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U.S. ARMY EUROPE MEDICS TREAT SOLDIERS, LOCAL CITIZENS AT REMOTE AID STATION IN AFGHANISTAN

By Sgt. Gregory Argentieri

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Surrounded by snow-covered mountains, the medical personnel of Task Force Saber operate an aid station on Forward Operating Base Naray along the Pakistan border in northeastern Afghanistan.

The aid station team is comprised of medical personnel from U.S. Army Europe's 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team and 160th Forward Surgical Team. The medics' first responsibility is to U.S. Soldiers who are wounded, injured or just need routine medical treatment.

"The Soldiers know that we are here for them, and that has given me a lot of good feelings about being out here. It's a huge privilege to be able to take care of U.S. Soldiers," said Maj. Warren Cusick, a certified registered nurse-anesthetist and the officer-in-charge of the 160th FST.

"The main thing is for troops to have confidence and know when they go fight they're going to be cared for if anything bad happens to them. I used to be (an enlisted Soldier), and one thing that made me feel confident was knowing I would get medical care, and that is important," said Cusick.



SGT GREGORY ARGENTIERI

Capt. Scott M. Harrington, a family medicine doctor with U.S. Army Europe's Company C, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion, examines an Afghan baby girl with help from members of USAREUR's 160th Forward Surgical Team at the Forward Operating Base Naray aid station in northeastern Afghanistan Jan. 3.

The aid station, made up of a series of tents, operates as close to the fight as logistically possible.

“Our biggest challenge is ensuring that the U.S. personnel are taken care of when they get wounded in battle, and that is what we’re always training for,” said Capt. Scott M. Harrington, a family medicine doctor assigned to Charlie Company, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion.

“In a big battle, we could have 10 or 20 Soldiers come at one time -- and that’s happened before. We handled it appropriately; we got everybody out, and we saved their lives,” he said.

“I am much more emotionally invested out here because you’re among friends,” Harrington said. “It’s very scary when we know the guys are in harm’s way. Every time somebody goes out, one of our medics from the aid station go with (them). Whenever they go on convoys one of our medics -- who I work with daily -- goes out with them.”

The station also provides life-changing and sometimes life-saving medical treatment to many Afghan citizens, Afghan National security forces, and when the need arises, the enemy.

“We have the best relationship with the aid station. They help us all the time,” said Afghan National Army Capt. Amanullah, a general-internal doctor assigned to the 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps.

“When our Soldiers are sick, first we treat them. We try to cure them by ourselves. If we are unable to cure them, we take them to the aid station, and the good doctors help us. We have a very good relationship with the surgeons.”

“I was worried and nervous about being treated by U.S. doctors; not knowing what to expect. But after arriving at the aid station and seeing how nice and kind everyone there was, I was OK,” said Sherin Beg, a medic assigned to 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps. “Within an hour after arriving, I was asleep on the operating table having my appendix removed. The next thing, I was awake and it was all over.”

The majority of the aid station’s patients have turned out to be Afghan citizens. Mostly by word of mouth, the doctors and medics are gaining the trust of the local people, and are building a solid reputation.

“Since we’ve been deployed, from May of 2007, the (aid station) has seen 5,400 local nationals in our five clinics throughout the upper Kunar Province,” said Harrington. “We see many children (and) adults and fewer women. But every day we’re seeing more of the local nationals and more of their women because they’re feeling more comfortable with us.”

An Afghan named Ramdad from the nearby village of Juba is one of the 5,400 people pleased with the services provided by the Soldiers at the Saber run aid stations.

“The first time I came to coalition forces hospital on FOB Naray was three months ago when I brought my daughter for treatment because she was burned,” said an Afghan named Ramdad from the nearby village of Juba. “I was not sure the doctors were going to take her, but they treated my daughter, and the doctors did a good job.”

“I was very happy, and because of that I brought my 3-year-old son, who is sick with pneumonia, in for help,” Ramdad added. “We are happy with the American doctors are taking care of our people, because we are poor people. We are not able to take our sick family members out of the country, and it’s helpful for us.”

“Being out here providing the care that I’ve been trained to (provide) is why I joined the Army. I get to wake up every day and know that I am doing the right thing,” Harrington said.



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