

3rd BCT takes steps to help Afghans succeed



SpC. Joshua McLay (right), infantry squad designated marksman, Company A, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT, 25th ID, shows an ANA soldier how to properly sight an M14 rifle during Operation Stone Steps at Nangalam Base, Afghanistan, May 31.

Story and Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, Combined Joint Task Force 1 – Afghanistan June 10, 2011

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan — “Task Force Cacti” Soldiers have the daunting task of training Afghan National army, or ANA, soldiers in everything, including medical, logistical and security aspects.

The task, dubbed Operation Stone Steps, comes at a critical time in a critical place, said Capt. Weston Amaya, an Afghan National Security Forces liaison within TF Cacti.

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, TF Cacti, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, traveled by helicopters into the Pech River Valley to train Afghan soldiers at Nangalam Base, here, recently.

“The ANA’s ability to really dominate the terrain out here is going to be a decisive move for them,” Amaya said. “Right now, they are doing a very good job at it. Frankly, they’ve had almost no coalition presence here until Stone Steps began.”

Maj. Mullah Mahbob, operations officer with ANA, explained that the Pech River Valley is more dangerous than other areas because it is an important route for insurgents coming from Pakistan, and the mountains make it difficult to defend.

“We have tried to decrease the enemy situation with the support and coordination of coalition forces, and (we) have been successful,” Mahbob said. “Terrorism is not only an Afghan problem, but an international problem.”

During the past few months, the ANA independently conducted several patrols, successfully clearing the area of many insurgents, Mahbob said. He added that if his men aren’t better trained or equipped, they might fail.

“Right now, we’re not going to let (training) falter, and we’re not going to let it fail. I’m not. Not on my watch. I’m going to continue to provide those training wheels,” said Lt. Col. Colin Tuley, commander, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT. “We’re going to be out there, every week, and I’m going to keep on being there with them, with the training wheels, (until) at some point in the future, we’ve got to let them do it alone.”

Tuley explained Operation Stone Steps is part of the overarching concept of methodically transitioning to the point where coalition forces are no longer needed.

“I think the toughest part is going to be us, as a parent, letting them be out there on their own,” Tuley said. “We’re afraid of them falling down. We don’t want to watch them fall down and skin up their knees, (but) sometimes, you have to watch them fall, learn and get up and get better.”

After four days of training the ANA, Amaya could already sense a boost in morale.

“We’re not just ... handing this over and saying, ‘Hey, good luck,’” Amaya said. “We’re here for the long haul. We’re their partners. We’re going to do whatever it takes to make sure the ANA is successful in the Pech. I think that means a lot to them.”

Amaya added that when the ANA is able to sustain and take ownership of the Pech, ANA soldiers will serve as a model and shining light for the way ahead.

Credit to: <http://www.hawaiiarmyweekly.com/2011/06/10/3rd-bct-takes-steps-to-help-afghans-succeed/>