

AFGHANISTAN'S NEEDS: OBSERVATIONS OF A SOLDIER

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Foreword:

I dedicate this thesis to my father, Staff Sgt. Noe Treviño, whose loyalty to his country and personal journal made writing this thesis possible. I love you daddy, and am so proud of everything you have done for us.

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Introduction

In retaliation for the attacks of September 11, 2001, thousands of U.S. soldiers have completed multiple tours of combat in Operation Enduring Freedom. The current war, more commonly known as the “War in Afghanistan,” waged for the attacks on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, masterminded by Osama Bin Laden and the abettors to the terrorist attacks, the Taliban regime. Many soldiers serve year-long terms overseas with only one chance to come home for a short time, with lots of soldiers completing their tours in Afghanistan. Such terms of duty are difficult, not only on the soldier, but for the family as well. When a soldier is deployed to fight in a war, there is no guarantee that he/she will come home safely. It is this lack of a guarantee that brings about fear and worry to the soldiers and family members. The separation creates an emotional roller coaster with unpredictable turns. On the other hand, there is also a feeling of pride and honor among the family members. These particular feelings stem from knowing that their soldier is doing something noble, brave, and patriotic in serving his country. Speaking from experience, I acknowledge these feelings and thoughts that family members experience.

My father is an E6 Staff Sergeant in the Army National Guard. On Mother’s Day in May 2005, he was deployed to Khowst, Afghanistan to serve a year-long combat tour with Operation Enduring Freedom. It took a lot of strength for me, as his 19-year-old daughter to understand why he was going. I had already heard of hundreds of soldiers and civilians who had been killed in Afghanistan, and I could not help but think the worst could happen to my dad. I wanted him to be with us, his family, for our birthdays, holidays, and special celebrations. He had already missed some of these events during his deployment in the Gulf War or “Desert Storm” when he served from 1990 to 1991. No one in my family was excited about him leaving again. However,

we could not stop him. Proud to be a soldier, he accepted his deployment to Afghanistan without hesitation. Though his departure was sad to us, not all feelings about my dad leaving were negative. As an American citizen, I was grateful that he wanted to go to Afghanistan to ensure his freedom, the freedom of his family, and his country. In addition, he was part of a mission to bring democracy to the war-torn country of Afghanistan.

My father's mission called for him to spend a year in a very different culture, one about which he knew very little. Everyday activities allowed my father to become aware of the culture of Afghanistan and to grow accustomed to living in a foreign land for his year-long term. While there he communicated with young men and discussed their country and traditions. He took the time to learn about the diversity of the country and more importantly, he took the time to understand the political issues in Afghanistan and the effect the war had on its civilians. My father communicated with civilians and members of the Afghan Army and in doing so, he was able to help establish new opportunities for people in Afghanistan.

Knowing that my father did more than just fight in combat, I found myself thinking about what he did with his time. While in Afghanistan, he kept a journal of his daily experiences. He wrote about the culture, his thoughts about the society, and how life in Afghanistan compared to what he was used to living. In addition to writing this personal journal, he took pictures and brought home local items from Afghanistan. Everything he brought home had a story to it, from the hand-made blankets to the Afghan money. Finally, my dad told my family many stories about his experience. He told us about the good things he saw, the worst experiences he had, and the moments that made him seriously think about his own life. Through his journal, pictures, stories, and an interview, he answered the question, "What did you do when you went to war Daddy?" What was the other side of the war?

My Soldier Dad

My father, Staff Sgt. Noe Treviño, was born on May 12, 1965 to Natividad and Guadalupe Treviño. He was the second of five children, having two brothers and two sisters. As a child, he enjoyed doing things that most boys enjoy doing, such as playing football and baseball. He was an active child who enjoyed playing with his friends and was a good student in school. Unfortunately, he was unable to participate in any organizations because there were five children in his family, so my dad occupied his time with his friends, helping his family by working, and hanging out with his girlfriend, who is now his wife of 23 years. My father met my mother in high school and eventually they got married.

Upon graduating from high school, my dad joined the Army National Guard. When asked what made him want to join the Army, he said, “At the time it was just something I thought about doing.” He had an interest in joining the Army, and with the birth of my older sister, Veronica AnnE in May 1984, he motivated himself to enlist. My father enlisted in the Army in August 1984 as an Army Reservist in the National Guard. Joining the Army gave my dad an array of benefits for himself and his growing family. While he was a full time family man, he was also a part time soldier. Because he could not afford to attend college right after graduation, my dad worked multiple jobs and dedicated his time to supporting his growing family. I was born in 1986 and in 1990, my younger sister Cassandra Lee was born. Continuing his education was important to my dad and he wanted a degree that would allow him to have a steady job. When my dad learned that the Army could help him pay for school, he joined, and attended Texas State Technical College in Harlingen, Texas earning an Associates Degree in Automotive Technology. After obtaining his degree and proudly walking across the stage, my dad immediately found a job that would enable him to have benefits that could help his family. He

got a job at Kivett-Rodriguez Ford Mercury, one of several jobs my dad had before leaving for Afghanistan.

For several years my father's role in the military did not have an affect on my family. Prior to the September 11, 2001 events, my father's primary military duty consisted of drill a few weekends out of the year with minimal time away from home for extended periods of time. Prior to September 11, 2001, my father did leave for several weeks of training when the Persian Gulf War occurred in 1990 and 1991. I was only four years old at the time, and my little sister was a new-born. For most of my life, my dad was home, but all that would change in 2001.

Soon after the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, he was sent to New York for a year to help with security and border duty. He was then sent to Oklahoma for training for another year. My family started seeing less of my dad, and it really worried all of us. We were dreading the day my dad would come home and say, "I am going overseas to fight." After bouncing back and forth from work to Guard for roughly two years, in March 2005, my dad came home with the news we had been expecting. He was being deployed overseas to Afghanistan. When he told us, he sounded as though he had no problem going. I recently asked him how he felt when he first got his orders and he responded, "*After being in the guard for twenty years, it was about time I got my combat patch.*"

Because Staff Sgt. Noe Treviño has been in the Army for 23 years, receiving his combat patch would be a symbol of his dedication to the United States in protecting freedom and promoting democracy. Therefore, my father went to Afghanistan without hesitation. He knew he was leaving his family, but he felt his deployment would positively affect us. On Mother's Day 2005, he left for Afghanistan. It was an experience for which he was ready. He went, fought, helped rebuild, and came home safely. It took 23 years for Staff Sgt. Noe Treviño to receive that

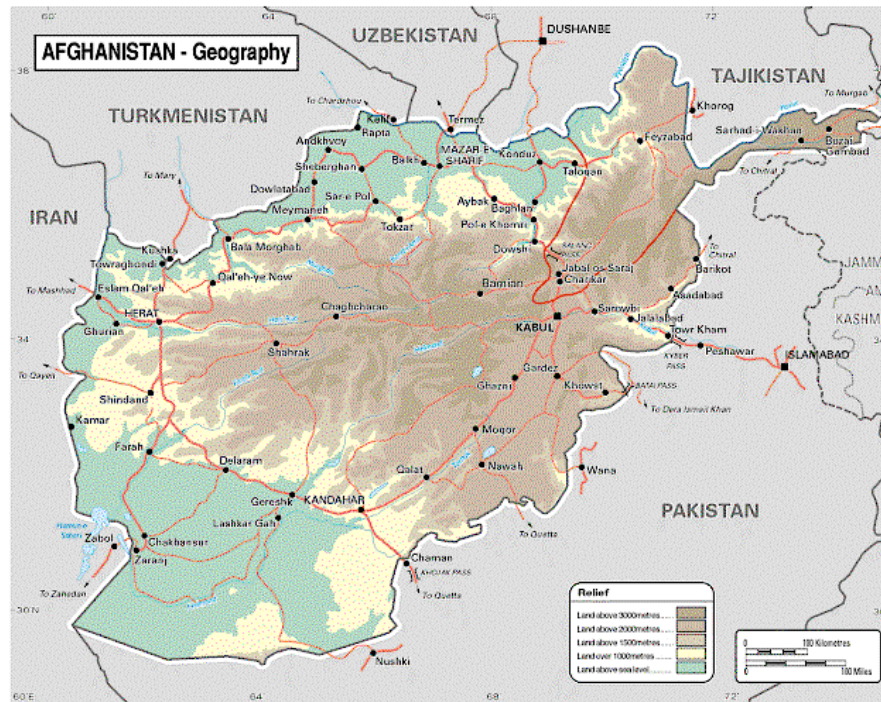
coveted combat patch with which most soldiers yearn to be rewarded. I know fighting in Afghanistan was what my dad wanted to do. I asked him how he felt at the end of his tour in Afghanistan, and he told me, *“I felt good because we had gone there to help them better their lives by building schools and health clinics.”* Even though he was initially sent in retaliation of the attacks on September 11, 2001, he did not feel good because he was surrounded by violence; he felt good because he made a difference.

Anyone who knows my dad knows that he is a very humble and modest man, one who is not too outspoken. Without calling himself a hero, he knows that he is one for his family. My father has gone from working in a grocery store, to a convenient store, to a dealership, to a school district, and finally to being a full time soldier. He never complained about what he did, and always did his best at whatever job he held. No matter what my dad was doing or where he was working, I have always and will always call him my Hero and my Soldier.



Afghanistan - Physical Geography

My father was stationed in Khowst, Afghanistan, which is along the southeastern border that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan. To better understand his situation, I first need to describe the physical geography of Afghanistan. Located in Central Asia, Afghanistan is surrounded by six bordering countries.



China, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan are all important to Afghanistan in that a part of the culture from each surrounding country contributes to the culture of Afghanistan. In size, Afghanistan is smaller than Texas. The physical geography of the country consists of mostly mountains and plains with dry desert and some lush green farmland. The Hindu Kush Mountains provide internal borders to separate the regions of Afghanistan, which include the Central Highlands, Northern Plains, and Southwestern Plateau. The central highlands constitute seventy percent of the land. Since the Hindu Kush Mountain Range covers the Central Highlands, this land has heavy snowbound mountains and some of the highest elevations in

Afghanistan. The fertile soils of the Northern Plains allow for crops and vegetation. Afghanistan has little land that can be used for farming, except the Northern Plains region. Because the Northern Plains cover only fifteen percent of the land, adequate crops for food are scarce. The third region, the Southwestern Plateau, is better known as the “desert area” of Afghanistan. It is a lower elevation, sandy desert, with infertile soil.

Afghanistan contains mountain ranges, caves, and rivers. Hard rock caves are found within the mountains and have provided shelter in which people can hide. Usually caves form in limestone, but limestone is limited to only two small areas of Afghanistan: the high tablelands north and west of Kabul, and northeast of Kandhar (Palka, 2004). Because there is not much limestone, most caves are man-made. The Taliban have found shelter in these caves, and have created a heavy combat zone in the mountains. One well-known cave is the Tora Bora, located at the Southeastern border dividing Afghanistan and Pakistan, where my dad was located.

The Tora Bora tunnels were apparently expanded by Al-Qaeda using hard-rock mining techniques (Palka, 2004). Because Al-Qaeda plays a large role in the war today, many people are interested in studying how they manage to hide. My father got a taste of the caves and mountains during one of his missions. He states, “*We went from 2000 feet of elevation to over 9000 feet elevation. It is colder up there...we went through the mountains where they were looking for Bin Laden*” (N.T. personal communication, 2005). My dad recognized how the people used mountains and how important they are aside from their basic geographical location. The mountains increase elevation and cause a natural change in climate. My father went on many missions through the treacherous mountains. Others included providing security for political campaigns and being in charge of security at Chapman Base.

Mountain operations were not the only difficult missions my dad faced. He encountered several natural disasters that he never experienced back home in South Texas, such as earthquakes. Because he had not been in Afghanistan long, he was unfamiliar with such events. He wrote, *“There was an earthquake in Pakistan and it was felt as far as 400 miles away”* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). Being about twenty miles North of Pakistan, my father experienced the tremors of the earthquake.

Aside from mountains and earthquakes, my father had to endure the extremes of climate in Afghanistan. There are hot summers with temperatures rising over 110°F, cold winters that include heavy snow and chilly nights, and unpredictable rainfalls that produce inches of standing water. My dad first recognized the intensity of the heat on June 21, 2005, when he wrote, *“The day was a hot 109°F”* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). Had my dad known what he was in for, he probably would have prayed that most days would have been 109°F compared to the heat he felt on upcoming days. The following day, June 22, 2005, was another hot day. *“They said it got up to 120°F. We all felt it at the gates. Drinking ten bottles of water is not enough water”* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). The extreme heat continued for several weeks, such that even with a cold front, the temperature was still about 100°F. My dad told me that there was a small office that had an air conditioner, but the temperature inside the room was still in the high 90’s. No matter how much water the soldiers drank, the heat still caused them to feel lethargic, tired, and drained. In addition to extreme heat that measured at 136°F, they endured a series of cold fronts during the winter with heavy amounts of snow.

Winters were just as extreme as summers in Afghanistan. Snow filled the mountains and rain brought cool nights. Temperatures dropped from the hundreds in the summer to 60-65°F during the day in the winter, with much colder temperatures occurring at night. There were some

days with weather below freezing. The cold and the snow in the mountains left my dad shivering with drenched wet feet. *“Yesterday we went out to the mountains to go give a madcap. There was a lot of snow”* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). My father was not used to being drenched in sweat in hot summers and adapting to extremely snowy winters, being from South Texas where it is always hot. These extremes took a lot out of him and he had to do his best to adjust; something the people in Afghanistan were accustomed to doing.



Aside from landforms and weather, my father recognized the importance of the mountains in dividing Afghanistan from other countries. When he went on missions, he saw the Northern Plains with its farmers, pushing plows, and carrying buckets of water. He saw villages where people raised livestock to eat and sell. Finally, my father experienced the Southwestern Plateau, where people struggled to keep crops growing. He noticed the immense amount of desert and dry land, and prayed that God would bless these people with water and vegetation in this extremely difficult area. There are many factors that contribute to Afghanistan being a place

where people can farm and not worry about crops, yet there are many factors that prohibit Afghanistan from being a lush green land.

The mix of landforms and extreme weather affect agriculture production. Agriculture is the primary source of income in Afghanistan, despite only 12% of its total land area being arable with less than 6% currently cultivated (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). Because such a small amount of land is used for agriculture, almost everything is done by manual labor. Machines are seldom ever used and the farmers do not use much fertilizer. The major crops are rice, wheat, barely, and corn. Some industrial crops used for income and trade including cotton and tobacco.

Poor growing conditions and economic hardships have been leading reasons why people in Afghanistan grow opium and heroine for economic gain. Many poor farmers grow opium to make quick money. Opium is easy to cultivate, thus it is used as a primary source of income. Afghanistan produced a record opium poppy crop in 2006, supplying 91% of the world's opium (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). Marijuana is also commonly seen in the streets and homes, especially those of impoverished families. My dad told me that marijuana was grown in several places and was surprised to see how common it was for children to be exposed to it. These plants were used as narcotics, so they brought in money rapidly. Granted, growing drugs does not seem to be the best way to provide for a family, but the people of Afghanistan have few economic options.

The people of Afghanistan suffer from inadequate nutrition because of the unavailability of land for cultivation. The physical geography of Afghanistan exacerbates the difficult living conditions for Afghans. Landforms create borders dividing ethnic groups and extreme weather

affects economic growth. Furthermore, this harsh geographical setting creates tensions among the people of Afghanistan.

Since U.S. combat activities began overseas in Afghanistan and later, Iraq after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the problems in Afghanistan have been overshadowed by the war in Iraq. Afghanistan, however, is a country that resembles a puzzle that is incomplete, yet complete in its own way. Many sections of land were put together and developed into a country with random borders that separate the regions and ethnic groups of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a diverse country that needs attention. People need to be made aware of the geography and how it affects the population. The pictures of Afghanistan most see are filled with violence, warfare, and adversity. The geographical formation of Afghanistan creates this adversity and is often overlooked.

Afghanistan – Politics, History, and Government

Afghanistan has endured a history of unstable politics and government. Historically developed as a “buffer zone” between Russia and Britain in the 19th century, very little attention was given to how the country should be run. A strong central government was not established, and the ethnic diversity tended to prevent a universal centralized government from forming to bring order to this country.

Afghanistan is said to have been founded in 1747 by Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was elected the first king of Afghanistan. At the time, the capital of Afghanistan was Kandahar. The government evolved around Durrani and his Muslim Empire. After his death, Afghanistan became a nation that suffered several tribal wars, pitting family against family. As the nation continued to grow, the tribal wars continued while larger and more powerful nations took interest in Afghanistan. In particular, Afghanistan became a target of expansion of the British Empire. Gaining territory in Afghanistan was not easy for Britain, as the Afghans drove them into two Anglo-Afghan wars. Rather than help the British gain territory of Afghanistan, these wars hurt the British army, and Britain had to accept defeat and eventually pull out of Afghanistan in August 1919.

From 1919-1929, Afghanistan’s leader, Amanullah, ended the country’s isolation by creating foreign relations with major countries. This move helped Afghanistan advance in security for its citizens. “Many reforms such as the abolition of the traditional Muslim veil for women and the opening of a number of co-educational schools” were made, but created problems with tribes throughout Afghanistan (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). From 1933-1973, the Afghan leadership ruled under a liberal constitution that brought about a

two-chamber legislature. However, this constitution allowed many extremist third parties to form, thus creating splits among the people of Afghanistan.

From about 1979-1992, Afghanistan was governed under a Soviet influenced government. The people of Afghanistan lived under the Afghan Socialist Constitution. Throughout the 1980s Afghanistan tried to balance Soviet and U.S. influences. The Geneva Accords in 1988 “called for the U.S. and Soviet noninterference in the internal affairs of Pakistan or Afghanistan, the right of refugees to return to Afghanistan without fear of persecution or harassment, and, most importantly, a timetable to ensure Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 15, 1989 (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). A major source of contention between Afghans and the Soviets was that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in support of communism. The Afghans had little interest in Communism and were not fond of the Russians. Conflict arose and eventually the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989.

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, a civil war ensued among the various militias in Afghanistan. The first couple of years in the 1990s included heavily fought civil wars in Kabul and eventually led to the formation of the Taliban. The Taliban rose to power in the mid-1990s in reaction to the anarchy and power of warlords that arose after the withdrawal of Soviet forces (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). By 1996 the Taliban dominated Afghanistan and took over the government. This created a change in governmental policies and Afghans’ rights. Women were denied the opportunity to work, receive an education, or receive proper healthcare during illnesses and pregnancies. Even young females were prohibited from attending school. The Taliban handled the government in a very strict and stern manner, and harsh punishments were given to those who broke rules. The Taliban members believed women had no place in the workplace. Eventually, the Taliban’s tactics and harsh treatment led to the

flight of many citizens. Civil wars continued and slowly social, economic, and cultural programs in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate.

The Taliban “committed serious atrocities” and also “provided sanctuary for Osama Bin Laden” (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2006). It was this man and his Al-Queda group who plotted the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in the United States on September 11, 2001. In reaction to these attacks, the United States retaliated against Al-Queda and the Taliban for their actions and for not expelling Osama Bin Laden. Eventually through the force of the United States military and various other anti-terror groups, the Taliban dismantled in December 2001. With the fall of the Taliban in 2004, Afghanistan was proclaimed an Islamic Republic. The first national presidential election was held on October 9, 2004. Under the 2004 constitution, women were allowed to vote and many Afghans had their opinions heard for the first time in a long while.

The United States continues to provide aid for Afghanistan and has played an integral part in the development of the current government. The country appears to have a similar governmental set-up to that of the U.S. This is due in large part to the United States influence on the rebuilding of the government. Just as the United States is divided into states with governors for each state, Afghanistan is also divided into 34 provinces which are divided into districts and sub-districts.

As this new government has matured, so has the interest in political parties. Among the numerous political parties which have formed since 2001 are the Afghan Social Democratic Party, the National Movement of Afghanistan, and the Islamic & National Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan (Aliprandini, 2006). Though differences in opinion are still being seen among the people of Afghanistan, they are now being articulated more through these political

parties. People can choose which party they want to be a part of and have a say in what they feel is best for their country.

While my dad was in Afghanistan, he saw these changes taking place and saw how Afghans were adjusting to the new government. Even though the new government hopes to help Afghanistan build a solid foundation for law and order, there are still people who object to the changes. My dad was able to witness campaigns and elections and many times provided security for major political events. *“Things are starting to pick up because of the elections” (Treviño, 2005-2006)*. People protested more as the elections slowly approached. Afghans are increasingly engaged in political issues, whether they are a part of constitutions or laws. Current President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has the power to exercise a uniform control over Afghanistan. Along with the other governmental officials, he has the potential to change this country from being a civil war-zone to a country that prospers. However, as Eugene Palka has stated in *Geographic Perspectives Afghanistan*, “The complex cultural geography, together with the difficult physical landscape has led Kenneth Weisbrode to describe Afghanistan’s internal political situation as ungovernable”(2004). With the new government emerging and slowly progressing, Afghan officials’ possibility to make their country governable and successful remains to be seen.

Afghanistan - Cultural Diversity

Distinct and diverse cultures in the Afghan region are apparent in the many ethnicities and languages found within Afghanistan's political borders (Palka). Afghanistan is comprised of several ethnic groups that relate primarily to their own people, both in and out of the country. They diversify the culture of the country and complicate a smooth running government's effort to maintain peace and order. Because every ethnic group is trying to maintain loyalty to their own particular set of rules and way of living, maintaining peaceful order is difficult. My dad became aware of this diversity in ethnic groups. He witnessed the lifestyle of the largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, in southern Afghanistan. In addition, he got glimpses of the culture of other ethnic groups as he went out on missions to Northern, Southern, and Eastern Afghanistan. In the many pictures he took, I was able to recognize the different ethnicities that create such a cultural diversity in Afghanistan.

The Pashtuns consist of over half of the population of Afghanistan and primarily occupy the southern border of Afghanistan that runs along the border of Pakistan. Their spoken language Pashto, is an Indo-European language and, according to my dad, the language was different from anything he heard before. Pashtuns are not either overly wealthy or impoverished, but live in villages led by an elder. The elder usually makes the decisions regarding women, children, and any issues that affect village life. When my dad took pictures, he became aware of this. He was not able to openly "pop out" his camera and start taking pictures; he had to ask the elder beforehand. In some of the villages, girls are prohibited from taking pictures or having their pictures taken. *These girls had to get permission from the elder to take pictures* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). Asking for permission for pictures was new for my dad, but he respected their culture and waited for the elder to give the approval. Pashtuns live primarily off of trade,

agriculture or animal husbandry. My father witnessed the lifestyle of Pashtuns and took photographs of them working in the fields or selling animals. Along with other soldiers, he participated in the local customs as they purchased goats and cows to raise for holiday celebrations. My dad wrote, “*We pitched in and bought two calves... we are going to kill them later*” (N.T., personal communication, 2005).

In physical appearance, most Pashtuns have light or fairly tan complexions, with straight or wavy dark brown or black hair. Facial features include long straight noses, with brown eyes, though blue or hazel eyes are not uncommon (Web Media Interactive, 1997-2006). The physical appearance helps to determine the ethnicity of a person. Most of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan are Muslims, and almost all of them are Sunnis, one of the two main divisions of Islam (Vogelslang, 2002). Though they are separated by a border, Pashtuns share a common religion and remain loyal to their ethnic brethren. My father was able to communicate with the Pashtun people, who are sometimes referred to as the “true Afghans,” and he says that they cooperated with the American soldiers and worked with them to better their country. The hospitality that the villagers showed my dad and other soldiers is characteristic of the Pashtun Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct for Pashtuns encourages both hospitality and chivalry while also calling for vengeance or strict penalties for crimes committed against a fellow member of a Pashtun clan or tribe (Palka, 2004). The Pashtuns have lived by this code for many years.

The Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and inhabit primarily the Northeastern border region of Afghanistan. Tajiks make up about 25% of the population and have been known for challenging the Taliban rule at the start of the U.S. invasion in 2001 and 2002. Their primary language is Farsi, which is a dialect of Iranian-Persian. Tajiks are mostly slender and light skinned, with black hair, and aquiline noses. They are town-dwelling traders,

skilled artisans, and farmers; many of them prosperous enough to be regarded as middle class (Web Media Interactive, 1997-2006). Most Tajiks are members of the educated elite in Afghanistan; therefore they have significant political influence in governmental issues. Though they are not the largest ethnic group living in Afghanistan, they are among the most powerful. Because they are not the largest, but are seen as more superior to the Pashtuns, the Tajiks usually struggle for power with the Pashtuns. Both want to dominate Afghanistan. The Pashtuns have numbers, but the Tajiks have the education and economic power.

The third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, consisting of less than 10% of the population of Afghanistan, is the Hazaras. This particular ethnic group is of Mongolian origin, and is among the poorest in the country. They can be found living in poor, dry, and barren lands in the mountains of Central Afghanistan. During the many Afghan civil wars, the Hazaras have actually been pushed up the mountains to live in this unbearable and unmerciful land. Because the land is very dry, most Hazaras are sedentary farmers with limited crops throughout the year. Other ethnic groups do not turn to them for wealth, nor do they see them as financially stable; however, other ethnic groups turn to them as allies during civil fighting. Like other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, the Hazaras are at odds with the Taliban. Hazaras speak Farsi and are Shi'ite Muslims.

Another large ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Uzbeks. The Uzbeks can be found living north of the Hindu Kush. They are closely related to their neighbors of Uzbekistan and can be heard having conversations in a Turkic language. The Uzbeks can be distinguished from other ethnic groups based on their appearance. Women wear trousers, long-sleeved dresses, and headscarves. Men wear long, striped and buttonless ikat coats held in place by sashes or belts, which they combine with high leather boots (Vogelslang, 2002). Uzbeks usually have broad flat

faces with light skin (Web Media Interactive, 1997-2006). This ethnic group is Sunni, so conflicts between this group and Shi'ites are common. Like many other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, the Turkics make their living as farmers or stockmen and live in clans or tribes.

There are many other ethnic groups that make up Afghanistan's population. Some of those include the Aimaqs, Balushis, Afghan Hindus, and Sikhs. Due to the number of different ethnic groups in Afghanistan, it was important for my dad to distinguish one from the other. He did not want to disrespect anyone's rules or beliefs, so learning the difference between each group was imperative, especially for keeping peace and trying to cooperate with all of the people of Afghanistan. He went on numerous missions and had to be careful of his actions and how he treated civilians. Any form of disrespect could mean trouble, and that is something my dad did not want. My dad witnessed the cultural and ethnic diversity of Afghanistan, and slowly understood why this country appears to be a puzzle with pieces being forced and squeezed into a place where they do not fit. The end result is that Afghanistan has endured several civil wars and will continue to do so as long as each ethnic group remains loyal to its own beliefs. Furthermore, because people in Afghanistan are not united as one group, many outside countries invade Afghanistan to take advantage of the tension and find allies.

Along with remaining loyal to their own ethnic group beliefs, Afghans have confrontational battles over their religious beliefs. Afghanistan is divided between the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. These are the two largest religious groups in Afghanistan and differences in beliefs create controversy among Afghans.

The cultural diversity in Afghanistan is the result of the Russians making borders to separate themselves from the British in the 1800s. European powers in the region divided the traditional homelands of the various ethnic groups into different countries. Afghanistan in turn

was created as a “buffer state.” However, living as one combined culture in Afghanistan is nearly impossible as each ethnic group is closely related to its bordering country. Ethnicity ties Afghanistan to the Western states of Iran, and the Middle East, to newly independent Central Asian Republics, and to the demographic powerhouses of Pakistan and India (Palka, 2004). These ties disrupt the cooperation of ethnic groups in Afghanistan. My father recognized this problem as one of many that troubles Afghanistan, which cannot be solved with wars or violence. The people must come to a consensus to preserve themselves and their country. My father learned to understand and respect the people of Afghanistan. He learned that while it is really difficult to live in Afghanistan, people make the best of it. He writes, “*I have seen a lot of places, met a lot of interesting people, and am impressed with what these people can build with the little they have*” (N.T., personal communication, 2005). No matter how bad the land is, or how unjust politics are, people still have to make a way of life. They do the best they can with the little they have, but cultural diversity and a lack of education make improving living conditions extremely difficult.



Afghan females rest on one side of the street. Most women were not allowed to have their pictures taken.

An Afghan woman sits with a young female on the side of a street. Most women must remain covered in the burqa.



Afghan woman working out in the field. This is a right women are slowly regaining.



Afghan females walking freely down the street. Walking without a male escort is something women are able to do now.

A young man stands against a brightly colored school bus. Education is slowly increasing for children in Afghanistan.



Young girls run outside during school. Since the fall of the Taliban, girls are given the opportunity to attend school.



Young boys attend school outside. Due to heavy resistance for education by some groups, school buildings are being bombed, forcing kids to have class outside.

Cultural diversity, such as the Pashtuns, in Afghanistan.



Manmade caves are seen within the mountains around Afghanistan. My father's missions called for him to search these caves and mountains.



An Afghan male works in the field. It is rare to cultivate with machines, but the quicker they are plowed, the better for the people.



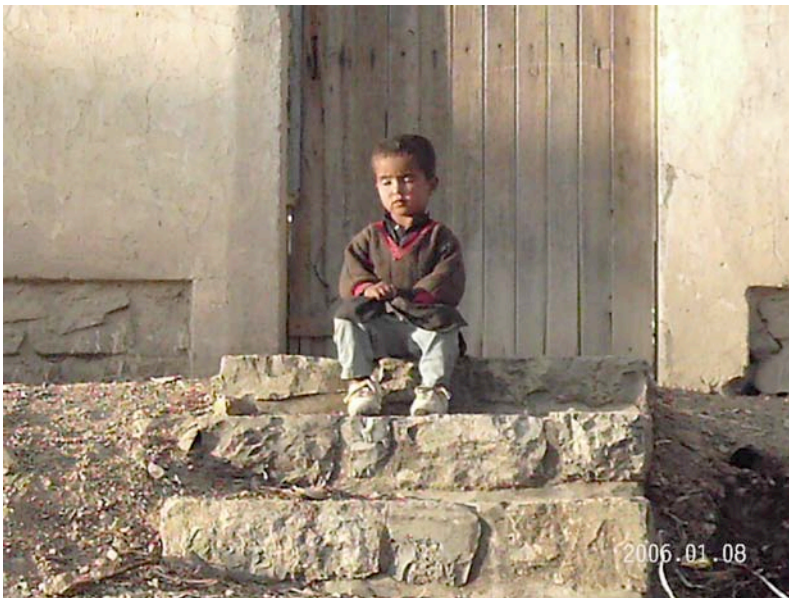
A young boy is dewormed by a United States soldier. Providing health aid is just one of the many forms of assistance provided by U.S. troops.



Cattle are raised, although it is rare that Afghans consume enough beef to meet daily protein requirements.



Beautiful temples are seen throughout Afghanistan. It's nice to see something so beautiful in a country that has experienced constant war.



A young boy dreams about one day living in a land where there is no war.

Afghanistan - Education

Education in Afghanistan has dwindled since the Taliban controlled most of the country in 1996. It is important that Afghans rebuild the education system to ensure a positive outlook for future leaders. With a properly educated population, leaders and citizens can work together to improve the condition of a country. Education plays an essential, but too often overlooked role in relation to conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation, and reconstruction (Nolan, 2006).

However, countries, such as Afghanistan, lack the resources to provide a universal education.

Literacy rates in Afghanistan were extremely low prior to the current war and United States involvement in Afghanistan, with an 18.7% literacy rate for males, and 2.8% for females. These literacy rates place Afghanistan with the third highest illiteracy rate among women in the world, with an estimated 79.2% of females not being able to read (Roshan, 2004). The United States involvement in Afghanistan has steadily helped improve educational institutions there. Since the start of the war, literacy rates have increased somewhat as more people are given the opportunity to attend school. Afghanistan is a country that has struggled for the past several years to improve education and find proper facilities to educate students. Today about 61% of children do not attend school (Aliprandini, 2006). Furthermore, in 2006 the current estimate for literacy was 51% for males and 21% for females (Aliprandini, 2006). These numbers may be skewed due to the emigration of educated Afghans. In order for Afghanistan to improve living conditions, improving the literacy rate and giving all children the opportunity to learn must happen.

In spite of low literacy rates, education is strongly desired by many of the children in Afghanistan. My father witnessed this firsthand. He wrote, "*There were a lot of kids at some of the schools we went to*" (N.T., personal communication, 2005), thus noting no lack of interest. In

fact, today Afghanistan's universities must deal with too many students competing for too few spaces (Zoepf, 2006). In addition, there are not enough buildings to house the students. This continues to be one of the biggest obstacles to improving education.

My dad noticed the desire of the children to attend school as he walked and traveled along the dirt roads of Afghanistan. *As he and other soldiers walked through the villages, "the kids always asked for pens and pencils"* (N.T., personal communication, 2005). The children would beg for school supplies from the soldiers rather than candy and toys. My dad was surprised to see that, but he realized how hard it is to receive an education and get these supplies, and so he understood why the kids were so anxious to have them. Many youths are interested in attending school, but their needs cannot be accommodated. The lack of resources is a large obstacle that Afghanistan must overcome in order to improve the poor education system of this weary country. This lack of attention to education is partly a result of the strict rules the Taliban had over Afghanistan.

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 1996, it nearly destroyed the education system. Girls were immediately prohibited from attending school and women were barred from teaching. Because most of the school teachers were female, the male students had no one to learn from, so the destruction of education began, and continued throughout the thirteen year era of Taliban control. Not only were girls forbidden to attend school, they were also prohibited from being taught at home. Many homes were raided for holding secret schools for females. People breaking the education rules could be stoned or executed. According to Alvi, those who dared set up secret home schools risked bodily harm and possibly even death if discovered. The very few intellectuals remaining in Afghanistan fled quickly, wholly repelled by the Taliban's ignorance and violence...the Taliban even shot stacks of books with their guns. They purportedly showed

particular hostility toward books on gynecology and obstetrics (Alvi, 2003). The Taliban appeared to have a distain towards educated women and education in general, and that influenced how they governed Afghanistan. This apparent hatred towards education was so severe that this regime was able to almost completely destroy the education system. Because of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan have been denied the opportunity to receive any solid education.

My father witnessed many of the run-down schools and children having class outside in unbearable weather conditions. Nonetheless, he points out that the kids showed up for school, despite the lack of resources. It was specifically during these particular writings that I understood what my dad did while in Afghanistan. He did not go for combat; my father saw himself as a part of the rebuilding of this war-torn country. He witnessed the deprivation of an education these children had endured. What he witnessed was a battle of citizens to better their country by providing an education to both males and females. My father saw children yearn to learn. He saw children who wanted to go to school, even if it meant learning with very old books or none at all, having class in a building that could be bombed in minutes, or sitting outside in the scorching heat.



My father's duties required him to go on missions that included driving around destroyed buildings, especially schools. One day he saw the buildings that were being rebuilt, and the next

day saw them in rubble. As schools were being built, they were also being bombed. “*Today, we went to go see a school that got hit by RPIG’s*” (N.T., personal communication, 2005). The children are experienced first hand the complications of receiving an education in Afghanistan by having class outdoors in harsh conditions.

Primary education buildings were not the only buildings being destroyed in Afghanistan; the upper level education in universities suffered as well from the many civil wars and the current war. “Afghanistan’s universities began slowly to rebuild their bombed-out buildings” (Zoepf, 2006). Education was seen as a threat by the Taliban; therefore some people who fear education are trying to prevent it by bombing buildings and destroying new structures. There are many attempts being made to improve the structures for schools, but the constant battles prohibit any progress from occurring.

Aside from the constant destruction of schools, Afghanistan suffers from a lack of teachers. Due to the war, many educators and “educated Afghans have either left the country, or were unable to finish their schooling” (Anonymous, 2005). The conflict that continues in Afghanistan has forced many people out of the country. This large exodus of the educated population left many children without teachers. Female teachers were prohibited from teaching at all, and the male teachers who remained were extremely limited in who they could teach. In the higher grades, male teachers are not allowed to teach female students, and so a shortage of female teachers with higher education limits the number of women who can pursue secondary and post-secondary education (Anonymous, 2005).

Competing voices for power and a lack of national unity hinder improvement. Because there are so many different ethnic groups in Afghanistan, it is difficult to establish one set language and one set of ideals to teach. Schools can be built and teachers can be found, but there

is no curriculum for literacy rates to increase overall in Afghanistan. In order to ensure that all students are learning similar conceptual ideas and gaining knowledge in math, writing, science, etc, school officials can meet to discuss what each particular school is doing. Government officials need to meet to decide what direction the education system will follow. By meeting, the officials will be able to come up with lesson plans that the teachers at each different school can follow in whatever language is spoken. In doing so, each student will be taught at the same level, while learning in their own language. Some universities have found a curriculum that enables all ethnic groups to come together. Afghanistan's ethnic diversity in the Pashtuns, Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others – is clearly visible in the faces of the students, and in the hats and ethnic garb that some of them wear as badges of identity (Zoepf, 2006). Even though each student comes from a different background, universities have enabled them to ignore physical appearance and focus on learning. Students are being taught and learning everyday. However, there is still much to do to bring together the different ethnic groups of Afghanistan.

The United States has sent thousands of troops to Afghanistan in hopes of rebuilding a war-torn nation. One of the main foci of rebuilding is restructuring the education system. Many bombed-out schools are being rebuilt, and new ones are emerging in hopes of providing ample space for every child to be able to attend school. As of today, the United States has opened the American University of Afghanistan, which introduces a new kind of higher education to the country (Zoepf, 2006). There are improvements being made, such as increasing teachers and increasing the amount of education students receive, but improvements are moving at a very slow pace. Seventy percent of the education infrastructure has been destroyed, and the majority of teachers have been martyred or detained, or have immigrated to other countries (Policy for the Rehabilitation and Development of Education in Afghanistan, 2002). Afghanistan has had to

endure warfare the past several years. Education has been put on the backburner due to the chaotic turmoil in war. Being denied an education is unacceptable to the people of Afghanistan as evidences by how Afghan communities, families, and children, have kept learning alive inside the country over the last decades (Policy for the Rehabilitation and Development of Education in Afghanistan, 2002).

“Afghans are coming to realize the value of an education for ensuring self-sufficiency and securing a stable future... they realize too that through education one learns the skills and knowledge necessary not just for survival, but also for moving from menial jobs to higher status occupations” (Alvi, 2003). The people of Afghanistan see possibilities happening because they know an education can make their lives better. With a solid education come more opportunities to improve living conditions and decision making. Some of the pictures my father took show the determination of the people of Afghanistan. There are scenes of children enjoying class outside and even though class is outside, the kids are enjoying being taught.

Education is increasingly recognized as an essential component of peace-building (Nolan, 2006). Peace is desperately needed in Afghanistan. A country that is educated most likely will experience greater productivity, greater civil participation, more concern for the environment, and economic growth (Anonymous, 2005). These benefits along with improved health care can drastically improve the quality of life in a country. My father saw the destruction of the education system. In addition, he saw valiant efforts to rebuild schools and improve teaching for the children.

Afghanistan – Women

“Women were beaten publicly for such offenses as showing too much skin, wearing the wrong colored socks, lacking a male escort, educating girls, working, and begging (Tell, 2002).

Prior to Taliban power, women experienced equality, the right to vote, go to school, and work. However, when the Taliban came into power in 1996, women were subjected to severe oppression. Women were denied the right to receive a proper education, were prohibited from voting, walking freely in public without the proper cover, working to support their families, and speaking their minds. Over the past two decades women have lost their rights to education, healthcare, and employment, their access to food and shelter and their freedoms of association, expression, religion, and dress (Kolhhatkar, 2001). Men have completely controlled decisions regarding women’s roles in home life, government, and families. The way a male figure decides his family should live is how they live, no matter what the affect on the woman. Women have lost a sense of identity and have lost rights that they once valued.

My father’s writings and personal stories emphasized the oppression of women. He wrote about how difficult it was to see women treated in this manner and that he could not even begin to envision his own three daughters being treated in this way. This display of the apparent harsh treatment of women strengthened my dad’s efforts to help promote change in Afghanistan, having witnessed the danger women experienced while he was there. Women and girls in Afghanistan are threatened with violence, both in public and private, in the community and in the family (Roshan, 2004). It is a constant danger zone if you are a female living in Afghanistan. Due to strict rules, women must always be careful of their actions. However, women of Afghanistan did not always feel the wrath of such horrible treatment until the Taliban took control of Afghanistan.

Since 1923, Afghanistan has had constitutions that have granted women equal rights. An important constitution that granted women equal rights was the Constitution of 1977, which stated that “the entire people of Afghanistan, women and men, without discrimination have equal rights and obligations before the law” (Khattak, 2002). Men and women were equal in those days under the eyes of the law. Women even were allowed some opinions in political issues. They were not obligated to stay at home and hide under garments. Women were allowed to go to school, get a job, and move about freely. These rights women had were taken away once the Taliban regime overtook control of Afghanistan in 1992.

Before the Taliban regime took control over Afghanistan, it was under a Soviet influenced government from 1979-1992, which encouraged and enforced the 1977 constitution. In the early 1980s, the Soviet government created the “Afghanistan Socialist Constitution,” which afforded women the rights to healthcare, education, employment, and travel (Roshan, 2004). According to Roshan, Afghanistan was to provide free education to everyone. Furthermore, women were given the right to work and travel through cities without the supervision of a male family member or village elder. Under the Soviet influenced government, women lived equally as men. For thirteen years, women enjoyed the privileges of voting. In 1996, the Taliban overtook power and by 2001, the Taliban controlled more than 97% of the country (Roshan, 2004). They denied women their rights by forcing healthcare clinics to close that treated women. Education for women was shut down, and they were no longer allowed to walk freely throughout the city, and were forced to wear garments that covered them from head to toe. The burqa became their sense of identity and women no longer had a voice in decision making. If they were to break any rules that the Taliban imposed on them, they would be punished by stoning, whipping, or execution.

An important right taken away from women was their right to receive an education. Today the literacy rate among Afghan women is estimated to be only about three percent (Klhakar, 2002). Although Taliban control severely disrupted the education system by refusing to allow females to go to school, the Taliban's prohibition of women attending school did not stop women from resisting this rule. Secret schools were formed and girls were sent to school knowing that they could be punished for doing so. Afghan mothers seemed most resistant to the education ban, often risking punishment to send their daughters to secret schools (Tell, 2002). Even though the Taliban regime was an intimidating and cruel group, people privately went against the Taliban's orders to continue to better themselves.

Because they did not have education, women are more likely to become dependent on men for their needs. My dad witnessed the struggle for women to attend school while in Afghanistan, as well as changes that were occurring. He saw girls attending school and even started to see some women working out in the fields. Most young girls go to school, but there is still a great risk of danger in doing so. Several girls' schools have been attacked or burned by terrorists and some villages have received "night letters" that threaten any family who sends their daughters to school (Anonymous, 2005). Though a serious risk remains for girls to receive an education, girls fight to attend. Education is of high importance to women and due to the current issues in Afghanistan, women are taking advantage of the opportunity to attend school while they can. No one knows how long the United States is going to be in Afghanistan, but as long as the United States has troops there, women will be able to receive an education. Despite the improvement in elementary education, most schools for girls only go through sixth grade (Osborn, 2003). Although this does not compare to true education in the United States, going to school through sixth grade is a big improvement for Afghan girls.

Along with being denied the opportunity to get an education, women were also denied individual identities. The Taliban required women to cover their bodies and faces with a full length garment called a burqa. “The burqa was the most visible restriction imposed by the Taliban...a heavily pleated and tent-like garment, the burqa made physical movement very cumbersome” (Roshan, 2004). No matter the weather conditions, women were forced to wear these “prison” outfits. “If a woman were to be seen without a burqa, she would be stoned and/or whipped. Under Taliban law, women could be beaten – and often were – if they lifted the veil in public” (Tell, 2002). Women were not allowed to let any part of their skin show. One woman was quoted as saying, “I stay home. I only went to the bazaar with a chadari and came back fast. We were scared to look around. We heard that women were beaten for having their hand out or for having nail polish” (Tell, 2002). Part of the purpose of the burqa was used to cover the physique and identity. The Taliban despised women and saw them as inferior, so being able to take away a woman’s identity was a way of letting a woman know she was not an equal. Like most other garments, burqas cost money. If they could not afford one, women had to share with someone in their household. If a woman could not find another woman to share a burqa with, she would not be able to leave her home. A woman could not be seen in public without a burqa or being covered from head to toe. Since the Taliban did not allow women to work, most of them could not afford to buy one. My dad witnessed many women wearing burqas and was somewhat disturbed by these scenes. Seeing the women of Afghanistan endure this kind of treatment made my father grateful that his daughters were able to express themselves individually in a way that made each of them comfortable.

In addition to being deprived of an education and an identity, women were prohibited from working. Even working outdoors and in the fields was prohibited. Prior to the control of the

Taliban, women worked in traditional female occupations such as being teachers, mid-wives, nurses, etc. When the Taliban banned them from working, schools were forced to close or teach only boys, and clinics were closed, especially those that provided of gynecology and obstetrics services. Automatically after the Taliban imposed these restrictions, there was a decline in education and health care. Prior to Taliban's control, women made up the majority of the education and health care workforce. Women comprised 70% of the teachers, as well as held 50% of government jobs, and 40% of medical posts in Afghanistan (Khattak, 2002). Women played a very important role in the economy, education, and health care of Afghanistan. When women lost their rights, a domino effect was created and slowly the poverty, illiteracy, and mortality increased. It appears that the Taliban did not just take away women's rights, but took away the opportunity for Afghanistan to improve its living conditions or even maintain rights women held before 1996.

Women who lived in single parent homes or who no longer had a husband had no way of making money to support their families. Since they were not allowed to work or beg, they became impoverished and desperate. The only alternative they had was to send their children out to work for money. Furthermore, women were not allowed to go out in public without a male relative. If a woman was seen in public alone or with a male that was not a relative, she would be punished. Women had to watch every move they made, and were better off staying indoors. As the wars continue in Afghanistan, many women remain without husbands so many families remain in poverty.

My father's mission to Afghanistan came at a time when women were starting to regain the rights they had lost. Because most villages were still under the command of people who helped the Taliban, there were still strict rules that women had to follow. My father witnessed the

improvements that have been made to help women regain some of their rights. As women slowly regain their rights, the tensions in Afghanistan remain at high levels. My dad wrote, “*Today we went to provide security at a midwives graduation*” (N.T., personal communication, 2005). Any time there is an event involving politics or women, there is a need for security. No one is sure what dangerous events may occur. With a drastic change slowly occurring in Afghanistan, it is hard for some people to adjust. My dad and the rest of his platoon had to ensure that everyone remained safe and that no fighting occurred.

Today, women in Afghanistan are slowly gaining better treatment. They are attending schools, and some are even attending universities. Some women are back in the work force and are employed by certain clinics. Others are working out in the fields and doing little jobs to help provide for their families. Many of my father’s pictures show how women are more involved in the workforce and education system. However, there is still a long journey to go in order for women to have the rights they once had, and an even longer journey for them to have equal rights with men. What concerns most women is not only the benefit of regaining their rights, but seeing the country develop successfully. Afghanistan’s only woman general, General Suhaila Siddiq, stated, “The first priority should be given to education, school facilities, the economy, and reconstruction of the country (Tell, 2002). Once women are given their rights fully, education, health care, and politics will most likely improve. I am very proud to say that my father played a role in helping with the improvement. He witnessed events that are making big changes in Afghanistan. He witnessed women working together to improve situations in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan - Healthcare

Afghanistan's health care system ranks among the worst in the world. In fact, Afghanistan has the second highest mortality rate in the world (United Nations, 2000). This is due to various factors. Afghanistan's terrain and isolated populations make it difficult for people to get to medical facilities. The ethnic diversity creates problems because not all hospitals have practitioners or nurses that speak the different languages. Agricultural deficiencies create problems with malnutrition and the passing on of disease. Restrictions placed on women and the lack of female practitioners and clinics have led to high infant and maternal mortality rates. There have been some improvements since the United States involvement; however, there is still much to be done to ensure that everyone in Afghanistan has access to proper health care.

Afghanistan harbors numerous endemic and epidemic diseases, such as tuberculosis and malaria (Palka, 2004). This is due in large part to the geographical location of Afghanistan. With rough terrain, mountains, and several rural areas, not many people have access to health care clinics or practitioners. Most of the hospitals are located in towns, and only a certain number of people have the means to drive to a clinic or a doctor's office. Given that the geographical setting of Afghanistan distinctly separates towns and villages, health care is only maintained in certain areas. The mountains, desert, and rough terrain of Afghanistan make it nearly impossible for health care to improve. Furthermore, Afghanistan's land restricts proper transportation of medicines to villages across the country. Many items necessary for health care do not reach patients in time, nor do they always arrive in a protected and sanitary condition. Aside from problems with the basic necessities of health care, Afghanistan has serious diseases, including malaria, which is commonly seen in the low valley villages near water. Some towns known for

outbreaks of malaria include Kabul, Herat, Khowst, and Gizab. Another disease that many people from Afghanistan suffer from is tuberculosis.

The ethnic diversity of Afghanistan creates obstacles for the health care system to function properly. There is not a single clinic in Afghanistan that serves people from only one culture. Before the Taliban took control, there were many clinics around the country where people could go. Under the Taliban, many people only had one clinic to attend. Language is often a barrier, and very few hospitals or clinics employ trained interpreters (Robson, 2002). Secondly, each ethnic group has its own set of rules, restrictions, and beliefs. A practitioner treating a patient from a different ethnic group must be extra careful not to offend his patient. While health care is being administered, practitioners must remember to respect their patient's culture. This ensures that there is trust and that people keep coming back to the practitioner whenever health care is needed. The ethnic diversity continues to be an issue with health care in Afghanistan. Since the United States' involvement and governmental aid given to Afghanistan, clinics have improved, but they are not at the level where they can immediately provide interpreters in every clinic and cater to cultural needs.

The success of agriculture affects the nutrition of many people in Afghanistan. When crops are not successful, families are left with nothing or very little to eat. This leads to malnutrition. Iron deficiency anemia is a primary disease resulting from poor crops with little beef production in Afghanistan; people attempt to find sources of iron in other places. The primary source of iron is wheat bread, but this does not provide enough for the human body, thus iron deficiency occurs.

People suffer from many illnesses and diseases. Many refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan come to the U.S. and flee into other countries already carrying sicknesses. The most

common physical ailments of Afghan refugees coming to the United States are diarrhea, acute respiratory infection, and measles (Robson, 2002). Malnutrition contributes to the increased risk of having one of these diseases. Furthermore, when foods have been consumed and they are not ready to eat, the consumer can suffer from illnesses. Though there is no specific study that shows how many people got sick from eating bad food, it is safe to say that many illnesses and health care problems arise from this situation.

As mentioned in previous chapters, women were employed as nurses and midwives prior to 1996. They constituted a large portion of the workers in the health care field. When women were prohibited from working, health care drastically declined. Health indicators for Afghan women are among the worst in the world, particularly in the areas of child health and women's reproductive health (World Bank, 2007). Gynecology issues stem from the lack of clinics and women health practitioners and from babies were being born in homes without the proper care. Complications at birth often result in death. Today, advancements have been made in health care, initially with healthier child birth. The infant mortality rate has declined 24 percent since the fall of the Taliban in December 2001 (Patel, 2007). Babies are living longer and women are having healthier pregnancies. This decline in infant mortality rate is due in large part to the number of pregnant women receiving prenatal care. The number of pregnant women receiving prenatal care per year has increased from 8,500 in 2003 to 123,000 in 2006 (World Bank, 2007). Women are being incorporated more and more into the health field which shows obvious benefits.

My father was able to be a part of a graduation for midwives to witness other events in which women were receiving recognition. Throughout many missions, he was able to help transport aid to provide health care for children. My dad described the administration of medicine to children in a way that he understood. He wrote, "*They were deworming kids like*

they were steers” (N.T., personal communication, 2005). This crude sounding description helped me understand how troubling health care is in Afghanistan. My father went to Afghanistan during a time of improvements in the health care industry. Today, Afghanistan receives a large amount of aid from numerous organizations and is continuing to see a decrease in diseases and malnourished children. According to the World Bank Organization, the number of facilities with trained female health workers has increased from 25% before its aid project to 85% in 2007.

Overall, health care has significantly improved in a country that formerly had some of the worst statistics in health care. Slowly, advancements are increasing the quality of life for Afghans. The global efforts from non-profit organizations and charities to enhance healthcare is helping provide a foundation for good health. Organizations such as CARE and HASCO have provided resources for education. Others like Action Aid International have devoted its projects to improving poverty and healthcare.

Afghanistan - Conclusion

The people of Afghanistan have lived through many civil wars. They have experienced constant changes in the structure of their country and have witnessed revolutionary events. Operation Enduring Freedom called for a drastic change in the way Afghanistan worked. Though it seems that the main purpose of this current war was to retaliate against the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden, there were many more reasons for U.S. troops to be involved in Afghanistan once they arrived.

Afghanistan contains a unique physical geography that makes it difficult for people to learn about one another. Furthermore, the physical geography helps divide the country and the various ethnic groups. Instead of people from different backgrounds being able to come together, they are separated by mountain ranges, plateaus, and deserts. Harsh weather conditions create problems with growing crops and maintaining health. Man-made caves and tunnels within the mountain ranges create hiding places for people to attack one another. With this difficult terrain in Afghanistan, it is quite obvious to see why there is so much division.

Governance and political issues continue to be big concerns for the government of Afghanistan. A newly organized government is starting to make changes in rules and punishments. People are starting to experience a more democratically set-up government, yet there are still many issues to be resolved with politics in Afghanistan.

However, division among the people in Afghanistan does not occur simply due to the physical geography or politics. The ethnic diversity among the people creates conflicts regarding their way of life, religion, communication, and moral beliefs. The different ethnic groups are divided by regions and because there are so many, it is difficult to establish a rightfully dominant political group. Tension is created among the people when issues of religion or language are

mentioned for the country whole. Afghanistan does not have one unified population. It has several distinct populations of peoples trying to establish their way of life.

The difference in cultures and the constant struggle of war have negatively influenced education. Women were prohibited from attending school and many teachers escaped from Afghanistan because of the war. This in turn caused literacy rates to collapse to a worldwide low. The United States' involvement in Afghanistan has helped alleviate some of these problems by rebuilding schools and helping women back into the teaching workforce. It is difficult for schools to remain flourishing, but improvements in the education system continue to be made.

Women have endured severe oppression in Afghanistan, especially under the rule of the Taliban. My father witnessed the increase in women's rights gained in voting, working, going to school, and being able to provide for their family. Though most women are still required to wear burquas, some see a sense of individuality coming back by being able to show their faces. An increased number of women are working in health clinics, receiving healthcare, and obtaining a basic education.

Healthcare in Afghanistan was at one point the worst in the world. Thanks to the involvement of the United States and several other non-profit organizations, Afghanistan is experiencing better healthcare, especially for women. More women are receiving prenatal care, children are getting vaccinations, and more clinics are slowly opening. The infant mortality rate has dropped and longevity is slowly increasing.

With all that is occurring in Afghanistan, it is quite simple to see why it needs assistance from all over the world. Afghans need assistance, not war. My father went on a year-long tour in Afghanistan that showed him the true result of years of civil wars and foreign affairs. His primary purpose in being deployed overseas was not to go into combat, but to help rebuild a

nation in dire need of assistance. My dad went, witnessed, assisted, and came home. However, his experience is one that he will never forget and it was also one that taught me a lot. My father's experience and hopes for the country that he devoted a year of his time to is expressed in one simple quote from his journal. He wrote, "*It has been an interesting deployment. I have seen the good and bad of this country. Hopefully one day, these people will be able to support themselves*" (N.T., personal communication, 2006)

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