plain lack of motivation and maybe they just walked away from -- (audio break) -- station due to lack of interest or it -- (audio break) -- poorly adjusted -- (audio break) -- they thought the army was about.

That's the entry point. That's the first element (in selecting ?), screening and a process there.

A second element of the process occurs in the unit, where -- the minister of defense has just talked to me about this this week -- he considers every soldier -- (audio break) -- every soldier in the Afghan army to be able to sense surroundings -- surrounding people, are able to detect those that might have an inkling or a motivation to turn on their fellow soldier.

And on top of that, in the unit is a counterintelligence program. Today there's 220 counterintelligence soldiers trained in that specialty that are embedded in formations. They're at the battalion level. They're in the (recruiting ?) stations. They're in the training centers. They're specially trained to detect these sorts of behavior that would indicate a fellow soldier turning on his -- on his comrades.

And that number of 220 is growing to 434 by the end of this year. So it will double over the course of the rest of the months of this year. All 434 of those of counterintelligence-trained soldiers will be embedded within units -- (inaudible) -- being enabled as I speak, at the U.S. Army Military Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, who has (trainers ?) over here and also soldiers that we send to (Huachuca ?) to enable that -- (audio break) -- (educate ?) them on that counterintelligence -- (audio break).

So those are some of the elements within the formation.

And then lastly, the third element of this process is really a continuous systematic approach. It's continuous education of soldiers to know, essentially, where they're surrounding -- (inaudible) -- vulnerability. Look for impersonators. You know, learn indicators of soldiers, not true soldiers, wearing a uniform, you know, that sort of thing.

And also, the accountability system. We just launched last month a(n) Army-wide personnel accountability inventory. We call it in our U.S. Army PAI, personal asset inventory. The Afghans call it tassafiya (ph). In Dari, tassafiya (ph) means full and open accounting. And that will occur over the next eight months. (Will be ?) every unit inventoried, every personnel checked, a head count, everybody -- every person entered into a biometric database, every soldier checked against pay records to ensure that they're getting the proper -- (audio break) -- the amount of pay matches the pay by which the Army -- Army payroll, so there's no -- so it goes out -- most accounts getting paid for.

So I've just described the three sort of elements of a process for the purpose of ensuring those soldiers in the Army are protecting themselves, they're aware of their surroundings, they're detecting -- (inaudible) -- that might have the motivation to turn against them, and that the Army's only accepting, assessing those into the rank -- (inaudible) -- screen.

Is the system foolproof? No, it's not. And I don't -- in these current conditions and environment, I think it'd be impossible to make it foolproof. But the Afghan army is striving to really improve this system so to greatly reduce the opportunities -- (inaudible) -- available to anybody that might have that motivation -- (inaudible).

Back to you.

Q: Yeah. I just wanted to follow up real quick. Was there any --

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Chuck? Chuck -- yeah, we've got to -- if there's time at the end, I'll give you a second to follow up, but we have a few more we've got to get to.

Q: Thank you. PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sorry about that. Paul.

Q: Hi, sir. Thanks for speaking to us today. It's Paul McLeary with Defense Technology International.

I was wondering if -- as far as training the trainers, could you give me numbers for how many Afghans are in the pipeline now to be trained as trainers, and what your goal is?

And also, what are your needs as far as the number of NATO trainers that they still don't have? I know up until recently there was a few hundred billets still open. Thanks.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, I'm really going to center my question (sic\answer) around the first part of that, if I could. We do expect on the NATO trainers, we've seen improved contributions and in the -- I'd say the weeks ahead, we're likely to see some additional international contributions in that line. And I'll just leave it at that. I think we'll see some of those contributions coming through here in the coming weeks that will make a significant difference (in ?) our trainer numbers. So I'll leave that for a future announcement, and national decisions and so forth from -- (inaudible) -- through contributing nations.

Let me focus my response, then, to the Afghan train the trainer. This is a huge program, and I describe it as our ticket home. Because the -- you know, we train the Afghans to train, and they train themselves, and that removes and greatly reduces the requirement, then, for NTM-A, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. And the Afghans then would be squarely in the lead in doing their own training. That's our ticket out of here.

Let me give you some numbers. The Afghan National Army training command, which is essentially their training and -- (inaudible) -- command, that's how we would refer to it in the U.S. Army, TRADOC -- their TRADOC, or ANAPC -- A-N-A-P-C -- currently has about 3,500 instructor positions. Our objective at the end of this year, December, 2011, is to fill 80 percent of those positions. Now, that's about 2,780. Eighty percent of the authorized instructor positions.

Now, why'd I choose 80 percent? That's our goal. Eighty percent's our goal because that -- right now we have about 85 percent of the -- I'm sorry, we're rising between 80 (percent) and 85 percent of the commissioned officer

positions filled. Same thing on the officer side. So this year's goal is really matched up against, you know, the -- at the end of the year, what the army strength will be like in those NCO and officer ranks, and I think it's reasonable to keep the instructor ranks on par with the overall NCO and officer manning.

So we should -- for 80 percent of all the instructor positions filled by the end of this year. Currently, we've got 2,000. So that breaks out of the current -- of the past yield against our objective -- 2,700, we've got 2,000 filled. So that's about 74 percent. We're striving to be 80 percent. And --

Q: And that's -- of that 2,000 -- I'm sorry, is that 2,000 Afghan trainers being trained now or 2,000 that are actually in the field training Afghan troops?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, there's 2,061 assigned Afghan instructors --

Q: OK.

GEN. PATTON: -- in the field training. They do train individual --

Q: And you're looking for 2,500.

GEN. PATTON: -- training, NCO training and officer training and also unit training. So 2,061 Afghan instructors today assigned for -- doing that training. And it's against the -- our objective this year, we want to have 2,783 by the end of the year. So that's where we stand today. So we have a little more to go.

Now, that's just the quantity side. On the quality side -- it gets to the other part of your question -- we want to make these instructors as good as they can. So we've established a program called train the instructor. Of the currently assigned instructors, we have 1,309 of them that have been through a level of training instructor certification. And so that's 47 percent. We want it to rise to 60 percent by the end of this year; our goal is 60 percent, we're currently at 47 (percent), 1,309 out of 2,783.

That's where we're at, and we have programs in every one of the regions fanning out across Afghanistan training instructors in this certification program to improve their instructor skills, improve their knowledge of weapons and improve their knowledge of various other aspects of their -- of, you know, the school that they're at.

And then lastly, I talked about the drill sergeant program. I -- (inaudible) -- called the Master Skill Instructor Course, MSIC. Currently, we graduate 136 from that program. Our goal is to about 15 percent of the total instructor cadre to be MSIC graduates, so today, we have about 5 percent, 156 of instructors, and we want to get to 15 percent.

So those are our goals, that's where we stand today. It's a great program. By the end of this year, we'll be very well postured where -- exactly where we want to be in terms of Afghans in the lead or close to taking the lead with quality instructors, vastly improved, I would say quality instructors in

the lead in their various courses at the individual NCO and officer and unit level.

Today, if you -- and I've been -- I've been out to the basic training center here earlier in the week. Every basic training class I saw, the Afghan instructors were in the lead and they had a master skill instructor in Overwatch. You see the same thing in the NCO training and the officer training. Where you see less Afghans in the lead today than I would like, but we're moving in the right direction is in the unit training.

Today, the unit training is principally led by the coalition, but we're training more and more Afghans in that -- to move into the lead. And that's part of this -- (inaudible) -- program. Back to you. Over.

Q: Great. Thank you. Of the -- quickly, of the 1,300 that have been through certification, so that that means there's about 700 doing training that haven't been certified yet?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's correct.

Q: OK.

GEN. PATTON: Our objective for the year is to fill 2,700 positions out of a requirement of 3,500. Today, we have 2,000 that are assigned, and we've got a total of 1,300 of those 2,000, 1,300 of the -- of the currently assigned 2,000 that have been through levels of certification. So we want to grow the current ranks to a higher number, and we want to -- we want to certify the ones we have to a greater number. Does that -- do you follow that?

Q: Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you. And Gail, you were next.

Q: Thank you. General, Gail Harrison with the Foreign Policy Association.

I was wondering, in your opinion, what is the biggest misperception the American public has about the training effort over there, and how would you like to see it corrected?

GEN. PATTON: Well, I think I'd answer it this way.

The misperception maybe is that the coalition is performing all of the training and the -- and we're training the Afghans in our -- in the entirety. That was the case about a year ago. But since then, by virtue of the program that I described -- (audio break) -- the Afghans are training themselves. And we, the coalition trainers -- (audio break) -- close overwatch. I'll just reiterate, you know, we -- (audio break) -- basic training, and the Afghans are squarely in the lead in leading basic training; same for NCO training and same for officer training.

The branch schools, where we do special training, you see a mix of coalition still in the lead in some cases, especially in some of the specialty courses like engineering, explosive ordnance and so forth. And then in other -- (audio break) -- schools, you see Afghans in the lead.

I'll relate a visit. Six months ago, I was at our logistics branch school. I had a Hungarian instructor teaching a class of 30 Afghan soldiers how to be mechanics. The Afghan -- there was not an Afghan instructor present. I was there two weeks ago. The Hungarian was in the corner of the classroom. An Afghan sergeant was in the lead. And this -- in this case, all 30 students had gone through first grade literacy training and all had notebooks out and pens and -- with pens and paper -- and were taking notes from their Afghan instructor. So that's a difference of about six months -- (audio break) -- literacy program and the combination of the Afghan trainer program. And then, like I said, we still have a ways to go in the Afghans -- putting a majority of them in the lead in the unit training -- (audio break) -- to work on that.

So I guess that's what I would say is -- (audio break) -- when we get visitors over here, I think all our American coalition leadership and visitors out to the Kabul military training center -- (audio break) -- basic training, officers training and other venues. And they see for themselves that Afghans are in the lead, coalition -- (audio break). And when the coalition trainers -- (audio break) -- helping the trainers -- (audio break) -- and manage and do their training planning. And they still need work there. So we're still valuable -- invaluable -- (audio break) -- the Afghans as they put their training plans together, they -- (audio break) -- training with transportation -- (audio break) -- and we're still hopeful in that regard. But in terms of -- (audio break) -- basic trainees, officer candidates or what have you, the Afghans are in the lead in that initial -- most of those initial entry training venues. Over.

Q: Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And John Doyle.

Q: Yes, thank you, General, for taking the time to talk to us. I'm sure you're a very busy man as you get ready to leave the country.

I wanted to follow up, basically, on Chuck's question. I'm trying to get a handle, if you have one, on these attacks that are being perpetrated by Afghan soldiers or people in Afghan army uniforms against coalition forces. Do you have any -- do you have a sense of whether most of them are Afghan soldiers that for one reason or another turned rogue, or are these infiltrators, sleeper agents that either have joined the army with an ulterior motive or just simply someone who's been able to get a hold of an Afghan army uniform?

And I have a quick follow-up question, which is what is this doing to the morale of your people, the trainers? Is it -- is it hurting their confidence and affecting their mission because they're worried about, you know, somebody suddenly going rogue on them? Thank you very much.

GEN. PATTON: Well, I think what you see is really a combination. And the Afghans investigate into these situations very seriously. And I have sat down with the chief of the general staff of the army and the minister of defense -- minister of defense of his ministry. And we've had very serious discussions and conversations about this problem. They take it very seriously. And they look at each incident on its own merits, and you see a combination of the situations you described, both impersonators, people who find a uniform, an army or police uniform, and then launch their attack. And these are insurgents bent

on, you know, violence, but impersonating -- using the impersonation as a means of entry and so forth. And then you have the other cases of -- (audio break) -- soldiers or policemen for whatever reason may be choosing to turn on their fellow comrades there.

Let me just address the -- (audio break) -- one of the things -- the -- I mean, the minister of defense issued a directive here a -- (audio break) -- ago talking about this, telling his own -- (audio break) -- within the Afghan army, you know, every soldier is a sensor. You know, and you have to be attuned to the -- both of those scenarios, you know, a soldier who maybe has been in your formation but has -- you know, maybe (it was in vacation ?). Maybe he went away for leave and came back acting a little bit differently. Maybe he's had strange contacts and so forth and acting out of the ordinary.

We'll also be very attuned to people that might be in uniform but don't have all the rank on the uniform correct or their ID card or the tazkira card is -- (audio break) -- a little phony, or they're wearing the wrong kind of boot, or the vehicle doesn't have the right logo sort decal on it and those sorts of indicators. Be very vigilant -- (inaudible) -- across the Army so that every soldier is a sensor and that, you know, in this type of war, an insurgent war, you're going to see that type of threat posed to an army. And so, you know, the best combat for that -- the best counter to that, rather, is a soldier- sensor.

The other thing he's addressed and directed his army to do is look at vulnerabilities across all the different facilities, the headquarters, the formation and so forth and look at points of entry, change your patterns up so as not to set a -- (inaudible) -- pattern, a movement pattern, a pattern of daily behavior. And all these kind of things are important to sort of offsetting and countering insurgent threats of the likes that you described, impersonators and with infiltrators that may change their motivation.

Just one example. You probably know of the attack -- (audio break) -- in the news -- the attack against the headquarters yesterday. Initial indicators from that, based on Afghan -- (audio break) -- that single attacker was an impersonator, not an Afghan army member. And I have personally interviewed a half-dozen people who were in the building at the time of the attack by this single impersonator, and those people all told me that their -- by their own personal observations, the Afghan response was (disciplined ?), rapid and they reacted in a very professional manner -- (audio break) -- the single attacker's attack against the defense. So very impressive response and -- (inaudible) -- against that impersonator attack yesterday.

Back to you. Q: Oh, and how's it affecting the training mission? Is it hurting morale? Is it making people kind of nervous and unable to do their job?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, I -- you know, on the training mission, I can relate to that. It has no effect on our training mission. Back in July, we had an incident on a training (range ?) up in Mazar-e Sharif that I was involved in. And the -- there was a -- an Afghan sergeant who turned on trainers and his fellow Afghan soldiers and wounded some, and then he was killed.

We started -- we opened up the training (camp ?) the very next day. Our motto in -- (inaudible) -- is "shoulder to shoulder" -- "shana-ba-shana," in Dari. And we really believe that. And we know that our -- you know --

(inaudible) -- there's a threat out of there and we take the proper precaution -
- (inaudible) -- against a -- against a -- both an impersonator and --
(inaudible) -- type of thing. But it really doesn't affect our (day to day ?).

We have -- we do remain confident in our Afghan partners. And just like after that incident up in Mazar-e Sharif at one of the training bases, we resumed training the very next day as a sign of solidarity and because we retain confidence in our Afghan partners. Over.

Q: Thank you, sir.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And Chris Radin.

Q: Hello. Christopher Radin with Long War Journal.

Last March, President Karzai announced that responsibility for security lead would begin transferring to the Afghan national security forces in July. This, to me, seems to be a major milestone. And I was wondering if you could describe what your -- what your expectations are for the performance of the Afghan national security forces are -- will be in these areas.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. Well, you probably know the provinces and municipalities at the present enterprise -- I think there's seven; one of them's Kabul -- where Afghans have been in the lead for a number of months. So July really poses no change to the current situation. Afghan police and army are in the lead in Kabul city today.

The other provinces and municipalities, that's -- that would be a question I'd be more comfortable -- (inaudible) -- operational force because the transition of the security lead is really a geographic issue with regard to battlespace, areas of operations and so forth. What we in NATO Training Mission have is institutional battlespace, if you will. And by that, you know, our battlespace is the training centers.

And for example, Mazar-e Sharif city, one of the cities targeted for Afghans moving to security lead here this summer, we have a training center in Mazar-e Sharif, but the training center transition timeline will occur on a different timeline. In other words, the rate at which we turn the range over to the Afghans in the lead at the training center will be based on some of the things that I've talked about tonight: number of instructors assigned, number of certified instructors that are part of that training cadre, the resourcing of the training center, the fact it's in a temporary facility now and are transitioning to permanent facilities.

And all those kind of things are part of the equation when we assess the training centers, and we do each one -- each branch, school, each training center gets its own assessment, and we have essentially a timeline by which we plan to transition at the institutional level over Afghans. And that transition timeline is, I would say, in parallel but not the same timeline necessarily as the geographic battlespace timeline that you're referring to for those municipalities and provinces.

Over.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you very much, sir. And thank you to all the blogger participants today and for your participation, sir. With that, if you have any closing comments, you can go ahead with those now.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, I had -- I'm still doing the math on the math problem from one of the first callers on the number of infantry battalions. Let me just close by saying this, and then if that caller could just stay on the line briefly, I'll give you the number. I'm trying to do the math in between questions here.

This has been, you know, I would say the pinnacle of my 32-year Army career. Everything I've done up to this point, all of my -- including my time at West Point as a cadet, so that's another four years -- has really prepared me for the job that I've had for the last 18 months. It has been one of, I'd say, high op tempo, high demand, but it has been very fulfilling with how far we've come in the NATO Training Mission and how far our partners in the Afghan army have come over these past 18 months both in quantity and quality.

Things that you saw a year ago in the training base and 18 months ago -- you know, soldiers unqualified on their weapon moving out to their respective infantry units from the training base -- doesn't happen today. Whereas only 30 percent of the soldiers qualified on a weapon 18 months ago, today 95 (percent) to 99 percent of those that go through training qualify on their weapon, and in addition to everything, all of the other skills that they learn.

It's a standard basic training. You must qualify on your weapon, you must pass a PT test, you must demonstrate weapons proficiency. And these are -- that's been one of the -- really, I would say the milestone changes over the last year is implementing a standards-based training model for the Afghans.

The other thing is the branch school, the specialty training. Whereby a year to 18 months ago, soldiers graduated from basic training and moved out smartly out to their battalions out in the field, today they go through specialty training where they learn how to be artillerymen, signalmen, engineers, explosive ordnance disposal, supply clerks, drivers, mechanics and so forth. It's a -- and now they're also educated because of the literacy program that's injected at every level of training. So more literate, more capable, more skilled soldiers are joining the ranks of the Afghan army.

So we're also going back to the units that were fielded in the past now with mobile training teams and -- which is one of the themes of this year, to bring them back and provide them the additional training and raise their level of specialization -- (audio break).

So those are some of the programs I've seen over the past year that I think have made the biggest difference: the branch schools, the literacy program and then the -- and the trainers that I've described in detail tonight that will significantly raise the quality of instruction we're seeing out there in the -- in the training phase.

So with that, that is my last Bloggers Roundtable. If you blog from the Pentagon, I'd be glad to talk to you in my next job. I'll be squarely in the Department of the Army G-8 staff here, probably in about 45 to 60 days. And

I look forward to having that conversation with you on an entirely different set of topics.

So that's it from here. Thank you for your support, your interest, your attention, your blogging and the great support of the American people that I've enjoyed over the last 18 months of my current deployment.

Back to you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sir, we really appreciate your participation today once again. Also, if you want to send those numbers back to me, I can forward it back to the blogger who originally asked the question.

Other than that, I'd like to thank everybody again for joining the call today. If you have any other questions about this program, please contact the Department of Defense New Media team at bloggeroutreach@hq.afis.osd.mil.

Again, thank you to the general and our blogger participants. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

END.