

OP GHARTSE GHADMAHE 3

22 Nov 09. This operation was designed to push back insurgents operating to the south of Sangin District Centre, expanding the area of security around Sangin DC and continuing to improve the quality of life for the locals. Pushing the insurgents and any fighting away from the urban centre and therefore away from the civilian population is sound counter-insurgency practice, protecting the people, bringing them security.

The mission for A and B Companies of 3 RIFLES, supported by Viking armoured vehicles from Egypt Squadron, 2 Royal Tank Regiment, and by Afghan National Army forces, was for each Company to clear, occupy and complete the initial build of a new Patrol Base (PB) each in the "Green Zone" to the south of Sangin DC. The "Green Zone" is the heavily irrigated and vegetated land either side of the Helmand River where the Taliban had been operating from. Numerous IEDs were cleared as the troops moved south to the compounds which were to be the locations of the new Patrol Bases. The Royal Engineers then worked throughout the rest of the day and night to put in place sangars and firing points and establish the new bases. The missions were completed within 24 hours.

The names for the new PBs are now being chosen by Colonel Wadood of the ANA to reflect the UK/ISAF role of acting in support of the ANSF.

In 2007 the bazaar in Sangin DC was largely deserted. Today the security situation is such that there are over 200 stalls open each day. While Afghan National Police take as much of a lead as possible for security within the urban area, the Afghan National Army and ISAF forces continue to expand the security "bubble" around the Centre. Op Ghartse Ghadmahe is another step in this process.

[Image]

B Company and Royal Engineers preparing the compound for troops to move in.

[Image]

Viking armoured vehicles help to move stores to A Company's new Patrol Base.

ANP GET PERMANENT CHECKPOINT IN SANGIN DC

6 Dec 09. Progress is being made on the Government led provision of new ANP permanent checkpoints. In Sangin the building work on a new checkpoint has progressed swiftly in the past 3 weeks, with 2 buildings nearing completion. The new checkpoint will provide the ANP with a permanent base from which to patrol the streets of Sangin. It is hoped that by the end of December works will be completed and contractors can move on to new Vehicle Checkpoints for the ANP.

[Image]

[Image]

Early stages of the observation tower build in Sangin

Observation tower on the Northern Checkpoint in Sangin nearing completion.

CIVIC IMPROVEMENT WORKS IN SANGIN DC

6 Dec 09. The Mayor's work in the Sangin District Centre Bazaar is beginning to show clear results. His Municipal Services Department have made significant progress cleaning the streets of Sangin and clearing the gutters that run alongside the road. Contractors are now building three extensions to the tarmac roadway in Sangin to the North, South and Central to the Bazaar.

[Image]

Road contractors working hard on one of 3 extensions to the tarmac road in the bazaar.

DENIAL OF BRIDGE IN SANGIN

6 Dec 09. During an Operation in the early hours of 03 December, 3 RIFLES continued their plans to deny insurgents access routes to and from population centres with the destruction of a bridge at a known insurgent crossing point. At 0500 troops deployed from new Patrol Base ALMAS and pushed West and North of the canal to allow engineers to place charges on the Bridge. The demolition was fired at first light and successfully created a 10 metre gap across the canal. Insurgents are now forced to use routes that pass within the arcs of the new patrol bases, thus allowing 3 RIFLES greater ability to track their movement throughout the area of operations.

[Image]

Charges emplaced under the cover of darkness

[Image]

Demolition fired at first light

3 RIFLES HOST AFGHAN JOURNALISTS ON VISIT TO SANGIN DC

6 Dec 09. This week saw 3 RIFLES BG hosting Afghan Journalists for the first time. Journalists were escorted through the bazaar where they got the opportunity to talk to the local population about how they feel progress in Sangin is being made. The journalists also met and interviewed the ANP Southern Checkpoint Commander Abdul Rashied, Acting Chief of Police Rahullah, and ANA officer Capt Nadari.

3 RIFLES BG Chief of Staff, Major Dickie Head commented: "To meet and talk to the Afghan journalists who had made the effort to visit Sangin was a privilege. They were clearly individuals who took their job seriously while approaching it with a great deal of enthusiasm. The questions they asked were to the point and pragmatic, as one would expect of many Afghans. We did nothing more than tell them what we were doing and how we thought Sangin was progressing.

Then, by taking them on patrol in the bazaar we let them make their own minds up. I am sure they are not so naïve as to think everywhere in our AO is as secure, but at least they will have had the chance to see things with their own eyes. It will be very interesting to see what they write."

IED FINDS IN WISHTAN

9 Dec 09. On 9 December British and Afghan soldiers spent time showing a recently found Improvised Explosive Device to locals living nearby to Patrol Base Wishtan, near Sangin, to encourage them to report details on further devices. The find occurred after a local Afghan reported its whereabouts to Afghan National Army members at nearby PB Wishtan. Local elders promised to report the whereabouts of further devices to the ANA and ISAF. The device was later taken to a safe location to be disposed of. Major Graeme Wearmouth, Officer Commanding B Coy, 1 SCOTS commented:

"It was really heartening to see a local willing to pass on information to the Afghan National Army about IEDs. ISAF responded swiftly to the threat, which was a big IED placed on a busy junction which would have caused considerable damage had it detonated."

[Image]

Soldiers from B Coy 1 SCOTS explain the IED to local nationals

ANA AND ISAF HELP RESTORE LOCAL MOSQUE IN AREA SOUTH OF SANGIN

13 Dec 09. When an ANA group mentored by soldiers from the OMLT (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team) arrived in Sangin the Mosque outside Patrol Base Pylae was in a terrible state after many years of conflict in the area. Despite the problems the people of the village still attended their Mosque.

After a number of meetings the restoration of this building should become a priority. Within the space of two weeks the construction was largely completed. A new school building was also added to the rear of the Mosque and a shower room was built with an area for people to wash their feet before prayer time

With the Mosque complete attendance has increased, and at least 30 children spend most of their day there. There is a lot of activity with the afternoon prayer being extremely busy. The Mullah, the locals and the children are thankful for what the ANA and ISAF have done for them.

The restoration of the Mosque highlights to the people in this village that ANSF and ISAF are there to help. More importantly it demonstrates that the Government can deliver a tangible improvement to their lives, something that the insurgents simply cannot offer.

[Image]

The mosque before the works – pock-marked with old bullet-holes

[Image]

The mosque after the restoration works

The material used in this post was supplied by the UK MoD