

## On the road from Kabul to Bagram

Written by AG

Thursday, 05 July 2007 09:00

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**From 6th to 17th of May 2007, Multinational Corps Northeast organized a media trip to Afghanistan. The journalists met MNC NE personnel deployed to ISAF HQ in Kabul but also participated in military patrol and a visited refuge camp.**

We start a routine patrol in an armored vehicle together with journalists. Every week the servicemen conduct dozens of such patrols. In front of us and behind us “Dingo” bulletproof vehicles. We leave the base in clouds of dust. Afghan roads full of holes are a major challenge even for such vehicles. Drivers rush so that they are not overtaken by civilian vehicles. If you are stuck in the traffic jam a human bomb may kill you. One of the non-commissioned officers recounts how ISAF headquarters in Kabul was shocked by the death of two American officers. Their car stopped in the traffic jam in the center of Kabul just in front of Afghan policemen. They started to horn to let them go. One of the Afghan policemen flew into a rage and he shot down two American officers. Then he was shot himself by the other policeman. People get mad when least expected. Sometimes it is enough to sound the horn or say a wrong word ... Finally I get out from the depth of the vehicle. I stand confidently as if I were on the bridgedeck in a submarine. Uncanny view around me. Strong blow of hot air gets into my nostrils. The sense of overwhelming grayness and dust. Only scattered mean homesteads make that place different

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from the lunar landscape. On the right hand side there is a slight hill burned by the sun, on the left hand side a flat semi-desert area stretches out. Magnificent snow-covered mountains come into sight far in the distance – They constitute the border with Pakistan- a German sergeant shouts to me. The Taliban come from there. I nod to assure that I have understood. Some kids are waving at us. An idyll – one could say. But it is not true. The sergeant turns around nervously with his machine gun from one side to the other. The attack may start from anywhere.

In May three German servicemen were killed in a bomb attack in Kunduz – northern Afghan province. A group of German servicemen felt so secure that they were shopping in the local market. A human bomb approached them and set off the bomb. This year already 50 ISAF servicemen were killed, mainly American, but it is not the rule, civilian personnel died as well. There has been a significant increase in the number of attacks and war crimes against civilian population – informs Human Rights Watch organization. In total 1000 civilians were killed last year in Afghanistan. At least 669 died in attacks, ambushes or were killed by rebels. 230 civilians were killed during operations of NATO and coalition forces, additionally some civilians were killed in smaller clashes between rebels and Afghan or international forces. According to Human Rights Watch around 70% of bomb attacks take place in southern and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan – Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Paktii, Paktice and Kunar. Human Rights Watch is of the opinion that international forces do not undertake sufficient precautions to prevent civilian casualties during operations against rebels.

Together with a German patrol we are going to visit one of such camps located on the road from Kabul to Bagram. The heat is unbearable – over 40 degrees Centigrade, bulletproof vest and a helmet seem heavy. Some kids approach military vehicles. They ask for food and water. German servicemen try to answer all the requests. Inhabitants of camps complain that nobody cares about them. They asked many times the governor of Kabul for any support, however, in vain. If nobody helps us and nobody gives us a chance for a job we will have to join the Taliban so that we could buy some food for our children. If your kids cry of hunger you will rather blow yourself up than listen to their cries – says one of them. You should write about it, Mister. Let the world know about our dramas. We will inform CIMIC, which has funds to support refugees – we give a promise to desperate Afghan people. I wonder where the battlefield is in Afghanistan. Is it in the north, where German servicemen systematically enforce security by means of military presence and cooperation with local authorities or is it in the south where servicemen, including Polish soldiers, will fight against the Taliban or maybe is it right here, 25km from Kabul on the road to Bagram where whole families forgotten by everybody live deprived of everything apart from themselves, desert sun and clouds of dust.

It is easy to tell those people that the world is bad and nobody cares. The question is how to show them a possibility for a better life. The future of Afghanistan depends on them and specifically on how they choose to live and whether they are able to believe in the possibility of a better life in Afghanistan. Here, in the desert, it is evident that presence of international military forces in Afghanistan is only a partial solution to all the problems.

**Article by Cmdr. Artur Bilski**

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