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To protect and defend

■ Afghan National Police learn essential job-oriented skills

By U.S. Army Spc. Luke S. Austin
33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

KABUL, Afghanistan – Afghan National Police (ANP) officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) gained new knowledge and skills at Police District Six headquarters during a week of job-oriented training Feb 2 to 9.

The week-long training was organized by Police Mentor Team (PMT) One, Regional Police Advisory Command-Kabul, Regional Security Integration Command-Kabul, based on insight from ANP police district chiefs in each district of Zone One, which falls under PMT One's supervision. The police chiefs shared with PMT One mentors the training and skills they felt their ANP officers, NCOs and Soldiers needed to carry out their duties more effectively, said Capt. Lenny Williams, PMT One team chief.

"Through meetings and discussions with each of the five PD chiefs in Zone One, we all noticed similarities in the observations made concerning ANP training," he said.

As the discussions of training with each police district in Zone One progressed, it was agreed they all were lacking in the same areas, Williams of Dyer, Ind. said.

"They needed to learn how to better protect and defend themselves, knowledge of life-saving skills, and more in-depth knowledge on how to use the weapons they carry," he said.

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U.S. Army photo by Spc. Luke S. Austin, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team

SHOW SOME FORCE: **Sgt. Aaron West of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VIII, gives combatives instruction to two Afghan National Police officers. The combatives training was part of a week-long training in Kabul, Afghanistan in February.**

Land of the free because of the brave

Story by Mike Chrisman
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – "I don't want to die for you, but if dying's asked of me, I'll bear that cross with honor, 'cause freedom don't come free," are the familiar lyrics that ring out in the hearts and minds of many Soldiers, especially as they deploy.

The lyrics to the Toby Keith song "American Soldier" became reality for eight families of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) during the months of February and March.

The 33rd IBCT has suffered 12 casualties since the brigade of nearly 3,000 Soldiers was deployed to Afghanistan late last year. Eight of those deaths occurred within five weeks of each other.

Staff Sgt. Jason Burkholder of Champaign, 27, and 1st Lt. Jared Southworth of Oakland, 26, were assigned to Headquarters Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry of Marion. Both Soldiers were killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Helmand, Afghanistan on Feb. 8.

Amanda Burkholder of Marshall, married her husband Jason in November 2008. Two days later he boarded an airplane for Afghanistan. Amanda said Jason's death has served as a life lesson for her and her family.

"We have to cherish every moment we have because we don't know when it'll be our last. There are many things I did with him or said to him that I didn't realize would be the last," Amanda said. "We always wait until tomorrow to say something to someone or do something, but tomorrow might not come."

Sgt. Scott Stream of Mattoon, 39, assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Effingham, and Sgt. Schuyler Patch of Galva, 25, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry, based in Kewanee, were killed in action Feb. 24 by an IED in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Life has taken a dramatic turn since Rasa Stream of Mattoon found out her husband, Scott, was killed. Rasa, a native of Lithuania, met Scott in Germany and moved to the United States after they were married in 2005. The couple has a 6-year-old daughter who was born on March 19, 2003, the same day the United States invaded Iraq.

"Scott was our life," Rasa said. "He was a wonderful husband, father, and just an all around good man. Our life together had just begun and we were happy.

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Recently fallen Soldiers

- Sgt. Lukasz Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills and member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based in Woodstock, died May 10
- Spc. Norman Cain, 22, of Mount Morris and member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based in Woodstock, was killed in action March 15
- Sgt. Robert Weinger, 24, of Round Lake Beach and member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based in Woodstock, was killed in action March 15
- Sgt. Christopher Abeyta, 23, of Midlothian and member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based Woodstock, was killed in action March 15
- Sgt. Simone Robinson, 21, of University Park and member of Company E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Crestwood, died March 1
- Sgt. Scott Stream, 39, of Mattoon and member of Company B, 2nd Battalion 130th Infantry based, Effingham, was killed in action Feb. 24
- Sgt. Schuyler Patch, 25, of Galva and member of Headquarters, Headquarters Troop, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Kewanee, was killed in action Feb 24
- Staff Sgt. Jason Burkholder, 27, of Champaign and member of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion, was killed in action Feb. 8
- 1st Lt. Jared Southworth, 26, of Oakland and member of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion, was killed in action Feb. 8

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Maj. Troy Scott recognized a hero by American Red Cross

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BRAVE

■ From page 1

Now we are left with an empty feeling and asking 'What next?'"

Spc. Simone Robinson of Robbins, 21, assigned to Company G, 634th Brigade Support Battalion in Crestwood, died March 1 at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, from wounds sustained Jan. 17 in Afghanistan. Robinson, along with four other Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers, was wounded in an attack by a vehicle-born IED.

Sgt. Lukasz Saczek

Sgt. Christopher Abeyta of Midlothian, 23; Sgt. Robert Weinger of Round Lake Beach, 24 and Spc. Norman Cain III of Mount Morris, 22, were all assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based in Woodstock. The three Soldiers were killed in action March 15 when their vehicle encountered an IED in Kot, Afghanistan.

Spc. Norman Cain

Barbara Abeyta of Midlothian, Christopher's mother, said she was blessed with only one child and questioned his desire to join the Illinois National Guard, but supported the decision.

"This was something he wanted to do," she said. "How can you blame a child that wants to make a difference in the world? He was a true hero."

In letters Christopher wrote to his mom, he said he was humbled at what he saw. He said seeing people living in caves and poverty made him realize how lucky he was.

Sue Weinger of Round Lake Beach, Robert's mother, said it is important for loved ones to know how you feel about them every day.

Sgt. Robert Weinger

Sgt. Christopher Abeyta

Sgt. Simone Robinson

"Don't take anything for granted," she said. "Make sure your Soldier knows you love them and you care about them. Especially when they are deployed, they need to know that someone cares."

The most recent casualty was Sgt. Lukasz Saczek, 23, assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry based in Woodstock, who died as a result of a non-combat related injury May 10 in Afghanistan.

Saczek, a resident of Lake in the Hills, graduated from the Steinmetz Academic Centre, Chicago, in 2005. He enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in July 2006. This was Saczek's first deployment.

Sgt. Scott Stream

Sgt. Schuyler Patch

Staff Sgt. Jason Burkholder

While the Illinois National Guard has mourned the loss of its brothers and sisters, many would agree that while the National Guard will move forward, these Soldiers will never be forgotten.

1st Lt. Jared Southworth

"Facing the loss of these Illinois National Guard Soldiers is devastating," said Maj. Gen. William Enyart, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "They were all remarkable, devoted Soldiers who will always be our heroes. We will remember these Soldiers by their bravery and the sacrifice they made for us all."

Year of the NCO

Command Sgt. Major John Starbody
State Senior Enlisted Leader

CSM John Starbody

During this past quarter, I've travelled to Kosovo, Afghanistan and numerous installations throughout the United States. Throughout all of these visits at each of the numerous locations I was simply amazed at the accomplishments of our young Soldiers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

While visiting Task Force Blackhorse in Camp Bondsteel, Bosnia, I talked with our young Soldiers and NCOs who where taking advantage of the NCO Education System courses being offered by U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR).

As a result, they had one honor graduate in the Warrior Leader Course and three honor graduates in the Basic NCO Course, Phase 1.

Now that they have all safely redeployed to Illinois and their statistics are posted, their accomplishments are astounding. The battalion received a superior on their initial command inspection.

They flew more than 2,300 hours on 11 UH-60 helicopters while maintaining an 86 percent operational readiness rate. They lead USAREUR for most of their deployment.

These accomplishments just don't happen without great NCOs leading the way.

Since my return from Afghanistan, there isn't a day I don't read or hear something great about what our NCOs and young Soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) accomplish.

Staff Sgt. Henry Baez Jr. of the 33rd IBCT was just recognized by Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Army Command Sgt. Major David Ray Hudson, Senior Enlisted Leader of the Guard Bureau, for his outstanding work as a squad leader, leading his squad on patrol through the Afghan villages surrounding Camp Phoenix.

I just read an e-mail from an active-duty 06 who has 132 of our "Golden Cross" Soldiers working for him. He said they are as good as or better than any other Soldiers that he has ever served with, active, Guard or Reserve.

On a visit to Brooke Army Hospital, in Texas, I met Master Sgt. Sherry Blackwell, an Illinois Guard Soldier assigned as the medical liaison, taking care of our wounded warriors and doing an outstanding job.

On my visits to the Warrior Transition Units the spirit and tenacity of our wounded warriors amaze me, such as Sgt. Cameron Crouch and Sgt. Benjamin McDonald at Brooke Army Medical Center and Sgt.James Taliano at Walter Reed Hospital.

Talk to these Soldiers.

They will lift your spirits and remind you of the great sacrifices our Soldiers are making.

Finally, there are my visits to our fallen comrades who gave the ultimate sacrifice to this great nation.

I could not be more proud of our NCOs who volunteer as notification officers, casualty assistance officers, funeral honors teams and casket overwatch details.

These NCOs and Soldiers have a very tough job to do under extremely emotional circumstances.

They all perform their duties professionally and honorably. Grieving families have nothing but praise for these fine outstanding Soldiers.

I thank you for your selfless service and the sacrifice of your family as well.

I wholeheartedly commend each and every one of you on your dedication to duty and country and would encourage you to continue serving with the professional excellence that has allowed us to live in the land of the free and home of the brave.

PROTECT

■ From page 1

With members of the ANP manning checkpoints throughout the city night-and-day, they need to understand what actions to take in the case of an emergency or civil disruption, Williams said.

"We noticed a trend in what was needed and went to work on putting it together," said Sgt. 1st Class Jarod Hansen, PMT One noncommissioned officer in charge.

"The PD chiefs in Zone One were all on board right away. We put together a list of classes and they helped get the event together," he said.

But with hundreds of members in the ANP in Zone One, it was going to be a difficult task coordinating training with each PD in a timely manner. With this in mind, PMT One took on the U.S. Army's "train the trainer" mentality, Williams said.

"We set it up just like we do business in the Army," he said. "Leadership from each PD, and each checkpoint within each PD, were brought to a single location and given the instruction and training so they can return to their ANP Soldiers and train them."

Noncommissioned officers from every checkpoint were required to attend the training to deliver it to their Soldiers.

Continuing on this course, the ANP skill sets and knowledge will grow, said Col. Hafizullah Alizada, chief of PD Six.

In the week of training, 110 ANP officers and NCOs completed six sets of tasks: dismounted patrol, improvised explosive device defeat, search (vehicle and personnel) and cuffing, crime scene management, self-defense and combat lifesaver training.

"Using the 'train the trainer' method, we effectively engaged the leadership of the ANP in Zone One, who will in turn impact the hundreds of ANP Soldiers under their command," Williams stated.

Alizada was impressed with the level of training given to the leadership of Zone One, as well as how well it was managed and implemented, he said.

"When members of the ANP see their leadership training, it encourages them to learn and train as well," Alizada said.

If the ANP continues on this course with the PMTs, it will make them ready for the future of Afghanistan's people. Alizada also said this was the training necessary for the ANP to one day take the place of American Soldiers in Afghanistan.

"There is a lot of pride to be had on the part of American Soldiers for supporting the Afghan National Police. We are getting the most professional training thanks to them," said Alizada.

With the successful completion of the training, Williams hopes to continue this training program throughout his tour as PMT One team chief, eventually making these valuable skills "…a matter of muscle memory for members of the ANP."

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Letters, articles and photographs are welcomed, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor.

Views and opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs or the U.S. Department of Defense.

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