

# Civil affairs NCO fosters relationships to help build district's government

By Air Force Capt. David Tomiyama  
Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team

Though he had been in Afghanistan for only a few weeks, 1st Sgt. Thomas Walsh, the NCO in charge of civil affairs for the Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan, already had made months' worth of progress in connecting the people of the province's Terezayi district to their government.

Walsh built working relationships with the district governor and his staff, held key leader engagements with village elders, explored project options in the district and helped to plan several community meetings. It's all in a day's work, the 28-year Army reservist said.

"Civil affairs is about cultivating relationships, listening to the Afghans, understanding their culture and value system, and working with the district governor in any way I can," he said. "I work day to day with the district governor, building up his credibility and supporting his vision for Terezayi. We all win when the district wins."

Terezayi is close to the Pakistan border, six miles from the provincial capital of Khost, and one of the largest districts in Khost province. Terezayi residents often feel disconnected from their government, one of the many challenges Walsh said he faces daily.

"Terezayi has its shortcomings in areas that the people feel should be addressed," he said. "They often feel like the 'country bumpkins' compared to the city folks in Khost."

Other challenges in Terezayi include divisions among villages in the district. The civil war took its toll on their relationships and made them competitive in regard to the money spent on reconstruction and development projects, Walsh said.

But Walsh said he believes he has made great strides in helping the elders take control of their villages and secure their areas.

"I know I've made a difference with the village elders. They're not listening to negative influences, and they've given me their personal word there's no impro-

vised explosive devices on their roads or in their areas," Walsh said. "At one of the villages where I kept my word and brought a [provincial reconstruction team] engineer to check out potential projects, the village elder was so grateful, he wanted me to stay overnight. I told him I needed to be with my security detail, but he assured me I'd be safe in their village — that they would be my security."

Walsh's work as a one-man civil affairs team at Combat Outpost Terezayi has not gone unnoticed. Capt. Dan Leard, commander of "Able" Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, has nothing but praise for Walsh.

"I've had four [civil affairs] detachments out here during my rotation," Leard said. "In the last 10 days, 1st Sgt. Walsh has cultivated a relationship with the district governor and 16 village elders. The trust and bonds he's built has blown away anything the previous [civil affairs] teams did in months. His ... abilities are exceptional."



U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. David Tomiyama

First Sgt. Thomas Walsh, the Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team civil affairs NCO in charge, addresses an audience during a young men's shura July 9 at the Terezayi District Center. More than 100 young males attended the 90-minute shura, the second of its kind in Terezayi.

# NCO on leave uses weapons-handling, combatives skills to foil bank robbery

By C. Todd Lopez  
Army News Service

When Staff Sgt. Eddie Peoples went to the bank in Sarasota, Fla., May 31, he expected to walk out with a cashier's check. Instead he was caught up in a bank robbery that ended with the robber in cuffs and Peoples the hero.

Peoples, who is assigned to the 386th Movement Control Team, 14th Transportation Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, out of Vicenza, Italy, was visiting family members in Florida. It was while on leave and conducting business in a Bank of America branch in Sarasota with his sons Ikaika and Kioni in tow that Peoples ran into bank robber Matthew Rogers.

"A gunman came into the bank, demanded money — brandishing a large caliber handgun, I thought at first — [and] basically putting a lot of people in jeopardy," Peoples said.

A surveillance video shows Peoples' initial reaction to the gunman. While his two boys hid under chairs in the bank's lobby, Peoples dragged two larger chairs in front of them, putting some protection between his children and the gunman.

Moments later, 34-year-old Rogers left the bank for his vehicle. Peoples followed him out the door.

"Outside, I knew that it would just be me and him," Peoples said, saying that inside the bank, any confrontation with Rogers might end in bystanders getting hurt. "That was my main concern ... my children and the innocent bystanders."

Outside, Rogers ran to his vehicle, and Peoples got into his own vehicle. Some quick jockeying in the parking lot allowed Peoples to block Rogers' escape.

"Basically I just backed out, made a big huge U-turn and put my vehicle directly behind him," Peoples said. "It seemed like forever, but I know it was probably for only about 30 seconds."

Frustrated, Rogers got out of his own vehicle, and Peoples was able to temporarily pin Rogers between the two vehicles for a moment.

"He shouted at me, raised his weapon and came around the vehicle in order to keep me there," Peoples said. "I fully expected to take at least two shots through the window."

Fortunately for Peoples, Rogers didn't shoot at him. But he did try unsuccessfully to get inside his rental vehicle through the rear door.

"I knew at that point I was in a bad situation, and I had to get out and face this guy," Peoples said. He put his vehicle in park and opened his driver-side door.



Photo courtesy Sarasota Sheriff's Office  
Sarasota, Fla., Sheriff Tom Knight presents a certificate to Staff Sgt. Eddie Peoples for his role in apprehending a bank robber.

"I was greeted with a handgun in my face," he said. "But since I was so close to him, it was easy to take the gun away. I basically did a wrist lock, pulled it back, intending to use that weapon as a blunt weapon to hit him with."

It was then Peoples realized the "gun" was too light to be real and too light even to be used as a blunt weapon. So instead, Peoples grabbed the criminal and slammed him to the ground. Taking the weapon from Rogers and putting him on the ground are reflexes Peoples said he learned in the Army.

"I've gone through combatives. I've gone through weapon handling. I've gone through the proper way to discharge a weapon, the proper way to take a weapon. I'm pretty well-versed in taking care of people like this. I owe that to the Army."

Peoples said that after putting Rogers to the ground, Peoples identified himself as a Soldier.

"He didn't want any more after that," Peoples said. "He basically covered on the ground and the police showed up."

Peoples said he had been concerned that Rogers, after leaving the bank, would continue to be a threat to civilians outside — especially if there was a chase with police. He knew there was a risk to himself for getting involved, but it was something he said as a Soldier he was prepared to accept.

"I knew the risk the moment this bank robber stepped out the door, and I accepted that risk." As a Soldier, Peoples said, "we accept these risks all the time."

# NCO delivers morale boost with air drops of care packages to remote areas

By Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown  
10th Combat Aviation Brigade

Many deployed Soldiers sacrifice common comforts to accomplish their units' missions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Some reside in remote areas, work with no running water, consume only prepackaged meals, receive mail infrequently and have no electricity.

Sgt. Paul Roberts, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter door gunner with B Company, 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, a Reserve unit serving with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force Phoenix, at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, made it his personal mission to provide care packages for Soldiers located in these remote areas.

"I was an infantry Soldier when I first entered the Army in 1989, so I know firsthand how difficult it can be living under these conditions," Roberts said. "I took it upon myself to go to all the units at Bagram asking for anything they could donate to help these Soldiers."

Roberts said he understands how important receiving mail is for the morale of deployed Soldiers.

"We fly all over Afghanistan and see the living conditions [of] some of our fellow Soldiers ... which are extremely rough," Roberts said. "Whenever we fly [into remote locations], we always do our best to give them whatever we can."

Roberts and his crew make quick supply drops to many areas that do not have common amenities. During these scheduled flights, Roberts and his crew quickly unload the supplies, as well as care packages for the Soldiers. The supplies are often delivered quickly without landing, and only in rare circumstances does the crew get to interact with the Soldiers they help.

"[On one occasion], instead of just dropping off the load and immediately taking off, we landed. This is something we do not do very often," Roberts said. "One of the Soldiers assigned there walked over to our bird and looked in. We gave him the first of a long line of donated boxes. It took about one minute, and we had about 30 Soldiers running to our bird to get the rest. It felt like Christmas in July to us."

The leadership within Roberts' unit supports his endeavors



Photo by Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown

Soldiers from B Company, 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, a reserve unit serving with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force Phoenix, prepare to drop supplies and care packages Aug. 25 near an isolated forward operating base in Afghanistan.

and has noticed the positive effect it has had on Soldiers.

"I believe that Sgt. Roberts' efforts have improved the morale of our [unit]," said 1st Sgt. Todd Carter, the first sergeant of D Company, 7th Battalion. "Every Soldier knows what it is like to receive a package from home. Getting the opportunity to help Soldiers in austere conditions makes us feel good."

Carter said he is immensely impressed by Roberts' drive to help other Soldiers.

"I have never witnessed one Soldier support [so many] other Soldiers in the way that Sgt. Roberts has. He is the epitome of selfless service," Carter said.

Carter added that the experience is rewarding for his Soldiers when they see the joy they can bring to others.

"It is great to see the smiling faces at [remote bases] when we arrive," Carter said. "It's like Santa coming in a big green Chinook."

"My goal is to boost their morale," Roberts said. "I just want to let them know that other Soldiers and civilians care about them."

# Always mission ready: NCO's efforts aid company's readiness, efficiency

By Sgt. Kandi Huggins  
1st Advise and Assist Task Force, 1st ID

After 14 years of service and three deployments serving as an infantryman and cavalry scout, Sgt. Reginald Alexander is in Iraq for a second time. This time he's keeping troops informed in support of Operation New Dawn.

During his first deployment to Iraq from 2004 to 2005, Alexander's unit was tasked to conduct combat patrols in Baghdad, he said. During his second deployment, Alexander has a different mission, as the company intelligence support team NCO in charge within G Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Advise and Assist Task Force, 1st Infantry Division, at Contingency Operating Site Warrior, Iraq.

"Before, it was more hands-on, and I was more exposed to the Iraqi population," Alexander said. "We were responsible for keeping the district free of violent extremist groups ... and provided security for the first democratic elections in Iraq."

Alexander said he spent 11 years in the National Guard as a scout and infantryman, but decided to go active duty for stability and to encounter new challenges.

As the company intelligence support team NCOIC, Alexander works with Soldiers and interpreters to provide intelligence reports to other Soldiers before they leave Contingency Operating Site Warrior for missions and engagements.

"As the COIST NCOIC, I follow attack trends, map the safest routes and plan alternate routes based on the current threat levels our [intelligence] has noted," Alexander said. "My job is pertinent because it gives the Soldiers situational awareness of threat levels; enemy tactics,

techniques and procedures; and an idea of what they need to look for when they are out in-sector."

"He is definitely an asset," said Staff Sgt. Eric Harleston, the operations NCOIC of G Company. "Operations would be hurt without him. He sets up everything before the guys roll out. All they have to do is get in their vehicles and accomplish their mission."

Harleston said since working with Alexander the past two years, his professional respect for him continues to increase.

"He works hard," Harleston said. "He always leads by example. He is never the type of leader to just dictate and tell his Soldiers to do this or do that. He goes out there with his Soldiers and helps them, or learns what their job is to understand how it

better helps him be more of an asset to their growth and development."

Though Alexander spends most of his time at COS Warrior, Harleston said he goes out on missions from time to time, which aids his understanding of what his briefings can do for the unit.

"It's a good thing for him to go out because he is better able to visualize the terrain and area," Harleston said. "When you see it firsthand, it's different. With him going out on missions, he is able to ... determine different things that will allow our operations to run effectively and efficiently."

Alexander said that even though it is a new experience and challenge, his time as COIST NCOIC has been rewarding because no personnel have been casualties of enemy action while he has been doing his job.

He is grateful his experiences and prior deployments allow him to provide leadership and expertise to his fellow Soldiers. He said he looks forward to taking that experience with him as he progresses in his career in the Army.



Photo by Sgt. Kandi Huggins

Sgt. Reginald Alexander conducts a mission brief Aug. 24 prior to Soldiers leaving Contingency Operating Site Warrior, Iraq, for a mission.