

This is the way life goes in ISAF

Written by AG

Friday, 02 March 2007 09:00



It took the soldiers a few weeks to get accustomed to the new environment and living conditions in Kabul, which is situated more than 1000 metres above the sea level. Some soldiers suffered from colds and coughing related to the climate change. Adapting to a new working place and duties were challenging as well...

A distant country, different culture, unknown customs... Before setting off for Afghanistan there were exercises, trainings, briefings and reading on one's own in order to bring closer the realities of life in Afghanistan, obligatory vaccinations, packing... And now, after a few weeks of the mission, how do the soldiers from the HQ MNC NE manage with the new surroundings and challenges?

It took the soldiers a few weeks to get accustomed to the new environment and living conditions in Kabul, which is situated more than 1000 metres above the sea level. Some soldiers suffered from colds and coughing related to the climate change. Adapting to a new working place and duties were challenging as well.

This is the way life goes in ISAF

Written by AG

Friday, 02 March 2007 09:00

Duties

The soldiers seem to be satisfied with the working conditions at the HQ ISAF and this is especially important with reference to long hours spent at work. There are different arrangements concerning working hours. Some soldiers work from 7:00 or 8:00 to even 21:00, other work in a shift system taking day or night, 8 or 12-hour shifts. On Fridays there is usually less work, however, everything depends on a post and duties.

Accommodation

At present everybody already occupies their target rooms, which are based on containers. The rooms are three – person, double or even single, depending on a post, but double rooms are the most frequent ones. The soldiers are quartered with the soldiers they have known from Szczecin or the soldiers from other headquarters. As they claim, housing standards enable relatively comfortable living there. Especially air-conditioning may seem helpful and, even more importantly, an access to the Internet, which allows frequent contacts with the family and friends.

Leisure time

The ISAF HQ offers numerous leisure activities for the soldiers including a cinema, pubs, restaurants and various sports facilities. Especially physical activities are popular among the soldiers. There is a recently renovated sports hall, a well-equipped gym and a sauna. There are also indoor and outdoor sports fields to play e.g. football, basketball, volleyball or tennis. At different times of the day, a lot of people go jogging, even the soldiers of the highest ranks.

Social life often flourishes on Thursday evenings because Fridays are usually less busy days. It is connected with the fact that in the Muslim world Friday is a counterpart of Sunday in the western world.

There are national meetings organized with the Senior National Officers. But there are also more informal meetings in pubs, cafés or even in a pizzeria or other places. For example German soldiers come together on Saturday to have some coffee and cakes. The Poles, mostly non-commissioned officers, gather in a Polish tent on Thursdays whereas Danish soldiers meet on Sundays to try pancakes and to chat. The same applies to other nations as well; the Slovaks for example see each other regularly during meals but they also organize informal meetings

This is the way life goes in ISAF

Written by AG

Friday, 02 March 2007 09:00

after work. They initiated football matches, which take place on Friday afternoons. Not only Slovaks come to play there, but also other nations. Good occasions to gather are also birthdays and name days, when the soldiers try to create a semblance of home atmosphere. Finally, informal film evenings are very popular.

Food

The soldiers meet at the canteen three times a day. An American company provides varied food, one may try Asian cuisine, hamburgers or hotdogs but also German delicacies e.g. white sausages. A lot of salads, fruit and desserts are offered. It is possible to have a meal even at midnight when somebody finishes a shift. Of course, standard menu may become a little monotonous in the course of time.

Final remarks

Due to safety reasons the soldiers do not have many opportunities to come across the real life of Afghanistan outside the base. Some claim that everyday routine, high density of people and a limited area of a base may be a bit frustrating. Therefore, an interesting experience is visiting a market organized on a weekly basis just in front of the base. One may have a look on real Afghan trinkets, souvenirs, carpets, coins and other mysterious objects sold by the local people.

Spending most of the time in the base may remind the soldiers of the exercise time with the difference that Afghanistan is thousands kilometers from home and the only chance to hear the voice of the relatives and friends is via telephone or Internet. Fortunately, these benefits of science are available without problems in a country, which has no more a few hundreds of paved roads...

Special thanks to the MNC NE personnel who have gone to the ISAF mission to Kabul and whose experiences inspired the article above.

{phocagallery

view=category|categoryid=41|displaydownload=0|displayname=0|displaydetail=0}