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PARATROOPERS JOIN AFGHAN FORCES TO TAKE CONTROL OF BRIDGE, CHECKPOINT

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Afghan National Army Soldiers and paratroopers from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry, walk across the Gowerdesh Bridge during Operation Mountain Highway II in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan April 27. The ANA, Afghan Border Patrol, and U.S. Army and Marine forces worked together during the operation to rebuild an ABP checkpoint at the bridge that was partially destroyed by insurgents last summer.

NURISTAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan --

Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry and Legion Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry teamed with members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan Border Police for Operation Mountain Highway II in eastern Nuristan province in late April.

The operation started April 22 when Soldiers from International Security Assistance Force and the ANA made a simultaneously night air assault onto three mountains above Gowerdesh Bridge.

Afghan and American Soldiers created Observation Posts Mace, Hatchet and Brick, which enabled the ABP and ANA to drive up from the south and seize the bridge April 26.

“It was (a very) synchronized air assault to get everybody in,” said Capt. John Williams, commander of the 1-91st’s Headquarters and Headquarters Troop. “Over four months of planning was put into this operation.”

During the planning phase, ABP members participated in training on weapons, vehicle searches, first aid and reacting to enemy contact, said Capt. Kafi Gwira, an ABP embedded tactical trainer from Chicago. The

ABP were also issued new uniforms, weapons, ammunition and equipment for the operation.

“We got them ready to seize the bridge for good this time,” said Gwira. “The ABP will now maintain a presence at the bridge at all times.”

The ANA built three local observation posts near the bridge during the first few days of the operation, which were handed over to the ABP a few days later.

“The reason why this bridge is so critical is that it’s one of the last ones left for insurgents to use,” said Williams. “If they can’t use the Gowerdesh Bridge, this severely limits their capabilities in this area.”

The bridge has been a key altercation point between insurgents and Afghan forces over the last year. Numerous firefights between ISAF and insurgents have occurred near the bridge, and last summer insurgents drove off the ABP and destroyed their security checkpoint.

“They need strong positions, which is why we provided the engineers to build the bunker positions at the bridge,” said Williams. “They also needed local OPs, which we’re building near the bridge. So now we can see all the area around us. The enemy can’t come here unimpeded like they have been.”

ISAF forces will continue to operate two of three larger observation posts to support the ABP, but once the bunkers and fighting positions are built the ABP will take over operations there.

Operation Mountain Highway II is an ongoing operation, but Williams said it’s already considered a great success.

“Since we have secured this bridge, we can now bring development to this region,” he said. “We can fix the road and bring economic and government development here. The insurgents have lost the upper hand in this area.”

The 1-91st and 1-503rd are part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, a U.S. Army Europe unit based in Vicenza, Italy.



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