

A TOUGH YEAR IN AFGHANISTAN

WORDS AND PICS GARY RAMAGE

part 2

Rugged mountain ranges that seem to touch the sky surround the new patrol base that a small group of Aussie diggers has just taken control of.



Soldiers from Delta Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, moved into the district of Deh Rawood in Uruzgan province, only two days before I arrived for a visit. The Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) has moved in to train the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the base.

From the massive mountains, the main river dissects the area the Aussie diggers must patrol. They will also provide security to the local population of the district.

OMLT commander Captain Morgan Allen says, "My men and I are here to mentor the Afghan National Army soldiers assigned to Patrol Base Razaq, and we are looking forward to the task at hand".

"My men and I need to get to know the area we are going to be working in and the locals need to see us out there providing security for them," he says.

Captain Morgan is preparing his men for the long months ahead. They only began to patrol this area in the past two days.

The Taliban are not far from where the Aussies have moved either. Just a couple of kilometres from here is a known Taliban stronghold in a well-protected mountainous region.

"The Taliban are just to our north," Captain Morgan says. "They are in a very hard area for the coalition forces to get to.

"The mountainous area is covered with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and there is only one way in," he says.

Australia's first Mentoring Task Force in Afghanistan lost a digger yesterday in yet another IED blast. He was killed instantly. He was part of a dismounted Australian patrol conducting operations in the Chora Valley region of Uruzgan province.

Captain Morgan tells me, "It is challenging maintaining the morale of my men when we lose one of our own.

"But all these blokes are true professionals and they will get on with the job. They will mourn their fallen mate when the time is right.

"We have a job to do here in Deh Rawood and my men and I are looking forward to getting out into our area of operations (AO) and doing just that."

Best mate of the soldier killed, Digger L, told me while we were patrolling in Deh Rawood yesterday, "It is really hard when you lose a mate out here. We were really close. We signed up together and did all our training together".

