



## The ANA joins the information age; one byte at a time

By U.S. Army National Guard  
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**KABUL, Afghanistan** – “We are building a communications infrastructure starting from virtually nothing,” said Air Force Capt. Robert Frees, a strategic computer network consultant for the U.S.-led Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, regarding construction of a viable and sustainable computing infrastructure for the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the Afghan National Army.

As the ANA continues to grow and decentralize some operations, a robust communications network becomes ever more crucial.

Prior to September 2004, all ANA operations were controlled by either the Central Corps in Kabul or coalition units with whom the ANA operated. Since then the ANA has set up four additional regional corps around the country, each capable of commanding and controlling operations in their assigned area of operations.

Remarking on the importance of a strong communications infrastructure for the new army, OMC-A Chief of Communications Army Lt. Col. Mark Baxter said, “The ANA must have a



Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Michael Payne

**From the left: Capt. Robert Frees, Col. Abdul Hadi, Brig. Gen. Shams Ahmad, and Mr. G.K.Madhu Kiran conduct a site survey on TV Hill overlooking Kabul to locate a new microwave radio antenna tower that will link all Kabul area Afghan National Army facilities for data and voice communications.**

comprehensive strategic network to allow effective centralized command and control of the Army. Without effective centralized command, tribal rule will dominate the future of Afghanistan.”

Through tremendous effort by OMC-A and the Afghan MoD’s Comm-

unications Directorate, computers and networks are being installed at the MoD, at all five corps headquarters and at all training facilities. OMC-A is carrying out a \$31 million comprehensive plan for initial stand-up, intermediate automation and permanent sustainment of communications systems connecting all echelons of the ANA with their first-ever automated command and control systems.

Frees indicated the financial support comes from the U.S. Department of State as well as funds allocated to foreign military assistance in support of the global war on terrorism. The funds have so far been spent on the design and



Photo by Terry Spanier, OMC-A Mentor to the MoD Communications Directorate

**Members of the Office of Military Cooperation - Afghanistan configure the Afghan National Army network hub at the Ministry of Defense building in Kabul.**





Photos by U.S. Army Reserve Master Sgt. D. Keith Johnson

**Left:** ANA Brig. Gen. Shams Ahmad, deputy communications director for the Afghan Ministry of Defense, congratulates one of his soldiers and hands him his Super User certification during a graduation ceremony held on Mar. 12 at Kabul University. **Right:** U.S. Air Force Capt. Robert Frees, strategic network consultant for the Office of Military Cooperation - Afghanistan, congratulates an Afghan National Army soldier and hands him his Super User certification during the graduation ceremony.

implementation of 17 communication network contracts linking more than 30 ANA facilities throughout Afghanistan.

A large investment in human resources is also necessary. The base of knowledge and experience ANA soldiers have with computer technology is very limited. ANA Maj. Gen. Mohammad Amin Norestani, chief of legal affairs for the MoD, recognized the importance of computer technology early in the development of the new ANA.

“The world has become a small village through use of computers,” Norestani said. “In the past, a person with a high school degree was called a literate person. Now a person who doesn’t know how to use computers is considered not educated; it has become a life requirement for everyone.”

The next project in OMC-A’s comprehensive plan is to set up eight

computer labs at the Kabul Military Training Center so new recruits can learn about computers before they get to their first assignment.

To run the new ANA computing infrastructure, OMC-A contracted out computer maintenance and network administration to a regional civilian computer consulting firm. The long-term solution, as for all aspects in the reconstruction of the Afghan defense sector, is for the ANA to be self-sustaining.

“To achieve this, soldiers must be trained and afforded the opportunity to work hands-on with experienced system administrators,” said Brig. Gen. Shams Ahmad, deputy communications director for the MoD.

To provide the necessary training, OMC-A and the MoD partnered with Kabul University’s Computer Science Department to design a training program

for ANA soldiers to become computer system administrators. Five instructors from Kabul University’s Computer Science Department are now involved in teaching the ANA students.

Along with the department head, Prof. M. Homayounnaseri, they teamed up with OMC-A and the MoD’s Communications Directorate to create a curriculum that would produce soldiers capable of carrying out the MoD’s long-term network administration needs.

“From the beginning, students had no experience with computers,” said Homayounnaseri. “So we had to consider this in deciding what to teach them and where to start.”

The first class of 48 soldiers, drawn from the MoD’s Communications Directorate and the five corps headquarters, reported for class at Kabul University Sept. 18, 2004, for a

**Dignitaries from the Afghan National Army and the Ministry of Defense, as well as Kabul University officials attend the Super User graduation ceremony of Mar. 12 at Kabul University.**



14-week training program. The inaugural program faced many challenges early on, including having only a few Pentium II personal computers available in the classroom, sporadic electrical service, and no heat during one of the coldest Afghan winters in decades.

The instructors faced another significant challenge. Many of the soldier-students had never touched a computer before and did not know English, the universal computer language.

According to Homayounnaseri, the most successful students in this class were familiar with English, had completed high school and had completed several math and science courses while in school.

Instructor Hassan Adelyar added, "It is different teaching the ANA than our university students. We are only teaching the ANA for a relatively short time on very specific subjects. The ages of the ANA are different too, ranging from 18 to over 50 years old."

In overcoming these challenges,

OMC-A provided the university with a generator and enough new PC's that every student had their own in the classroom. Modifications were also made to the curriculum, lengthening it, adding some basic English instruction, and dividing it into two semesters.

The first semester includes training in English computer terms, typing in English and Dari, Microsoft Office,

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*-- Mohammed Saber  
Super User class graduate*

Internet concepts and computer anatomy. Graduates of the first semester are certified by Kabul University as "Super Users" and are qualified to work on the ANA computer help desk.

The best Super Users continue on through a 12-week second semester and are certified as System Administrators upon successful completion. They are qualified to install cable, establish peer to peer connections and other networking responsibilities. Addi-

tionally, several of the best second semester students participate in a cooperative education program that Frees arranged with the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has a relatively advanced information technology department.

The revised training plan will put the first 25 of 100 required System Administrators in the field by July 15, 2005. The ANA is projected to have the infrastructure and trained personnel in place to sustain itself by May 2006.

Graduates of the first semester participated in a simple but prideful ceremony attended by MoD and university officials on March 12 at Kabul University.

The soldiers were excited to receive their Super User certificates, and each poured over his certificate in detail and with great interest after he returned to his seat. "I'm excited to take what I've learned during this training and go to work wherever the ANA needs me," said Mohammed Saber in his native language.

