

More than just supplies

Living conditions at a forward operating base in Afghanistan can be rough for soldiers of Mentoring Task Force Two (MTF 2), but after a lot of hard work they are getting better.

Major Roy Henry, officer commanding Delta Company, MTF 2, says there are a lot of things at the patrol bases that are different from home, but the more comfortable we can make the bases, the better off the soldiers will be.

Soldiers of the Logistical Support Company (LSC), MTF 2, understand this all too well. This is why they are constantly out on the roads in Uruzgan conducting supply convoy missions.

The bases they service are temporary homes for MTF 2 soldiers who are deployed to Afghanistan to partner with and mentor the Afghan National Army (ANA).

These bases are supplied on a regular basis by a special supply convoy called the 'shojo'. And this convoy brings much more than just supplies.

The shojo also brings tradesmen, like plumbers and electricians, to conduct repairs and inspections on equipment needed for life sustainment.

Without these experts, equipment would break down and overall health, welfare and morale at the forward operating base would break down with it.

Shojo commander Warrant Officer Class Two Jake Donnelly says maintaining the

bases is just as important as resupplying the ammunition and fuel the soldiers need.

"There is also effort put into improving the overall standard of living for the soldiers," he says.

"Something like installing electricity into the soldiers' living quarters to power personal items such as laptops, makes a big difference to morale.

"Morale is a big factor. If morale is high then everything else gels.

"So, the more amenities we can provide, the better."

The Australian accommodations aren't the only focus for the LSC – they also resupply and maintain the Afghan National Army (ANA) side of the bases.

Major Henry says the Australians have been installing numerous upgrades into the ANA living areas – items such as generators, flushing toilets and showers – items many Afghans simply do not have access to.

The overall mission for MTF 2 is to prepare the ANA to take over security operations in Uruzgan when international assistance is inevitably withdrawn – and this includes conducting resupply missions.

To achieve this objective, MTF 2 has been partnering with and mentoring elements of the ANA on how to conduct logistical operations.

"Not only are we able to supply our own soldiers at the bases, but the ANA have been able to partner with us and resupply their own people too – and get all that experience of major road moves in a dangerous environment," WO2 Donnelly says.

While these remote bases don't have the same comfort levels most Australians are normally used to, the soldiers of the LSC are doing their part to make that gap as small as possible for the members of MTF 2 and their Afghan partners.



Left: The soldier on the right is wearing the 'traditional' Auscam DPCU, while the two on the left wear the new Multicam uniform.

MULTICAM

to the biennial Land Warfare Conference in Brisbane.

Mr Clare said the feedback from special-forces troops had been extremely positive.

"Special-forces soldiers have said this is the uniform they want to wear," he said.

"The camouflage pattern provides troops with greater levels of concealment across the range of terrains in Afghanistan – urban, desert and green.

"It also makes it easier for our troops to do their job."

The Multicam shirt and trousers have elbow and knee pads built in to reduce soft-tissue injuries; are cooler and designed to be worn under body armour; have a padded waist band to make it more comfortable under webbing or a field pack; and have more pockets and a stretch fabric at the joints.

Mr Clare said Defence has made an urgent order from the United States to get these uniforms to troops in Afghanistan as quickly as possible.

"I have also instructed the Defence Materiel Organisation to pursue the purchase of a licence to provide for the potential manufacture of this uniform in Australia if the extended trial is successful," Mr Clare said.

In May, Lieutenant General Gillespie toured the Middle East Area of Operations showing off a range of new equipment, including the 'mid-point' Auscam uniform, which he said would be issued for trial by the end of the year.

But, by November, before planned trials of the new Auscam even began, Minister Clare was making this game-changing and expensive about turn. In CONTACT's opinion, since the SAS is already 'extremely positive' that they 'want to wear' this uniform, this so-called 'trial' – extended to every man and woman who needs to be camouflaged – will see our soldiers in Afghanistan getting what they want.

And why shouldn't they? After all, they are the ones on the ground facing the enemy on a daily basis.

The real surprise here is that someone with the power to make a decision actually listened to the boys in the field – and enacted that decision in what is effectively a nanosecond on Defence procurement scales.

A so-called 'trial' of a new Multicam combat uniform has been extended to all soldiers operating outside the wire in Afghanistan following 'extremely positive' feedback from special-forces soldiers wearing the gear in Afghanistan.

Multicam combat uniform is a different camouflage pattern to the current Australian combat uniform and is also worn by US and other forces.

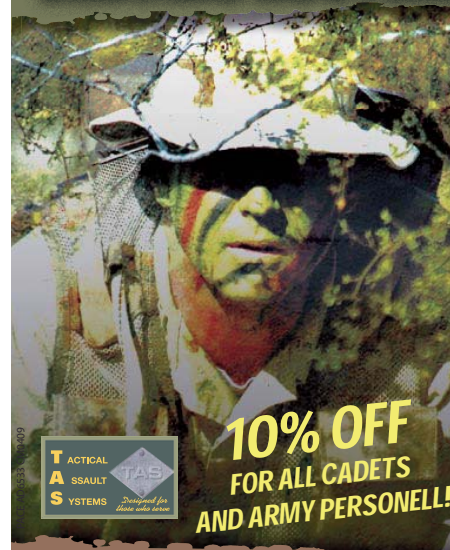
Multicam is a new seven-color, multi-environment camouflage pattern developed by Crye Associates in conjunction with the US Army – and so new it is still being rolled out to US forces in Afghanistan.

The decision to issue the new uniforms more generally in Afghanistan was made just months after Chief of Army Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie toured the Middle East spruiking the virtues of an Aussie 'mid point' camouflage uniform – a lime-green variant of the current Australia disruptive-pattern uniforms.

Minister for Defence Materiel Jason Clare announced the extension of the trial in November during an address

A close up look at the new Multicam uniform as a Special Operations Task Group soldier waits to board a helicopter for a mission in northern

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