

USIP - ADST  
Afghanistan Experience Project

**Interview #19**

**Executive Summary**

The interviewee served with the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamian Province, Afghanistan from July to December 2004 as an agricultural advisor.

**Briefings and preparation for the assignment**

The best I had was from someone who was there before me in Bamian; I did meet with him for about an hour a couple of weeks before I left.

**Local situation**

- I never saw that much green in a country that was so destitute and I didn't expect to see that much agriculture in Afghanistan. There was a lot of wheat starting to be harvested and the potatoes were almost ready to flower out by the time I got there even in July.
- The New Zealand military (Kiwi) base was very stable, very secure. The PRT was very much welcome all over the area. Any time I was out on patrol with them we got the same reaction whether we were American or Kiwis; they really appreciated us being there and showed their thanks.
- All through the province there were IEDs reported, but nothing that was directed at the PRT or Americans.

**Mission of the PRT, its organization and funding**

- Overall, the PRT mission was to maintain the security of the region and then, secondarily, it was to start rebuilding the infrastructure of the region: roads, bridges, highways, buildings, clinics, hospitals, schools, and the university.
- The Kiwi PRT had a New Zealand military commander. A Development Group reported to the Commander. We all had access to the DFID money from Britain. I had access to the CERP money from the Commander of the Civilian Affairs Officer. I had access to USAID money, but anything that I might request was subject to the Development Group. They had to review and approve the proposal before it went to the Commander.

**PRT projects, objectives and the NGOs**

- When I did go out I was able to work directly with the Save the Women and Children of Afghanistan, SWCA;
- There was a fish hatchery project that I was hoping to get funded before I left;
- Our credo at the PRTs was sustainability;
- There were a lot of NGOs in town;
- As far as helping each other, it was very well coordinated.

**Accomplishments**

- The best thing I did probably was reestablish good relationships with the NGOs in

town because when I got there I was told that most of the agricultural NGOs didn't think the PRT was worthwhile; that we really shouldn't be there. The general feeling with NGOs in country, of course, was that the PRTs don't know what they're doing in development work, but what I felt the best about was that I did get along with the people at Solidarities and I did work very closely with UNFAO and those are two of the agencies that really didn't seem to have much need or desire to work with PRT. I think I built a bridge there and that's what I'm happy I was able to accomplish.

- In agriculture, I think they (the PRT) could have done more. They didn't seem to understand why I was put there. They really didn't seem to understand that I was supposed to be a part of their team going out with them to do anything on the ground. I think the lack of communication from somewhere didn't get to them that I was supposed to be actually a part of the PRT plan that I was supposed to be included in their patrol units and not have to ask or basically beg for a vehicle and shooters.
- The Commander did ask USDA for an agricultural advisor. In their mind, it would make them look good to support the United States mission over there on the ground by having a USDA rep

### **Democratic processes and governance improvements**

- DFID was helping the local provincial governor and the different department heads under him; trying to help them reestablish a democratic system and the governance policies that would apply to each of those like agriculture, human services, health.
- In my last month (I was there five months) I watched the capacity grow and get better at every meeting. By the last meeting the Director of Agriculture called the meeting to order; he had an agenda; he had minutes; he kept control of the meeting; he approved or didn't approve projects people wanted to talk to him about. That to me was really neat to watch because he went from sitting at a meeting saying I don't know; I have no idea what to do; what do you want me to do; what do you want me to say to actually controlling his meeting and knowing what he needed to do.

### **Police Training**

That was a big part of what the PRT got involved with; a couple of the local security agencies that were in town did the field and police training. The U.S. was building the police training center.

### **Program Pillars**

Priorities were set according to "program pillars": 1. Governance and democracy, 2. Infrastructure, 3. Education, 4. Economy including agriculture; 5 ? 6. Humanitarian relief (changing hearts and minds), which changed in priority depending on emergency conditions. They were defined by all of us (the Development Group).

### **The National Election**

- I wasn't allowed to leave the base. It really frustrated me.
- It went very smoothly. People were leaving homes we heard at 4:00 in the morning to get to the election sites. They walked three to ten hours just to get somewhere to vote, but they did it.

### **Role of the central government**

- The Kabul government and their linkage with the Bamian provincial government: I think they were very closely linked. My Director of Agriculture went to Kabul quite often to work with the Minister of Agriculture. He kept circumventing the Governor of Bamian, even though one of my goals there was to try to get him to work through the Governor
- There was a real effort in Bamian to extend the government's work in the rural areas, The PRT patrol unit seemed to do a lot of that like they were the extension agents to some degree because they could carry messages from the Governor; the Commander and the Governor met quite often.

### **Impact of the PRTs**

- None of the other provinces were up to speed on governance systems and democracy and the judicial system, but we were (in Bamiam). To me if one province out of the 34 is doing that then I think they've (the PRTs) made a difference.

### **The future of the Bamiam PRT and lessons**

- I personally don't think that (phasing out the PRT) will be for quite a while, but I did find out that the Bamian PRT is being turned over to ISAF. New Zealanders will still be there. They'll just fall under the Commander for the ISAF.
- The ISAF phase out: I think it will be at least 20 years, if I were to guess and that's given stability if nothing happens and we don't lose the country over the next election. I think the Provincial governments can take hold sooner than that. I don't think that we're going to back out or I don't think we should back out either until they are established long term. The population is extremely poor.
- The other PRTs need to look at Bamian as an example;
- The PRT got a head start on getting all of the other dominos to fall into place owing to popular (local) support for the U.S before the PRT started.
- Better communications: I think they (the NGOs) want to work closely with the PRT and they felt like the PRT would shut them out a lot of the time. In the other provinces the PRT doesn't share security information with some of the people out there unprotected.
- Going out with the armed guards inhibited you from talking to the local communities? No, not at all. I kind of thought it might, but they seemed to welcomed them. They felt more protected by them.
- My bigger hindrance was that I wish I had a female interpreter.
- The ability to get out into the country frequently: the Commander didn't build me into his movement. That was a real frustration. I thought that because I was invited to be there and they welcomed me to be there, they should have planned for me better.
- I liked the visibility that Development Group had. I was frustrated as the USDA representative because I didn't have my own pot of money to spend and do my projects.
- Recommended to USDA that they not put someone there as a replacement

### **Conclusion**

- I think the PRTs are in the right place. I think they're trying to do the right thing.
- I think our Ambassador and the General's relationship was a real big part of the reason why we've made such strides in the time we have.

*United States Institute of Peace*  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Afghanistan Experience Project

**Interview #19**

*Interviewed by: Haven North*  
*Initial interview date: May 5, 2005*  
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*Q: When were you in Afghanistan? What period of time?*

A: July through December 2004.

*Q: Where were you located?*

A: I was stationed at Bamian. It's in the central highlands region.

*Q: Your position was?*

A: Agricultural Marketing Advisor.

*Q: I see. In that area how would you describe the situation as you saw it when you arrived there?*

A: Securitywise?

*Q: Well, security and economic, the political situation.*

A: I guess when I first flew in the thing that struck me the most about the region was the potatoes that were grown. Being an agriculturist it was pretty amazing to me. I had served in Africa in the Sahara Desert and I never saw that much green in a country that was so destitute and I didn't expect to see that much agriculture in Afghanistan. I was really surprised. There was a lot of wheat starting to be harvested and the potatoes were almost ready to flower out by the time I got there in July even.

*Q: What about the security situation?*

A: Well, it was very stable. The New Zealand military unit that I was stationed with, it was called Kiwi Base because the New Zealanders called themselves Kiwis. Kiwi Base was very stable, very secure. They were welcome and very much welcome all over the area. The entire province would cheer and clap and thank them and any time I was out on patrol with them we got the same reaction whether we were being American or Kiwis, they really appreciated us being there and showed their thanks.

*Q: Were you able to go out alone, or did you have to go with a security force?*

A: I had to stay with the security force from the base. That was the USDA requirement was that we meet all the commander's requirements. The commander's requirement was that we stay with two shooters and the vehicle with the driver and one of the shooters could be the driver or not, but we still had to be with the vehicle and the two shooters. The vehicles were not armored.

*Q: You didn't have any incidents?*

A: Not specifically with me. I mean during the buildup to the election before October 9<sup>th</sup> there was a lot of security flare-ups all through the province where there were IEDs reported where kids might have planted them, a lot of different little things, but nothing that was directed at the PRT or Americans or anything like that specifically.

*Q: Okay. What was the mission of the PRT overall?*

A: Overall it was to maintain the security of the region and then to secondarily it was to start rebuilding the infrastructure of the region.

*Q: What infrastructure are we talking about specifically?*

A: Roads, bridges, highways, buildings, clinics, hospitals, schools, university. Actually we rebuilt the university. It opened just after I got there. That was one of the.

*Q: This university was called?*

A: University of Bamian. It was actually blown up by the U.S. because it was a Taliban stronghold and the U.S. forces blew it up there when we went there and they promised to rebuild it and they did. Kind of a joint effort. The U.S. built the building and the New Zealand Kiwis once they took over the base it reestablished everything inside, the computers. They had two really nice computer labs and all the classrooms, all the books, all the textbooks, the library, the New Zealanders supplied that, but the U.S. built the building.

*Q: Did it have an agricultural?*

A: They had 142 students and 92 of them supposedly were agricultural students, but they really didn't study livestock health or anything that way. It was more horticulturally related.

*Q: I see. How was the PRT organized?*

A: Well, the way I was put in there I was part of a development group and at the time of there were 19 PRTs in-country and the Bamian PRT is the only one that has this type of structure internally with the PRT. The development group consisted of the U.S. army

civilian affairs officer who was assigned there. He was out of Bagram. We had a USAID representative who was out of Kabul from USAID. We had a DFID representative, the British counterpart to USAID Agency for International Development out of Britain and there was a State Department representative as well as myself from USDA. We actually had our office, plywood building that we all worked out of and worked beside each other to coordinate all the different projects that we might fund.

*Q: Was there a head to the development group?*

A: No, we were all equal in the group, however, the New Zealand unit had an engineer as part of the group and he coordinated any money that came from New Zealand, so being a New Zealand PRT they pretty much had the final say in any projects, the commander did.

*Q: So, you all reported to the commander?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Then he had a whole military contingent as well.*

A: About 120 on base.

*Q: I see. This was a New Zealander who was in charge.*

A: Yes.

*Q: The funding came you said from New Zealand, but where else?*

A: The U.S. army civilian affairs army officer had U.S. army money. ODECA funds and he had the CERP the Commanders Emergency Relief Program funds and we also had the DFID gentleman. He had quite a bit of money, about a million dollars all together.

*Q: I see.*

A: The State Department didn't bring money. She actually was there as a political advisor for any of the projects to make sure we didn't step outside the bounds of what the U.S. government would want the Kiwis to be doing or saying or representing for the U.S. purposes. Then there was myself, USDA, we didn't bring any monies. We kind of took the money from other groups that we thought might have a beneficial part in the redevelopment of any of the agriculture.

*Q: You didn't get any USAID money?*

A: Well, being part of the development group in that, it had a really good benefit and it had its downside. The benefit was they had access to the DFID money from Britain. I had access to the CERP money from the commander, not the commander, but the

lieutenant colonel who was in charge of the civilian affairs officer. I had access to USAID money, but anything that I might request was subject to them. They had to review the proposal and then they had to approve it before it went to the commander.

*Q: They being?*

A: The development group, my counterparts, from DFID, USAID and the army officer.

*Q: I see. You say there was a counterpart group?*

A: That was my group that I worked within because I didn't bring money to the table, any projects that I might want to do.

*Q: So, they had to review your request?*

A: Yes and they had to approve it before it went to the commander. Some of the PRTs and you've probably talked to some, you said like Mahmood, it's my understanding that the USDA person could just go to the commander with a project and get it approved, but in my case because we had the DG underneath the commander, I had to pass it through them first and make sure they thought it was worthwhile. A lot of the times they didn't. A lot of the times my projects that I might want to do were not recommended to the commander because they didn't think it was appropriate use of the money for some reason.

*Q: What did you do? What were your projects? What were you trying to accomplish?*

A: I didn't get off base as much as I wanted to because of the as I was told a couple of times by the commander and some of the people under him that I was taking resources away from a military operation anytime I went out. That was very frustrating at times. When I did go out I was able to work directly with the Save the Women and Children of Afghanistan, SWCA. (One woman I met) was actually implementing a garden project in the valley next door to us. It was a gardening and horticultural project. It had about 18 different types of vegetables from radishes to turnips to potatoes and wheat, the normal stock, but she was teaching women that they could actually grow these crops on their own and then market them. She turned to the PRT to get some funding to buy the seeds and have the women paid to plant the product and actually help them get started as a women's coop type thing.

*Q: Is this the little local NGO you were talking about? What was it?*

A: No, well, she was, yes, Save the Women and Children of Afghanistan was. It was her own pretty much an offshoot of Save the Women and Children, but she was the one (inaudible).

*Q: She was an Afghan woman.*

A: Yes. Very smart woman. Never missed a day when she could be at the front gate asking for money for some project, she was there, but she was actually written up in the Washington Post. Her project was written up by, I can't remember the lady's name, but a Washington Post female who lived 18 months over there I think. I have an Afghanistan article about her, but she actually did a very nice large write up right after I got over to Bamian about this whole project. She had a few of her facts wrong. She didn't know it was U.S. funded and she kind of missed the point as to who was actually behind it, but she did pretty good from somebody who came in from the outside and didn't really, she didn't come to the PRT and ask any questions, so she kind of went by what she knew.

*Q: This project was trying to do what, I think you mentioned it, but if you could review that again.*

A: It was mostly women working in the valley growing their own vegetable gardens, large growing area, not just little background gardens, acres and acres, hectors of it and then selling them in the market place. The biggest thing was that they were growing their own as women and harvesting that and marketing it all on their own as females instead of the men doing any part of it. There was a dairy cow genetic diversity project and we called it the woolly sheep project. We had 300 sheep brought in from a province outside Bamian and 10 dairy cattle brought in from another province to breed back against some of the cattle and the sheep in Bamian to try to mix up the genetic diversity and get the productivity a little bit better. The Taliban pretty much killed all the livestock and during the meantime they've been inbreeding all their animals and they have no genetic diversity and thereby their producing decreases. You don't get as much milk production or meat production or anything out of the animal if they're inbred.

*Q: I see. Was there another project?*

A: There was a fish hatchery project that I was hoping to get funded before I left.

*Q: A what project?*

A: Fish hatchery.

*Q: Oh, fish, yes, right.*

A: A gentleman from Iran, he's an Afghan man who lived in Iran for 25 years and built five fish hatcheries over there and he came back to Bamian and he actually put in \$25,000 of his own money and then he came to the PRT requesting that further funding to continue to fund his project. He wasn't done putting the hatcheries and the breeding, the egg breeding building in yet, so he asked us for some more money, about \$25,000 more matching money to continue to do that. What he wanted to do was freeze the fish and take them to Kabul and market them to the restaurant clientele in Kabul, but as part of the agreement for the development group to accept that project they said no, it would have to directly benefit the people of Bamian province. We said no to the freezer and no to him shipping any of the fish to Kabul at the point that we were helping him for the first



few years. He would have to actually market fresh fish in the market of Bamian so that he could increase the protein value of the people there locally, not just ship it all to Kabul because he could make more money at it. There was some give and take in the contract. We had to negotiate things like that.

*Q: Right. He was just an individual as part of your development team?*

A: Yes. He was just a man who came up and said this is what I want to do. He was referred to me by Solidarities which is another NGO there mostly French. Solidarities was the name of it and I dealt with a gentleman there who called me and told me that this guy was legitimate and he really did know how to.

*Q: This was an American?*

A: No, this was French, a French NGO.

*Q: A French group. I see.*

A: We got along very well actually.

*Q: Good.*

A: I worked well with them. The gentleman there was okay and we met quite a few times about projects because he'd been there for two years and was going on a third year in country as an individual, not just the agency to him personally, so he knew what projects would and wouldn't fly and what might be sustainable. Our credo at the PRTs is sustainability and a long term sustainability of anything we took on was what we were trying to shoot for. Then UNFAO, United Nations Food Agricultural Organization, chief of that mission called me and also vouched for this gentleman that they couldn't supply funding for him, but they felt that the hatchery was a worthwhile project if we could find the money to do it. We pretty well coordinated all of our efforts the best we could.

*Q: Were there any other projects or NGOs that you associated with?*

A: There were a lot of NGOs in town. SWCA, UNAMA, the United Nations mission in general when it was there, UNFAO and Solidarities were my primary counterparts as far as NGOs in town as well as the PRT. I shouldn't say it like that, that sounds negative. Working with the PRT. There was AKDN, Aga Khan Development Network and they were very heavily involved of course in agricultural projects, but I really didn't deal with them much because a lot of those were out of town. My mobility was pretty much limited to Bamian central and the immediate surrounding area; I didn't get to work with them very often on projects. There was another group down in the South that I didn't work with that often. They also had a dairy cow project where they were trying to do pretty much the same thing as we were up North in their genetic.

*Q: Were they reasonably well coordinated or were they communicating pretty well with*

*each other?*

A: They were within themselves and I only heard from them periodically. I really didn't have a lot of contact with them, but it was always very positive when we did. I helped them if I could, they helped me if they could. It was limited contact because we just didn't overlap in our areas of work. As far as helping each other, it was very well coordinated. Nobody seemed to have any problem giving up information to each other.

*Q: There was quite a lot of activity going on in the area then.*

A: There was a lot, more than I would have guessed when I first got there, that's for sure. It probably took me the first two months there to figure out who was who and who was who in town and whom I can trust. That was a lot of it, figuring out what to do.

*Q: Did you have any briefing or preparation before going out there to help you understand what was going on?*

A: The best I had was a gentleman who was there before me actually in Bamian, (name). I don't know if you've talked to him or not, he's over there again for this third time. He's gone back twice since his first six months, but he was one of USDA's original three men. We had (three names). It wasn't (name); it was another guy (name). (Name) had actually been stationed at Bamian at the same PRT under a different commander, so I did meet with him about an hour a couple of weeks before I left and he kind of briefed me on what he'd been working on and really there wasn't much overlap in his projects versus my projects. He was into water management and reforestation and my background is livestock, animal health and marketing. We didn't have a lot of the overlap.

*Q: What would you conclude that you specifically were able to accomplish while you ere there?*

A: I guess, I keep looking at that whole thing. I can say something positive. The best thing I did probably was reestablish good relationships with the NGOs in town because when I got there I was told that most of the agricultural NGOs didn't think the PRT was worthwhile, that we really shouldn't be there. We weren't needed. The general feeling with NGOs in country of course was that the PRTs don't know what they're doing in development work, but what I felt the best about was that I did get along with \_\_\_\_\_ at Solidarities and I did work very closely with UNFAO and those are two of the agencies that really didn't seem to have much need or desire to work with PRT, but when I went there and I worked with them as closely as I could, I think I built a bridge there and that's what I'm happy I was able to accomplish. If nothing else, many of the projects, at lest the PRT and the local two agricultural agencies seemed to be getting along and working with each other.

*Q: So, I gather there's a lot of resentment about having a PRT among the NGO committee?*

A: It didn't seem to be so much outward resentment as I've heard in others. When I went to the commanders' conference in November I heard a lot more and it seemed to be more at the base where it was still U.S. I was at New Zealand and the Kiwis are pretty easy going, laid back, military group. So, I didn't feel like they really resented us, they just didn't really think they needed to include the (inaudible), the development group in some of their plans. If they needed money for something, certainly they would come up to the PRT and make themselves known, but for agricultural purposes they really didn't. Even with our other USDA rep there they told me that they really hadn't dealt with him that much. I think trying to build that bridge, for me it was important because I kept hearing that that just wasn't happening. I thought well, if nothing else at least I can make a committed effort to these two groups so that they can continue to work with each other whatever happens.

*Q: Good. What about were there any specific accomplishments apart from building bridges in terms of actual on the groundwork?*

A: Outside of the agriculture, there were a lot of bridges built. There were a lot of schools built. The Japanese pretty much were funding JICA, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. They are funding a lot of the hospitals and clinics. I was actually surprised and very pleased to see that JICA had come in and built a completely equipped veterinary clinic, but they weren't using it because they had no way to pay anybody to work there. The facility was there. They had microscopes. They had autoclaves. They had gloves and sterile equipment and right down to horse hoof trimmers and castrators. I was just like a kid in a candy store as a vet tech walking through, saying oh my gosh, I couldn't imagine it would be there, but nobody was working there. The business is not running. It's part of the Department of Agriculture in Bamian, but they have no way to fund anybody's salary. They have a vet that they want to pay, but they don't have the money. I'm curious to see in the future how that all works out. That was a positive for the whole, actually it's probably the best equipped one in the country from what I was told by other provinces, but nobody was working at it. So not doing anybody any good until they can actually get somebody in and start drawing blood samples and do some testing for anthrax or anything else.

*Q: What would you say was the PRTs contribution was to agricultural development?*

A: I think they could have done more. They didn't seem to understand why I was put there. They were happy to have me, they didn't mind that I lived there as I was told other USDA reps were not welcome. They ere charged for their food at the mess hall or tried to charge them, I guess they didn't actually, but they tried to charge them. I was welcome to live there, eat their food, live there all day, all night and they really didn't seem to understand that I was supposed to be a part of their team going out with them to do anything on the ground. I think the lack of communication from somewhere didn't get to them that I was supposed to be actually a part of the PRT plan that I was supposed to be included in their patrol units and not have to ask or basically beg for a vehicle and shooters and all that. I felt guilty. I mean I didn't want to take away from the military operation either. I didn't feel like I had the right to ask them for that even though that's

what I needed more of to do my job. In general, I mean they did support what we did, it was the engineer from the PRT who actually signed off on the money for the genetic diversity project with the dairy cows and the sheep. I mean they did support it in some ways, but as far as having an actual physical body there, I recommended when I left not to replace me because I didn't think there was enough understanding on the commander's part to support having somebody like me there. I just didn't think I had the. UNFAO and Solidarities are there. They can get out and around. It's a very stable environment. They're not hindered in their own work as NGOs in the entire province. They can move where they want to without fear, so really to have a USDA person on the PRT, I didn't think it was really necessary to have somebody with shooters and armed guards all the time because the other NGOs were doing a fine job. I think that's why I got along with them is because I acknowledge the fact that they were doing wonderful work and they had been for years. Three years at least and they got around just fine. They didn't need to worry about their own safety so there was nothing I was going to do more above that from being protected and guarded on the PRT side if I'd gotten out.

*Q: I'm not clear, how did you happen to get assigned there, did they ask for someone?*

A: They did. They asked for someone.

*Q: They asked for an agriculturist?*

A: Well, they wanted to replace the one that was there. Manuel was there and Manuel was put there for whatever reason I don't know. You'd probably have to ask Manuel how he was selected. I think because it was stable and first of all because it was very safe. When the USDA was putting people there he was one of the first three of us to go at all and it was one of the safest ones to go to. I think that safety of the personnel there was primary and that was a very stable place so they put him there. He recommended of course that he be replaced. Well, I was the first female to go and as far as I know I'm still the only one. There's two more in the pipeline, but I don't know if they've gotten there yet, but I was the only female and I think that's probably my opinion is that that was because I was female that I was put there. My marketing background could have been very well utilized if they had roads and trucks to take the potatoes over to Kabul and over to Pakistan, but we really didn't have that kind of infrastructure yet locally that I could even do marketing.

*Q: But there was no specific request for somebody with a marketing background?*

A: They said marketing and livestock healthcare would go well. I think it was just oh, gee, that would be good. He was water resource and reforestation management, so between Manuel and I we had totally different backgrounds. They didn't have any problem. They weren't against me coming. I don't know that they specifically asked for someone.

*Q: They being the commander?*

A: The commander. I think I'm guessing here, but I'm thinking it's because it makes them, in their mind it would make them look good to support the United States mission over there on the ground and that's to have a USDA rep. I mean President Bush asked Rumsfeld to ask Secretary Veneman to get some USDA people over there on the ground and do some work. I think safety was a priority as far as putting USDA people there, so that was the I think the main reason they put somebody there in that region.

*Q: Does the USDA deal directly with the PRT commander?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Not through some central channel?*

A: No. My boss Otto Gonzalez who was at the time the supervisor back here for the program, I think he still is, he talked directly with the commanders of all the PRTs as to what their needs were. Even though they assured him that they could use me and wanted me there, as I say I was very welcome, they didn't mind that I lived there. They were very hospitable, very pleasant. I got a lot of good friends out of the group, but they really probably didn't need to have me there and I just don't think they wanted to say no to the United States. My feeling was that it was more political, yes, gee, we'll have somebody here because you asked us to and we're not going to say no to the U.S. because they didn't have any meat in this thing. I don't think they really had the calling to have someone there doing work.

*Q: Were there other Americans there besides you?*

A: I was the, myself and then there was the USAID guy. He left in August. He was only there about a month while I was there. He was the USAID representative. The State Department rep, the political officer, she was there and then we had I think it was at one point we had 12 American military on base anywhere from the civilian affairs army officer that I worked with everyday, I also lived in the same hut with him and the USAID guy and the DFID guy, me and three men in a hut.

*Q: Oh my.*

A: We also had some tactical human intelligence assigned there out of Bagram and then there was just some communications people that were working with the Kiwis in the communication center.

*Q: I see. Were you aware of any work being done to promote any democratic processes or improve the governance of the situation working with the?*

A: Yes, that was the British guy, DFID, Jonathan. That was his entire mission. That was his only mission was to use his money that he had to further the cause of governance and to help him reestablish their structural system in town. His money had to be, that's when I say my not having money hindered me in ways because some things that he might

wanted to fund he just simply wasn't allowed to because that's not the intent of his goal. That was his entire goal as the British governance guy, he was supposed to help them reestablish and help them to structure their meetings, help them to understand how to hold a meeting. UNAMA.

*Q: They being what?*

A: The British DFID.

*Q: Who were they helping?*

A: The local provincial governor.

*Q: The provincial governor, I see.*

A: And everybody under him as far as the different department heads as trying to help them reestablish a democratic system and the governance policies that would apply to each of those like agriculture, human services, health.

*Q: Did you have any sense of how that was going?*

A: Actually really well. I'm just in my own arena; he went to my first agricultural meeting with me, the director of Agriculture. We had meetings every two weeks with like all the agricultural organizations and of course all the health organizations. When I went to the AG one and this gentleman came with me and it was very interesting because I watched this new, well, he wasn't new, he'd been over there probably a year and a half, the director of Agriculture go from looking at the UNAMA representative. She was a lady, an American woman actually, but she was born and raised over there for 25 years and she was helping them along with this guy that I worked with Jonathan to run the meeting. I mean she would tell the director of Agriculture to take control of it. Go ahead and run the meeting. He said, "Well, what do you want me to say, what do you want me to do?" He didn't understand that you're supposed to come to the meeting with minutes and that you're supposed to start on time and that you were supposed to end when you would say you would end and that you come to the next meeting with minutes from the last meeting to read back to people. It was really interesting to see how much effort they put in there. Bamian was considered by far and away the furthest ahead of the game in that. When I went to the commander's conference, General Olson and, yes, it was General Olson out of Bagram said that there wasn't anybody in the whole theater over there that he thought was to the point where they could actually hold their own meetings and that they really needed some hand holding to get them through all that. I really was biting my tongue. I didn't want to correct the general in front of everybody, in front of all his 19 commanders, but the gentleman with the State Department, Bill McCullough, he stood up and he said, "Well, sir, I beg to differ, but Bamian is a very good example of where we've actually done that and they are holding their own meetings." They've been doing it for the four months that I'd been there and they have continued. My last month I was there five months and I watched it grow and get better at every meeting. By the last

meeting the director of Agriculture called the meeting to order, he had an agenda, he had minutes, he kept control of the meeting, he approved or didn't approve projects people wanted to talk to him about. That to me was really neat to watch because he went from sitting at a meeting saying I don't know, I have no idea what to do, what do you want me to do, what do you want me to say to actually controlling his meeting and knowing what he needed to do.

*Q: He again is who?*

A: The director of Agriculture.

*Q: Right, okay.*

A: In Bamian at a provincial level. So, when I went to this commanders' conference and the general out of Bagram said that that wasn't happening I went up to him after the break. I didn't want to say anything in front of everyone, but I went up to him and I told him I was a representative of Bamian and I certainly had seen in the five months I was there the provincial governorship right on down through all the different directors had learned how to hold their meetings and they were doing that very well. I'd gone to the health meeting. I'd gone to Agriculture and a couple of other ones and they were doing it. He said, "Well, that's good to hear." I said, "I understand you don't want your commanders thinking they can back off on their province because not all the provinces were where we were at, but I think it's important to know Bamian is doing that and they've been doing it for quite a few months. They've been trying to do it for over a year and a half when UNAMA went in and started with these agencies. I guess it just happened to be luck on my part to see that process actually take hold and the directors finally start taking some ownership of their own, the department heads." It was something.

*Q: Well, this is outside of your field, but were you aware of any police training going on while you were there?*

A: Yes there was. That was a big part of what the PRT got involved with a couple of the local security agencies that were in town to do the field and police training. The U.S. was building the police training center and that was a big controversial thing when I went there. The training center was actually going to be constructed in view of the (inaudible) that had been destroyed and that was pretty controversial. The State Department actually had a person leave out of there because they didn't agree with building the police center or the training center where they wanted it and that person was removed. I went in with the new lady and they decided then to go ahead and build the police training center which consisted of tents, but then they lost funding after the elections it seemed to start sliding. When I left in December it was pretty much in a state of flux. They didn't know if the group that was doing the training was going to continue to do that, it was DYNCORPS or if they were going to be pulled out of the country.

*Q: Who was doing the training?*

A: DYNCORPS was doing that in Bamian, but they didn't know if they were going to continue to fund the project. They pulled the funding on most of the areas as far as the center goes, but they still had their instructors. Two of the instructors were still living at the PRT. They lost their housing in town and they moved them up onto the PRT to our hut so that they could stay in country and still try to do their job. They were police officers that were doing the training, United States police officers.

*Q: Was there any work being done on establishing a sort of legal system, courts and the laws at that time?*

A: That was the British, the DFID guy and again our political advisor. She was from the State Department. She would attend the meetings with him and they advised quite heavily on that. That was their, we had six pillars and that was pillar number one was to reestablish the governance and the democracy and all the judicial system underneath that. That was just the first pillar. The second one was the infrastructure. Once they got the democracy and their whole system in place, the judicial system they went and visited the prisons and they talked to prisoners and they did do a lot of that. The groundwork plus they were also working at the provincial level trying to go to the meetings and steer them properly where they needed to go. Then the second was the infrastructure once they got thinking in the right place and they were hoping to get this infrastructure rebuilt so that things could move if they needed to.

*Q: Then what were the other for?*

A: If you asked me in December I could have rattled them off because I was really frustrated. Agriculture didn't fall into anything until economics, which was like, number four. I thought we should be three. I thought economics should have been number three, but they actually had the hearts and mind thing, it was a floater, that was number six, but it was also allowed to be put in anywhere. So if at anytime there was a flood or a frost and people froze or anything that was drastic and we needed a food drop the hearts and mind pillar came into play immediately and went in front of anything else that might be going on. Obviously in an area like that you have a lot of that kind of emergency help that's needed tomorrow, not yesterday, so that sixth pillar which was hearts and minds tended to move up a lot in the front area. We had the educational system and that's where they put number three. I said you don't need to be educated to have a good economic system because there are a lot of Third World countries that don't have a lot of education, but their people are doing much better off economically. I kind of argued with the commander on where that should fall, but education was number three. I got pushed to number four. Agriculture fell under Econ. I couldn't tell you what number five was right now.

*Q: That's good. This was either defined by the commander or?*

A: It was defined by all of us actually. We had quite a few meetings to define and redefine it. They did it when I first got there in July. I guess they had just gone through



that and then when the elections were held and things started changing a little bit just based on some of the new assignments, we redid ours in November just before I left. We were restructuring what the commander thought should be based on what the development group told him. He was very receptive to what anything the development group said because he felt we had a better handle on things in town and in the province as far as what needed to be done in reconstruction. He relied on us very heavily. I think that might be different than the other PRTs. I'm not sure, but our commander turned to the development group daily to get an update. We did an update every night. We had a development group meeting every morning at 8:00 AM among ourselves to tell each other what we were doing, what meetings we had, what vehicle support we needed. Then every Saturday we had a two hour development group meeting at 1:00 just to find out where we were heading just to make sure everything was still in the goal. Then every night we had the commanders bringing, the officers briefing at 6:00 every night and that's when we would tell the commander and any of his subordinates what we felt we needed to have them do for us out on patrol where they might have mixed in with what we were doing supportwise. It was pretty much a daily update on everything that we were doing, plus when we needed them to be involved and he was real receptive to it.

*Q: Good. Sounds good. You mentioned the election. You were there during the election? The national election?*

A: Yes.

*Q: How did that go do you think? Was it pretty fair?*

A: I wasn't allowed to leave the base. It really frustrated me. I was hoping to be able to go out and observe like our political officer did. She had a badge for me and everything, but USDA told me no, so I stayed back even though two of our people that were in country did go, but (inaudible). I did what I was supposed to do and stayed back. She went out to five different polling sites in the Bamian township with the Kiwis, with the patrol units. She didn't stay with the vehicle. She went off with two of her own people, two shooters, so that she could get closer to the women and talk with them and see if they thought things were going well along with an interpreter. She thought it was a party atmosphere. She said it was wonderful. The women were laughing and dancing and giggling and showing their cards that they were going to vote with and it was pretty much a party scene. I guess she said they were just so excited to finally get a chance in their own democratic election it was something. I wish I could have seen it.

*Q: So, by and large, you said it was pretty fair?*

BIRDWELL: It went very smoothly. No questions about the ink. Of course we all heard about the ink problems over there, but nothing like that happened. We had our first snow the night before, well, during the night of the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>, on Friday night the 8<sup>th</sup>, I said something to the commander in the mess hall. I said, "If it's going to be this cold I just wish it would snow." I'm from the snowbelt up near Erie, Pennsylvania, so I'm used to 40 inches of snow, but I'm used to getting around in it, too and I said that

over there and the next morning we had six inches of snow on election day. The commander walked by me and said, "You, you did this, it's all your fault." I said, "I am so sorry." I really meant if it is going to be this cold, it was minus 10 degrees or so, I said, "If it's going to be this stinking cold it might as well just snow." It was just too cold and it did snow, but unfortunately I said, "I am sorry it's election day because that really hindered people." People were leaving homes that we heard at 4:00 in the morning to get to the election sites. They walked three to ten hours just to get somewhere to vote, but they did it. They don't feel it really affected the results of the turnout that well. I was afraid it might. I felt terrible. Obviously I didn't cause the snow, but I felt bad that I wished snow on election day. I totally wasn't thinking about it being October 9<sup>th</sup>, but apparently they said it really didn't hinder the turnouts, not that much.

*Q: That's good. In general looking across the thing, did you get a sense that the central government was getting more representative and more represented and having more of a role in the province?*

A: From Bamian to Kabul or within Bamian itself?

*Q: The Kabul government and their linkage with the Bamian government and the situation there.*

A: I think they were very closely linked. My director of Agriculture went to Kabul quite often to work with the minister of Agriculture. He didn't feel as though he was supported by the governor of Bamian at all. He kind of kept going, circumventing the governor of Bamian even though I kept talking to him and one of my goals there was to try to get him to work through the governor because obviously that's who he needs to go to. He kept going back to Kabul to the Ministry of Agriculture because he had friends there that would approve funding for projects that he knew the governor would not. He and the governor did not get along and I kept talking to him. I felt like a school marm. I mean the gentleman was about 20 years older than me, but I kept telling him you've got to learn to get along with your governor because at some point Kabul is going to cut all of you people loose and you're going to have to work through the governor to get your money because that's how the budgets are going to be. He said he understood that. He said he knew that, but at the same time the governor was in cahoots with too many people and he didn't trust them and so he was going to go to Kabul and get his money where he knew he could get it. He said he understood what I was saying that someday he might not be able to just go to directly to the Ministry of Agriculture and get what he wants. I talked to him a lot about that. That was one of my concerns when I first got there, there was the governor at the time now, they have a female governor there now. She's the first female governor.

*Q: How unusual.*

A: Yes. I wish I was there now. I would love to go to some meetings and meet with her. I think she could be pretty fascinating, but they have a female governor. I'm glad they got rid of the one they had because apparently he was not the best person to have there, he

had too many ties that he thought he had to pay favorites to. I think my director of Agriculture was probably from what I could tell one of the most honest of the current people that were in place. I think he wanted to do the right thing and I think he felt the way to do that was to circumvent the governor and just go directly to the people that he knew in Agriculture. I don't know now. I doubt now that that government is gone. I'm hoping maybe he's getting a good relationship established and going through that channel because he seemed to understand what I was saying, but he didn't want to do it because it just never worked for him.

*Q: Were there any warlord type problems there?*

A: There were, but they were out of Bamian central because Bamian is such a, I guess the Taliban was hated. They say there were three upheavals by the local townspeople before the U.S. forces came in and ousted them. The local people themselves really hated the Taliban and they pretty much didn't have any stronghold in the area except for the university when they took over and bombed that. On the provincial level there seemed to be some problems when the patrols would report in. There was a little flare-up here and there. Usually they were tied to somebody outside of our province that was basically trying to stir up trouble within I think.

*Q: So, there was some question about the extension of the central government's role out in the rural areas?*

A: It had to be, yes it was a real effort in Bamian to extend it. The PRT patrol unit seemed to do a lot of that. It was kind of like they were the extension agents to some degree because they could carry messages from the governor and the commander and the governor met not daily, but quite often. The commander's people, his patrol line officers actually had four different units and they were on patrol on the road anytime. They could go out anywhere from four days to two or three weeks. They would kind of take the olive branch from the governor and the commander out to the people in the province. It seemed to work well in Bamian, but again they welcomed us. They weren't anti-military; they weren't anti-U.S. or anything. They really enjoyed seeing the military trucks come down the road.

*Q: In terms of the achievements of the PRT in time overall, do you think it was making a positive contribution and a significant change to the situation?*

A: I do. Yes. I wasn't sure when I was there from July to November. When I got to the commanders' conference and I started listening to all the other 18 commanders plus my own and then I was sitting next to some Polish police officers in the Polish army and the Romanians and the Dutch and the Germans and the British, the Japanese. It was, that was in Bagram. I was Peace Corps back in the '80s and I was in West Africa in Niger and so I knew what a Peace Corps volunteer did. You went out on your own and you try to make a difference in the world and you won't see a whole lot in two and a half years. Well, in the five months I was there, here I went back to the commanders' conference and there were 27 different countries in that room represented all of them trying to do the

same thing. That's the first time it dawned on me, I mean the U.S. to me, we're right to be doing this, we're right to be here, we're trying to make a difference. I think we are. Just because I could hear generals saying that none of the other provinces were up to speed on this governance system and democracy and like you said the judicial system, but we're doing that. We're doing that. To me if one province out of the 34 is doing that then I think they've made a difference. I think they really have made a difference. I was really proud that I was part of Bamian at that point because I didn't know. I mean when you're working out there, it's kind of like Peace Corps. You're on your own, you don't really know where you fit in, even though I was with a military unit, but when you went back to that conference and you heard some of the people from Jalalabad or Kandahar or Herat or even (inaudible), I mean they were kind of out there maybe not knowing for sure that they were heading the right direction or making a difference. I sit there and compare where we were at and going where they were at going oh my God you're kidding me. No, we don't do that our director of Agriculture holds his own meetings. They are. I mean I definitely know that the Bamian PRT was making a difference.

*Q: So, do you think at some point relatively soon that the PRT could sort of fade away and hand over its work to the provincial governments and so on?*

A: I personally don't think that will be for quite a while, but I did just find out from Agriculture that the Bamian PRT is being turned over to ISAF, that's a new twist. The International Security Assistance Forces. It's the counterpart to the coalition, so there's the U.S. and coalition forces which I think is Japan, New Zealand, Kiwis are part of the coalition, but ISAF is all the others, the German, the British, the Dutch. ISAF is supposed to eventually take over all U.S. coalition involvement and they were supposed to when I was there take over Herat PRT, that's what I heard, but just last week I heard that Bamian was going to join ISAF instead of the coalition.

*Q: So, that would mean that the New Zealanders would back out?*

A: No, the New Zealanders will still be there. They'll just fall under the commander for the ISAF. I went to the commanders' conference. There was a General Olson who had the coalition forces and then there was a general, oh, what was his name, I don't remember, but it was another general who was in charge of ISAF and they were co-generals under the theater under General Barno. So, General Barno has the whole thing and then these two generals were underneath him. That's why I was surprised Bamian is going to go to ISAF because I knew the New Zealanders liked being with the U.S. They felt they had more freedom to operate as they wanted to and they're going under ISAF I guess. I'm not sure why. Of course I'm not there to know, but I do know ISAF is eventually supposed to take over all of them. That's where the U.S. will get to back out having our people on the ground, our military on the ground is when ISAF takes over all of them, the coalitions will back out. The PRTs, I see them going to Peace Corps. Twenty years from now if they're still stabled and the Taliban doesn't get aback in there I see Peace Corps having a role there for a long term. Because Peace Corps has been in Niger for 40 plus years now and they still have a long way to go. I don't think it's going to be a five to 20 year fix in Afghanistan.

*Q: But do you think that the ISAF and all will that phase out?*

A: I think it will be at least 20 years if I were to guess and that's given stability if nothing happens and we don't lose the country over the next election.

*Q: Twenty years for the provincial government to really take hold?*

A: Not to take hold, but for us to back out. I think they'll take hold sooner than that. I don't think that we're going to back out or I don't think we should back out either until they are an established long term. Again, I'm looking at the economics and the agricultural not the military and the stability. I would hope that the stability will be secure over the next.

*Q: So, you're talking really a long term development effort?*

A: Yes. Just as far as the redevelopment of their country and their culture.

*Q: They're still very poor.*

A: Extremely. They're number five up from the bottom. Niger is number two from the bottom because the political officer kept saying to me, "Well, you keep talking to me like Niger is worse off than Afghanistan." I said, "It is." Then the results came out on the world surveys and there are 175 countries listed and Niger is 174. Afghanistan was five up from the bottom instead of two up. So, it's not much farther up on the chain, but the kids aren't starving in the area where I was at. They have a lot of wheat and a lot of potatoes. Although they're not well nourished.

*Q: Hold on one second. Okay, excuse me.*

[END SIDE]

A: I don't think the kids are well nourished or the people and the population is extremely well nourished, but they've certainly got food in their stomachs. Where when I look at Niger and I see kids that were starving. I watched starvation everyday and leprosy even people that shouldn't happen. When I got there at 22 and I saw leprosy was still a killer I couldn't believe it. I thought that was a biblical thing that was gone out of the world and totally, really blew my mind that there was leprosy that was going on that rampant in a country like that, but I don't think Afghanistan has those problems. They've been further ahead than that at some other point and I think after that again Niger's never known that development level. Afghanistan, the people have moved out of country, seen other things and they've come back with the education and the knowledge of what they can be. I think that helps them a lot for their goals. They know what to reach for. They know what they can achieve. I really think they will. I hope so.

*Q: All right. Well, we're moving towards the end. What would you, what kind of lessons*

*have you come away with, things that worked or didn't work or how the things should be approached and all that?*

A: Again, just because Bamian seemed to be such an example when I was at my conference, I wouldn't have known that being out there on my own, but I think the other PRTs need to look at Bamian as an example. I don't know what they did right. It may be as a welcome that the U.S. got when we first went in there on the ground, maybe that made the difference in the development rate. I'm sure it has to have because in the other areas they're still fighting to get the people support and Bamians have the people support since the U.S. was in there.

*Q: This was not just in the city, but in the outskirts?*

A: In the whole outlying province, yes.

*Q: There was a lot of popular support for the U.S.?*

A: Yes. I think that's where they got the headstart on getting all of the other dominos to fall into place was that they actually had the support. They gave their support to the U.S. They gave it to the Kiwis as soon as the Kiwis took over, but I don't know how you get that support until you get the stability and that seems to be.

*Q: This was there before we actually started the PRT then?*

A: Yes, I think that was why they got a headstart on everybody. If the other provinces can look at how well Bamian I think will be operating, I'm hoping Bamian does this in the next couple of years. Their governance system, the judicial system all of that should be functioning and it should be functioning in harmony with Kabul because they do have a lot of close ties with Kabul. They're not out there on their own doing their own thing. They are working in coordination with Kabul. So, if the other provinces could look at that situation and if it works and if it shows that it works then maybe with a female governor that will be even better. Some of the male governors might not want to admit that she's doing a good job if she is. It may not be her fault if she does a good job; it's because of all the buildup until her time. The three years previous to her getting there now as a lot of her success, but whatever the reason I hope the PRTs around the country will at least look at that province and say this is working. They're further ahead. They've got a better veterinary line and they've got a better health care system, whatever they can look at, I hope they can take that away and say there's something there that they need to look at.

*Q: Obviously coordination within your group and with the other organizations was a major requirement. What lessons do you have from that?*

A: I think better communications. I made a lot of friends with the United Nations, different groups, not just UNAMA and not just UNFAO, but all the different UN NGO agencies there. I think they want to work from where I was at they wanted to work

closely with the PRT and they felt like the PRT would shut them out a lot of the time. Not mine, but in the other provinces the PRT doesn't share security information that they might want to share with some of the people out there unprotected. I understand the reality of you have to keep your security situation in close check, but at the same time there's got to be more of a level of trust to share that with the people that are out there unprotected so that they don't feel like you're trying to screw them. If I was out there without a weapon and without an armored vehicle and United Nations person and the PRT wouldn't tell me if it was safe or not to go into an area and they knew better and knew more information than I had I would just think that would be a real sore point for them not getting along. I can understand that from the UN point of view having been very well protected any time I went somewhere. It wasn't really up to me to say, well, the PRT can't give you that information. If I had my son or daughter out there working on their own in a UN vehicle, I would hope that the commander of the PRT would disseminate the information out to the people that need to have it. There's got to be some sort of trust in-between both parties that the people that are in the right place and the NGOs aren't going to divulge information that's going to hurt the PRTs' mission then it will at least help them in their security situation. Otherwise, they're not going to feel safe and if they have a PRT in their own backyard why would they trust them to share information where the development work is concerned?

*Q: That was working in Bamian?*

A: It was working, yes.

*Q: But not in other places?*

A: Well, it's not that, I didn't, I had heard that it wasn't. I'll say that. I heard it was not. I heard complaints in other provinces. Again the commanders' conference was an eye opener because I thought everything was coming up roses when I came in from Bamian and I started hearing things and it was like whoa. In Bamian our PRT commander and it maybe because they're Kiwis, I don't know, they're very laid back. Everyone calls them pacifists, they're not. They would protect me. I felt very secure, very comfortable when I went out on patrol, when I trained with them on the rifle range. They took me out. Everytime we went out on patrol the morning of that, they would do a dry rehearsal as to what to do if we got hit left, hit right, if we had sniper fire left, sniper fire right, if we had a IED on the left, a IED on the front. I actually practiced what to do and how to escape and who my shooters were going to be and we went out on the range. Everytime I went out with them and did that, I mean I was real sure after that they knew what they were doing and they'd do what they had to do to protect me. On the base these kids were in their '20s maybe, 19, 20, 21 year old kids and they couldn't look you in the eye and say hi. I'd get in their face and say hello, can you speak to me? It's common courtesy to speak to when spoken to. They just didn't have any social skills. They seemed awfully green, but then when I went out with them on patrol and I was out there at the range and the commander would holler okay, sniper left and we'd all move and take off, I had every confidence that these kids that I thought couldn't talk to me socially would protect me. They really knew their job. I felt like our commander was the type of person. I had two

different ones and both of them shared as much information as they thought they could and needed to with the people in town to keep the communication open there for safety. I think that's what helped build the relationship.

*Q: Did you find going out with the armed guards inhibited you from talking to the local communities?*

A: No, not at all. I kind of thought it might, but they seemed to, they welcomed them. They felt more protected by them. I was surprised because you think of all the times they've seen a weapon and got shot by one or shot at by one that they would not want to see a weapon come swinging by them, but they really didn't seem to be hindered by that. My bigger hindrance was that I wish I had a female interpreter. All of my interpreters were male and I think I could have gotten more information.

*Q: That's an important point, yes.*

A: Yes. Out of the female agriculturalist that I worked with even (inaudible) and at the head of a group, she had a male interpreter; I had a male interpreter. I think if we had a female interpreter she and I could have had some much better conversations and gotten more information.

*Q: I'm sure that's true, that's important.*

A: Because they would have shared more with a female to pass to me, whereas with a man, they watched what they said to a male because they didn't know what he would tell me back. There was a trust level there between the men and the women as far as what the man was going to tell me they said. That was more of a hindrance to me than the shooters and the Kiwis and the military. It was definitely an interpretation problem.

*Q: Generally one of the constraints was the ability to get out frequently because you said the commander.*

A: Didn't build me into his movement.

*Q: Didn't want to use up too many resources.*

A: Yes, that was a real frustration. I thought that because I was invited to be there and they welcomed me to be there, I mean they were very nice. I just felt that they should have planned for me better. They should have had a space in a truck on each of their patrols where if I wanted to go to a certain area of the province that would be my seat. I would have a seat in this truck and that would be Kathy's, but that's not how it worked. I had to put in a request two weeks in advance and then if they went in that area and if they had enough time and if they had an empty seat, everything was totally if. It wasn't like they planned around me actually having my butt in a seat somewhere. I don't know if the other PRTs do that, but I think they planned for it better.



*Q: I see. Well, that's certainly one of the lessons of your experience is how to get better planning for your being able to get out and around.*

A: Yes. When I left there I recommended to USDA they not put someone there. It's stable enough that the other NGOs are doing very good agricultural work. They're doing more than I could do because I couldn't get out and move like they can because it is so safe so there was no reason to have me there wasting my so-called expertise. I had the PRT on camp if they can get out and move around the province like they can and do. They were doing really good work and I think that helped my relationship with them is that I recognized that. It was like I told them that. You guys are doing the job I wish I could be doing, but I'm hindered because I can't leave. You guys are out there doing it so therefore, there really wasn't a reason to have USDA on that particular PRT.

*Q: Were you able to work with the ministry and help them get out and do their thing?*

A: The Ministry of Agriculture?

*Q: Yes.*

A: You mean in Kabul?

*Q: Yes. No I mean in..*

A: The director.

*Q: Yes, the director.*

A: He got out on his own all the time. He was out there. I met with him quite a few times at different projects that he was asking for money for and he was very mobile. He didn't hesitate to move. He did go to Kabul a lot because that's where he got his.

*Q: I mean his staff, too?*

A: He didn't have much staff.

*Q: I see. He didn't have any staff.*

A: He had a couple of people under him, not much, but they seemed to get around easily. They weren't in fear of anything there. They moved very readily. It was very safe. It was very stable. They didn't have any problems. If they had a vehicle going somewhere.

*Q: Well, are there any other overall lessons or suggestions or anything that you can?*

A: Well, I think it's a good thing. From my own sake I can say it was probably better than my Peace Corps experience in my life, I never thought I would say that because since 22 years old I kept saying that was the toughest job I'll ever love, because that's

what everyone always says. This one I think beat it just because I was in there with 27 other countries all trying to do the same thing. I think we're doing the right thing. I think the PRTs are in the right place. I think they're trying to do the right thing. I was a little dismayed to see that our ambassador has been moved to Iraq and General Barno is no longer in charge of the theater operations. To me that's two big losses. I think our ambassador and (inaudible)'s relationship was a real big part of the reason why we've made such strides in the time we have. I really think he should have been there through the next election. I don't think an Afghan in Iraq is going to do as well as an Afghan in Afghanistan, but then that's politics. I think General Barno, I know his time was up. He had 18 months in there, but I think his relationship with the ambassador and with (inaudible) the trust level there I'm hoping the next guy in there can maintain the trust because that's a huge part of it obviously for possibility. I think the PRTs are a good thing. It was like there's a lot of.

*Q: You don't think they should be organized differently or structured differently?*

A: Well, I like the way ours was organized. I liked the visibility that development group had. I was frustrated as the USDA representative because I didn't have my own money. I didn't have my own pot of money to spend and do my projects.

*Q: That's a good point.*

A: That was very frustrating for me, but at the same time I mean I had to look for my money elsewhere and that basically just gave more scrutiny to my projects. So anything that did get approved should be a worthwhile, sustainable project because it got so many eyes looking at it because of that. I couldn't just go in with my own money and say I'm going to pay this project off and do something that was flippant and overnight was going to be gone. In that respect I think the development group served a purpose in where we checked and balanced the counterchecks there. I just got a little more scrutiny because I didn't have any money to offer. That was the frustrating thing.

*Q: Do you think your development group had an understanding of the local culture in the situation?*

A: Yes. I do. I think we got out enough, they did anyways, the ones that got out because they were there longer than I was. Our DFID guy, our British guy had been there two years. He's going to be there another two. He's actually going to have four years of service in country and he has a very good handle on it. He doesn't do the down and dirty agricultural stuff, couldn't care less about a fish hatchery, but he is definitely at every other one of the government's meetings and the structural meetings and the democracy and the judicial system. He's doing that. He goes to the prisons, he talks to the people. I think that somebody that's been there two to three years knows the system as well as anybody's going to. They'll cover up what they want to cover up, but I think after that period of time you learn who you should or shouldn't be going to for your information.

*Q: I see. Well, is there any other aspect of this that we haven't touched on? I don't want*

*to miss anything because it's been very interesting.*

A: I don't think so. I think overall I was really happy with my experience. I'm pleased that we are there.

*Q: Would you go back?*

A: Absolutely. I tried to go back. When I came back in December I asked immediately to go back at the end of March. I was supposed to go back this March and then there were some other problems that came up that got me, so USDA may not be putting people there soon and that's really frustrating for me because they waited 19 years between my Peace Corps time and this job to finally get back and do development work which I really love. I thought I was going to be able to go right back, but political issues have come up and I am not being placed back over there right now. They're still looking at it. I'm still in contact with the embassy over there and the former Under Secretary of USDA is trying to help me get back. He's working my path, which is the highest level person I can certainly ask for at my job.

*Q: Do you have any contact with the USAID people in Agriculture?*

A: I do. They're my next choice. I know USAID, the money agreements with USDA are probably going to be my way back if I go back.

*Q: Right.*

A: Yes, they're my hope, I guess if I'm going to go.

*Q: Do they have a large agricultural program?*

A: They do, very large actually. I worked with them a lot and they had a lot more money of course than anything I could have come up with, but I'm hoping. I was wanting to go back to Jalalabad is what I asked for and they told me I would go back. Commander (name) needed an agricultural marketing person because Pakistan is supposed to be connecting electricity through Jalalabad to Kabul anytime. They've got a couple dehydration and vegetable processing plants that are going to come up and running once the electrical supply is there and they needed an animal husbandry person. I'm not a vet, but I am a technician. I can go into a herd and detect health problems and get information for them to treat. They said they needed somebody like that there, so it was perfect. I have the two backgrounds and everything was supposed to fall in favor. On January 6<sup>th</sup> I was told I was gong at the end of March and then in February I was told, no, sorry, you're not gong back. We've got 17 other people and we've got all the positions filled, so I was told maybe July or maybe September. I'm fighting it and I'm trying, but as I'm sitting here the agricultural season is passing me by over there.

*Q: I see, sure I understand.*

A: Yes. I'm very frustrated. I would go back tomorrow. My footlocker literally is packed. I unpacked it when I came home and repacked it thinking I was going back in March. My footlocker is packed. I just have a duffel and a suitcase to fill.

*Q: Well, that's a great story. Is there anything we haven't touched on?*

A: You know, I think we covered everything. Call me if there's any area that you didn't ask me.

*Q: Sure, but this is excellent. You talk very fast. The transcriber will have to keep up with it, but when we get it transcribed I'll do a little light editing and then do a little summary and we'll get you a copy.*

A: Do I get to see it to correct anything in it?

*Q: What?*

A: Do I get a copy to make corrections on?

*Q: Not necessarily, I think they hesitate, but you'll get a copy and obviously if you see something you want comment on, that will be fine. They hesitate to give the people to correct because then we never get them back.*

A: Just because I do talk fast I'm afraid they might get something wrong.

*Q: Well, when I go over it I'll check back with you and make sure we understood things.*

A: Okay.

*Q: So, we get it right. That's what we want to do.*

A: That sounds good.

*Q: Good. Thank you so much. It's been a great interview.*

A: Thank you very much.

*Q: We'll be back in touch.*

A: Okay, thank you.

*Q: All right.*

A: Bye bye.

[END TAPE]

[END INTERVIEW]