**Afghan-Iraq Update/7-02-11 (Troop Scoop)**

**Dear Interested Reader,**

Global Connections and Exchange Program fosters communication

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AFGHANISTAN STORIES:

RC-East, Bagram Media Center

**Global Connections and Exchange Program fosters communication**

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Amber Robinson, TF Bronco



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dejuan Roberts, an effects officer with HHC, 3rd BCT, 25th Inf Regt, 25th ID, TF Bronco, chats online with Afghan high school students from Jalalabad city, at FOB Fenty, June 18. The chat was part of Global Connections and Exchange (GCE), a program which connects Afghan students to American students and American Soldiers, and teaches them the value of diplomacy, volunteerism and initiative.

NANGARHAR PROVINCE – Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dejuan Roberts sits with a furrowed brow in front of a computer screen ... a barely audible ringing comes from the computer’s speakers ... then a small crackling ... and then, “Hello?” Roberts smiled and offered a greeting as well, relieved that the internet video chat connection worked.  On June 18, Roberts experienced his first Internet video chat session with several school-age Afghan boys.

The chat session was part of an on-going program called GCE. State Aid members stationed in Afghanistan started the program to provide a forum for Afghan students to communicate with Soldiers in Afghanistan, and Americans in the U.S. The program is funded by San Diego’s La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club Foundation, and facilitated by State Aid employees attached to 3rd BCT.  Steve Brown, a La Jolla Rotary member based in San Diego, runs the program, but Anna Mussman, diplomacy officer with 3 BCT, supports the program from her position in Nangarhar Prov.

“What the program does is teach computer skills, communication skills, and the value of volunteerism,” said Mussman.  "In a country that continues to struggle for stability and unity, volunteerism and the understanding of technology can go a long way," she said. Mussman said that the Internet empowers students in Afghanistan, because it gives them an outside window into other societies, provides confidence, and expands their world view.

“They’ve improved their English skills, both verbal and written, and feel more confident talking to visitors and Soldiers,” said Mussman. “All this has helped build confidence, which is especially important when taking initiative and becoming more accountable.”

So far the program succeeded in putting computer labs in 12 Nangarhar Prov. H.Ss., and connected students in the U.S. with those in Afghanistan. Afghan schools can also petition the Rotary through a formal application process, and ask for funds for small school projects, such as school water fountains, painting and other school improvements. Students are encouraged to make decisions on how to use the funds, and put the small sum to the greatest use possible.

“It teaches them how to manage funds on a small level, and make the best decisions for themselves and their peers,” said Mussman.  She and her colleagues believe the program begins to prepare the Afghan youth for the resolve they must have to make the difference their country needs.

Meanwhile, Roberts, a usually charismatic and confident man, confided that he was nervous prior to the chat session. “I want to make sure I'm saying the right things, and make this worthwhile for them,” he said.  Roberts said that he understands how hungry Afghan students are for info and experiences outside of their own. He's making a small step in the way of diplomacy, as are the students. Both cultures are eager to put their best foot forward. The students who lined up for the chat were older H.S. males; some were in their early 20s.  Roberts said he considered the questions the students could have asked before the chat session, to ensure his answers were well thought out.

His preparations paid off when the student's first question was: “What are the secrets to your success?”  “Be the best of what you can be; then you start to uplift others around you,” said Roberts. “You won’t really notice it, but others will start to look up to you, to see what you're doing, and will see that you always do the right thing.” Roberts and the students openly discussed a variety of topics which ranged from the importance of family, to the current security situation in Afghanistan.

“All the students enjoyed talking with Mr. Roberts, because he had so many good points,” said Abdul Almas, the GCE project dir. in Jalalabad. “The students asked him different kinds of questions about his life, job career and Army medals which he won, and also they asked him different questions related to Afghanistan, and the life of Afghans, including security issues.”



Female students from Jalalabad City, enjoy a new water faucet, funded by the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club Foundation out of San Diego, and facilitated by State Aid employees attached to 3rd BCT, as part of GCE.

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The above article can be found at: <http://troopscoop.typepad.com/updates/2011/07/daily-afghan-iraq-update7-02-11.html>

This article is also published in *RC East* at : <http://www.rc-east.com/en/regional-command-east-news-mainmenu-401/4668--global-connections-exchange-program-fosters-communication-through-technology-and-diplomacy.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter>

And published in *Thank you for your Service.US* at: <http://thankyouforyourservice.us/issue/july-4-2011-happy-fourth-of-july/article/global-connections-exchange-program-fosters-co>