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ARMAMENT EXPERTS TRAIN AFGHAN MECHANICS TO WORK WITH U.S. SMALL-ARMS

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NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Soldiers from the 173rd Brigade Support Battalion trained a group of Afghan National Army mechanics in small-arms repair at Forward Operating Base Fenty, March 3.



2ND LT MONIKA COMEAUX

Spcs. Lee Gaskell and Luis Velez-Casiano (center) from the armament section of Company B, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion show an Afghan National Army mechanic from the 5th Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 201st Corps how to load the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon during a weapons maintenance class at Forward Operating Fenty, Afghanistan, March 3.

The training brought together troops of the ANA's 5th Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 201st Corps and Soldiers from the armament section of Company B of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team's support battalion.

The Afghan participants learned about gas- and recoil-operated weapons and their functions; trained in weapons clearing, disassembly, reassembly and functions check procedures; and learned how to identify faults on the U.S. M-4

rifle and M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon and Russian-made PKM machine guns.

"It seems like on the PKM, they pretty much know everything that we showed them. They were very, very interested in the American weapons," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jean Belizaire, officer-in-charge of the armament section.

The 5th Kandak does not have separate weapon maintenance technicians. It is the job of the unit's mechanics to maintain weapons if they break, explained Fazal Dod, one of the participating ANA mechanics.

The ANA Soldiers "are surprisingly quick in learning our techniques and troubleshooting and inspecting weapons systems," said Sgt. Micaiah Ragins, a small-arms and artillery repairer. Ragins, who became familiar with foreign weapons such as the PKM during an assignment with Army Special Forces, was one of the primary instructors for the class.

Class participants discussed the differences between the AK-47 and the M-4. Ragins admired the durability of the AK-47, and said the weapon is quite accurate up to 400 meters. The ANA mechanics seemed amused and surprised at some of the features of the M4 and M249, and spent some time disassembling and reassembling the American weapons, trying to break them down to their smallest components. Ragins said removing the gas tube on the M249 can be quite a challenge even for American Soldiers, and ANA troops became engrossed in learning how to disassemble the trigger housing on the M4.

"It was a surprise how many small springs and pins there are in these American weapons," said Fazal Dod.

This was the first time the armament section taught the small-arms class to their ANA colleagues, but Belizaire said the training was "a great thing" that is helpful to the Afghan troops, and he hopes his team can offer more training in the future.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team is part of the Southern European Task Force, a U.S. Army Europe organization headquartered in Vicenza, Italy.



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