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Embedded Training Teams (ETT) with The Afghan National Army (ANA)

A summary of lessons and observations from Operation Enduring Freedom

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Executive Summary

A Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) Team was attached to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines (2/3) during the conduct of combat operations in Afghanistan from 18 December 2005 to 15 January 2006. During this period, the MCCLL team visited three Embedded Training Teams (ETTs), who were tasked to train, mentor and advise Afghan National Army (ANA) units. Observations in this report were taken from interviews with leaders and team members of ETT 1-6 at Jalalabad, ETT 2-3 at Bermel, Shkin and ETT Sharana, Paktika Province, Afghanistan. Two main themes emerge from the interviews: (1) inadequate pre-deployment training for ETT personnel, and (2) support issues, including logistics, communications, and intelligence. Specific recommendations from those interviewed include: ¹

- Pre-deployment training of ETT personnel should be taught by instructors who have experience in ETTs, military training teams (MiTTs) or other foreign military training.
- Training should include familiarity with equipment that will be used during the deployment, to include electronic countermeasure (ECM) devices, tactical satellite (TACSAT) communications, all weapons systems used by the ANA, call for fire procedures, and convoy operations.
- Lesson plans and training support material, to include translated training media, should be provided for ETT personnel use.
- ETTs need training on the language prevalent in their assigned area of operation.
- ETT members need to be formally trained, and possibly given a skill designator MOS to track those with this unique experience.
- ETT units should be staffed with a logistics officer or SNCO experienced in all aspects of supply and logistics including contracting.
- ETTs should have SIPRNET access as well as ETT specific intelligence and force protection essential elements of information.
- ETT should have a combat medic to ensure that quality professional medical care is available to ETT and ANA personnel.

Background

ETTs varied in size from six to twenty personnel. As a representative example, ETT 2-3 consists of fifteen Marines and two sailors and is commanded by an active duty Marine major. Of the fifteen Marines, eight have artillery MOS backgrounds, three have intelligence MOS designations, and the remainder is a mix of communications, infantry, heavy equipment, and combat engineers specialties. The ETT is critically short of expertise in communications repair, motor transportation mechanics, and logistics. The ETT is task organized between two forward operating bases (FOBs) located at Bermel and Shkin. FOB Bermel is ETT headquarters since this is the headquarters of the ANA battalion it trains and mentors. The 3rd Battalion Kandak ANA has an authorized strength of 611 soldiers but due to unauthorized absences, was standing at 476 men at the time of the MCCLL team visit. At the other FOB is an ETT detachment of five Marines and one Sailor. This detachment is led by a reserve infantry Marine major, with

extensive active duty and combat experience, who works directly with the Kandak company commander. The enlisted leaders within the ANA company are mentored by an active duty Marine infantry Gunnery Sergeant, whose small unit tactical expertise and leadership were invaluable to the detachment.

Training

Inadequate pre-deployment training for ETTs. The ETT 1-6 leader at Jalalabad reported that the training given prior to his deployment was poor and did not adequately prepare his team for their mission. The observations below are all areas that are critical for an ETT to successfully perform its mission in a combat environment.²

- The mission of the ETTs includes instruction for ANA personnel on how to fire and employ multiple weapons systems. These include Soviet era mortars, heavy and light machineguns, artillery, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and mechanized assets. None of these were covered in pre-deployment training. The ETT was given very little firearms training: The team leader stated that they fired two magazines through a semi-automatic AK-47. The ETT is often involved in combat convoys but was given no training in this area.
- ETT training did not include TACSAT communications training, which is the primary means of communications for ETTs in the mountainous environment.
- Although on the pre-deployment training schedule, the ETT did not receive high risk personnel course training. They also received no training on basic infantry tactics, no call for fire classes, and no lesson plans for training ANA were offered.
- The ETT received 'blue force tracker' (the Army's Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2)) training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, but a concurrently scheduled evasive driving course had to be cancelled. ETT personnel stated that the blue force tracker training that they did receive was not adequate.
- The improvised explosives device (IED) class they received was not Afghan specific and the instructor could not offer any information about Afghanistan as he was not familiar with the theater.
- The ETT members were given Dari language classes while the area they were to be assigned in Afghanistan was a Pashto speaking region.
- One positive remark about the ETT training was that the cultural training was very good.
- The ETT leader, on his own initiative, located a former ETT leader and arranged to have him talk to his team. He stated that provided the most effective training the team received.
- One team was sent to the training one week late and received only two of the scheduled three weeks of training.

The quality of pre-deployment training received by ETT personnel will directly impact on the effectiveness of training they are able to provide to ANA forces. Content and conduct of ETT pre-deployment training should be reviewed. The below comments came from interviews with members of ETT Sharana:

- Pre-deployment training of ETT personnel should be taught by instructors who have experience in ETTs, Military Training Teams (MiTTs) or other foreign military training.
- Training should include familiarity with equipment that will be used during the deployment, to include electronic countermeasure (ECM) devices, tactical satellite (TACSAT) communications, all weapons systems used by the ANA, call for fire procedures, and convoy operations.
- Lesson plans need to be provided for ETT personnel use.
- ETTs need training on the language prevalent in their assigned AOR.
- ETT members need to be formally trained, and possibly given a skill designator MOS to track those with this unique experience.

Soviet Weapons Training. The ETT's primary function is to train and mentor ANA counterparts in small unit tactics and employment. The ANA is equipped with Soviet era weaponry to include AK-47s, RPG-7s, RPK light machineguns, BRDM armored vehicles, and D-30 artillery pieces. The ETTs are expected to bring specialized training experience in these systems.³ In order to be proficient on these systems ETT personnel require hands on familiarity focused on loading, unloading, battle sight zero (BZO), functions check, immediate action, and general maintenance. The Marines assigned to ETTs 1-6 and 2-3 reported that the extent of their foreign weapons familiarity training consisted of a 10 round familiarization fire on a civilian version AK-47. Although the 82 mm mortar is the primary means of indirect fire for the ANA, many of the ETTs lack the requisite knowledge to provide instruction on the nuances of this weapons platform. The ETTs were not given any technical manuals, publications, or 6000 mil plotting boards required for instruction and employment of these weapons systems, yet they are required to teach all aspects of these weapons. They were not shown how BZO the AK-47 or any other soviet weapons used by the ANA. When conducting weapons familiarization classes and training ranges, the ETT employed ANA personnel with weapons experience to lead the training effort. Additionally, the ANA possesses many variations of the AK-47 but they do not have the requisite "SL-3" components to support BZO of weapons or conduct maintenance. Pre-deployment training must encompass detailed familiarization and employment of the Soviet era equipment employed by the ANA. Additionally, the proper components and tools to assist in BZO and maintaining these weapons must be available to the ETT and the ANA.⁴

*"Many ETT personnel do not have a ground combat arms background or prior experience training personnel in basic tactics. This lack of experienced trainers reflects in the proficiency of the ANA soldiers they train."*⁵

"Train the Trainers." The ETT did not get to vet, prepare, or rehearse training plans prior to deployment. If the ETT knew prior to deploying what classes and training they would be providing, the team would have been much better prepared for its mission. They could rehearse

classes, conduct “murder boards,” complete practical applications, and prepare media before they arrived in theater. Recommend that ETTs be provided with training guidance, plans, and supporting equipment prior to deployment.⁶

Training Support Tools. The ETT teaches numerous classes to the ANA that require written communication, yet they have no means of creating translated products. This includes operations orders, staff planning process, patrol checklists, intelligence reports, etc. Many of the translators do not have the ability to complete these tasks. If an ETT had prepared operations orders written in Pashto, Urdu or Dari they could give these to the ANA for training. Recommend that ETTs be provided with computers and printers with local language capability. If the ETT was given computers with Pashto, Urdu or Dari text then they could use these to create new documents. Also recommend that ETTs be supplied with examples of OPORDS, patrol checklists, and other necessary orders to teach ANA about these processes.⁷

Logistical Planning Training. ETT personnel stated that the ANA forces are proficient at tactical operations to include snap vehicle control points (VCPs), cordon and search, and patrolling. Their previous tactical experiences as Northern Alliance and mujahadeen fighters provided a strong foundation on infantry skills. However, ETT personnel must focus much of their attention on ensuring that the ANA plan for rations, fuel and ammunition consumption or they will conduct operations without proper logistical support. ANA personnel need training in conducting platoon commander inspections and logistical planning as there is a tendency to hoard supplies by higher headquarters and not distribute them to the troops. There is a cultural tendency among ANA leaders and soldiers not to ask for logistical support from higher headquarters as it is viewed as a sign of weakness. Contributing to the difficulties of logistical support and sustainment is the fact that all ANA requisitions must be approved by the Minister of Defense in Kabul. Recommend that logistics planning be stressed as an important part of the ETT’s training package to the ANA. More decentralized logistic support will help meet the timely support requirements of the ANA troops on the ground.⁸

Operations

Training Under Fire. Some ETTs are deployed in combat zones, and the training given to the ANA in many instances occurs during combat situations. This makes the ETT role more of an advisor than a trainer. Recommend that ETTs have “secure” training areas so there is maneuver space to practice and train free from contact prior to moving into combat zones.⁹

Intelligence

Intelligence Support for ETT. The ETT has no intelligence support and threat assessment capability. They do not have SIPRNET access and must rely upon other unrelated organizations to get intelligence and threat updates. This information is critical for force protection. Recommend that ETTs have SIPRNET access as well as ETT specific intelligence and force protection essential elements of information.¹⁰

Manning of ETTs

Logistics Experience. The ETT in Sharana has no logistics officer or supply sergeant and is not manned with personnel experienced in ordering and accounting for supplies and sustainment items. This causes numerous problems as the ETT has difficulties obtaining supplies. This includes contracting of projects to improve the base as well as food and other essential items. Recommend that ETT units be staffed with a logistics officer or SNCO experienced in supply and logistics including contracting.¹¹

Medical Personnel. There is no medic or Corpsman assigned to the ETT. Having a designated medic assigned to the ETT is critical to support the medical needs of the ETT and provide combat lifesaving training to the ANA. ETT personnel were trained and certified as combat lifesavers prior to deployment. Though the ANA has an embedded Afghan doctor, his skills are rudimentary. Attaching a combat medic or physician's assistant (PA) to the ETT will ensure that quality professional medical care is available and will provide a professional to mentor and train the ANA as well.¹²

Logistics

Logistical Support. The Sharana ETT reported that the process to request weapons, communications support, and other equipment was extremely slow, because the requests must be sent through both the U.S. and Afghan chains of command. This creates a long delay in receiving the equipment since it must be vetted through multiple chains and approved by the Afghan Minister of Defense. This time consuming task is usually done by the ETT commander since he does not have the logistics personnel to process these requirements. The time the commander must devote to FOB sustainment requirements interferes with his responsibilities in the execution of the ETTs primary mission. Recommend that the present process for obtaining weapons and equipment be streamlined and the approval process decentralized.¹³

Support Facilities and Funding. ETT Sharana members stated that they did not have proper living facilities and equipment to effectively accomplish their mission. The ETT occupies a compound where the staff lives in CONEX boxes. There is no power generator sufficient to operate the refrigerators and there is no SIPR or NIPR email capability. There are no quality heaters and some of the ETT staff use wood stoves for heat. Since there was no heat in place, the ETT members bought wood stoves with their own money. The woodstoves require considerable effort to obtain wood and maintain the fire continuously. The ETT has no cooks or facilities to prepare their food except an outdoor grill. Most of their food is borrowed from the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) camp as they receive little assistance from the supply system. This causes considerable difficulties during periods of rain and snow. These shortages consume a considerable amount of time and effort and monopolize the commander's time to the point where at times he is forced to focus on FOB operations vice the ANA training mission. Time that could be spent training the ANA is often concentrated on force protection requirements and improving living conditions.¹⁴

The ETT commander is given little funding to hire contractors to improve the living conditions for his team. ETT commanders need discretionary funds so they can make open purchases for the necessary items that are available locally and are subject to long delays in the standard

logistical process. This will also build the local economy and create a favorable relationship with local Afghan businessmen.

Conclusion

ETT's are essential to the training and capabilities of the ANA. The more resources devoted to enhancing ETT capabilities, to include trained ETT personnel and essential support, the faster the ANA will be able to shoulder the responsibility of providing security for their own country.

ETT personnel need to be better prepared to accomplish their mission during their pre-deployment training, and supported during their employment.

Endnotes

¹ Lyon, LtCol G.L, and Lauder, Major J. M. USMC, Ground Training Branch, Training and Education Command, After Action Review for MCCLL Team Visit to Embedded Training Team (ETT) 2-3, vicinity of Bermel and Shkin, Paktika Province, Afghanistan, 20 February 2006. Hereafter cited as Lyon, Lauder report..

² MCCLL Lesson Management System (LMS) Lesson 40742, based on interview with Officer in Charge, ETT 1-6, Major Stuart Lankford, USMC, January 2006.

³ Based on a mission statement viewed at the *Coalition Joint Task Force PHOENIX* website, viewable at <http://www.tfphoenixiii.org/mission.htm>

⁴ Lyon, Lauder report, based on interview with ETT 2-3 Officer in Charge, Major Jay Rice, USMC, and members of his staff. Also, LMS Lesson 40748.

⁵ LMS Lesson 40743, ETT 2/3 interviews.

⁶ LMS Lesson 40731, extracted from interviews of OIC and members of the Embedded Training Team (ETT) Sharana, Paktika Province, Afghanistan, January 2006. Interviews cited hereafter as ETT Sharana interviews.

⁷ LMS Lesson 40732, ETT Sharana interviews..

⁸ LMS Lesson 40750, ETT Sharana interviews .

⁹ LMS Lesson 40734, ETT Sharana interviews.

¹⁰ LMS Lesson, 40741, ETT Sharana interviews.

¹¹ LMS Lesson 40728, ETT Sharana interviews.

¹² LMS Lesson 40730, ETT 2/3 interviews, and Lesson 40753, ETT Sharana interviews

¹³ LMS Lesson 40728, ETT Sharana interviews

¹⁴ LMS Lesson 40728, ETT Sharana interviews