



New Radios Improve ANA Communications and Enhance Military Operations

Story and photos by U.S. Army
Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis
OMC-A Public Affairs Office

KABUL, Afghanistan—The Afghan National Army can now talk freely—from Kandahar, to Kabul, to Herat—thanks to recently received communication equipment that replaced Soviet-era radios and systems.

Implementing the new communications system was a complex task. Attempting to set up and manage all the different aspects of the country-wide tactical communication network was even more difficult, requiring the procurement and deployment of various equipment types; installation into different environments; and training for administrators, operators and maintainers.

The Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan assigned that task to its communication section in Kabul.

According to Sgt. 1st Class David Miller, an Army Reservist with the 3rd Battalion Signal Command, Anderson, Ind., and head of the OMC-A tactical communication section, “We are on track with what we have to complete. This is a challenge, but of a good sort.

I thought I would be repairing radios here, and was surprised that I was honored to have such a high level of responsibility.”

In the past the ANA relied on older, Soviet-style radio equipment, the R130 and the R123 for high frequency and very high frequency communication. They also used the PRC-77—a man-pack short-range VHF radio the United States deployed during the Vietnam War era.



Said Forouk, Ministry of Defense Communication Officer, takes a close look at a radio component to determine pin alignment of a connection.

The difficulty was finding someone to conduct the training and maintain the radios once deployed.

According to Capt. Stephen Robinson, Alabama Army National Guardsman and embedded trainer during Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix II, the Romanian Army used to

provide some communications training and repair at the ANA’s Pol-e-Charki site.

“The biggest challenge for them was making daily repairs on the Soviet radios while trying to conduct training at the same time,” said Robinson. “Repair parts were almost non-existent, and the U.S. embedded trainers had never seen the radios before.”

Mixing Afghan soldiers, U.S. trainers, Romanian instructors, several interpreters and Soviet radios

presented some challenges.

The first mission for the OMC-A communications team was to find a company that had some experience with similar circumstances. They assembled a summary task list of equipment and initiated a bid process in the United States. U.S. company Datron World Communications Inc. won the contract to provide communication equipment and training to the Afghan Army.

OMC-A chose four types of radios and repair part kits to give the army both long-range communication capabilities and squad-level abilities. The Datron RT7000 long-range high-frequency HF radio will replace the R130 Soviet-style radios. These radios have the capability to communicate between Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Gardez and back to Central Corps in the Kabul area.

The Datron PRC-1077 man-pack radio and the PRC-1070 hand-held radios will

“I welcome the training we are receiving. ... I want to learn all I can while the instructor is here.”

-- Saad Forouk, Communication Officer for the Afghan Ministry of Defense

Robert Fable, Datron World Communications Project Manager for Afghanistan, reviews component parts of a radio to members of the advanced component-level repair course at Pol-e-Charki.



be very high frequency and will complement the U.S. PRC-77. The ANA will use these radios for platoon and squad-level communications.

Maj. Brad Letner, Materiel Officer for OMC-A, said the U.S. government has spent \$46.5 million dollars on radios and \$1.7 million on repair parts for the Afghan National Army. The British Government provided an additional \$6 million dollars.

Each of the repair part packets was put together to give the radios a 10-year serviceability.

After the equipment started arriving in Afghanistan it was time to begin the training process.

Robert Fable is the project coordinator for Datron in Afghanistan. A retired Marine master sergeant in the communication field, Fable has worked for Datron for four years.

Fable's first visit to Afghanistan was in March 2004, when he set up

Datron's program. His first step was to develop administrator-level training, which focused on how to program the radios and properly deploy them for optimum use.

Training included choosing the appropriate antenna, setting up communication networks and procedures for handling radio traffic. He also initiated operator-level training, primarily a non-technical approach to equipment use.

At the same time Fable was trying to get his training program off the ground, the U.S. embedded trainers and the ANA were deploying throughout Afghanistan.

Said Fable, "During the day I would teach one-week classes to the ANA on how to use the different types of radios, and at night I'd meet with the ETTs to bring them up to date on the equipments' capabilities." One key difference between the older radios and the new Datron equipment was the new

radios are digital.

Fable continued to work almost around the clock in Afghanistan until June 2004, training 100 ANA soldiers and many U.S. advisors. While "a lot of the Afghan men do not have a formal education," said Fable, "They are really sharp and pick up on the equipment. They have a genuine interest on learning the radios so they can do their jobs."

Because of the tremendous growth in the Afghan Army, Fable has returned again to train the ANA soldiers. During the next five months, Fable will concentrate on intermediate and depot-level maintenance courses.

To maintain the equipment throughout its lifespan, the Afghan Army and the Ministry of Defense will have to be able to troubleshoot and repair the Datron radios. Saad Forouk, Afghan Ministry of Defense Communication Officer, said, "I welcome the training we are receiving. It will be my

office that will be responsible for the fault identification and advanced trouble repairs, and I want to learn all I can while the instructor is here."

The ANA has used the radios in Afghanistan since March 2004, allowing Fable to concentrate repair training on faults appearing in the field environment. He has prepared the ANA to sustain the equipment in the future, through train-the-trainer programs. While the Ministry of Defense will provide some future training, future communication mobile training teams from the United States will include classes on the Datron radio as part of their Signal Course.

Whether calling in reports from Kandahar to the Central Corps in Kabul, or calling for additional troops when quelling a riot in Herat, the Afghan soldiers will have the equipment to enable their efforts to provide peace and security to the people of Afghanistan.