

# America's warlord allies continue Afghanistan patrols

By Mark Fritz  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITHAVE, Afghanistan — A Soviet bullet entered his skull behind the left ear and exited via the nearest eye socket, leaving nothing but lid. Two decades later, a permanently winking Maj. Mulla Naimatullah beams with pride when his commanding general tells this story.

Then there is Col. Talib Hayatallah, who literally ate a Taliban slug. It crashed into his mouth and pulverized every tooth on the left side of his face before bursting out his cheekbone. He, too, smiles in satisfaction about the flesh-and-bone medal of valor.

These are America's allies in the south-central Afghan precinct of the worldwide war on terrorism, just two of the 220 men who recently began an open-ended mission to hunt for Taliban fighters who have gained a foothold back inside the country.

The United States toppled the Taliban's darkly repressive Islamic regime in 2001, payment for harboring the headquarters of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida

terror group, which pulled off the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

The Bush administration's plan to rebuild this Texas-sized place includes the creation of a new national army and the disarming of a veritable army of warlord militias — including the relatively elite 1818 Advanced Special Operations, an oft-ambushed intelligence task force to which Naimatullah and Hayatallah belong.

U.N. teams plan to begin the disarmament program on Oct. 18, offering cash for weapons. But few expect much cooperation from the warlords who have bankrolled their own armies to fight 23 years worth of wars in Afghanistan.

To the commanding officers of this unit — run by the secular ruler of southern Kandahar Province and various other regional Sunni Muslims — the disarming idea triggers more perplexity than anger.

"We're fighting the Taliban and they want us to disarm?" asked the hulking Gen. Atta Mohammad, director of Kandahar Special Forces and leader of this patrol, which consists of 20 commanding officers

of other units, each with 10 of their own hand-picked men.

Their mission, is to patrol the rugged and isolated area that forms the apex of three hot provinces: Zabol, Kandahar and Uruzgan. Scores of aid workers and others affiliated with the Western presence in Afghanistan have been murdered in recent weeks in the region.

The guerrillas, shrouded in robes over their camouflage fatigues, traveled in 10 light pickups and two larger trucks filled with fuel, spare tires and other supplies. They were on a loosely planned mission to fly the flag for the isolated, impressionable people of the flyspeck villages that are often hideaways for the Taliban — a term that has been loosely used of late to include any enemy of the U.S.-backed central government.

The Afghan government is trying to rein in warlords who control most of the countryside while it builds an entirely new army, which so far numbers only about 5,000. The militias are proving difficult to control, and even those who support the post-Taliban government have waged war with each other over local disputes.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Government rolls out new vehicle safety test

WASHINGTON (AP) — After years of using a dry, mathematical formula to predict rollover risk, the government is adding a wheel-squealing road test intended to give consumers more information about a vehicle's handling capabilities.

Automakers say the road test will reward the best-handling vehicles in each class by highlighting performance measures the formula could not assess. One example is stability control, a system that applies brakes to specific tires and decelerates if it senses a driver is veering off course.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the government's auto safety agency, is considering two different road tests and will announce its decision Tuesday at its

test facility in Ohio. In the future, the government's five-star rating system for rollover risk will factor in both road tests results and the mathematical approach.

#### Oldest American dies in sleep at age 114

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Elena Slough, documented as the nation's oldest person, died Sunday at the nursing home where her daughter died three days before. She was 114.

Slough died in her sleep at the Victoria Manor Nursing Home, where she and her 90-year-old daughter, Wanda Allen, lived, according to Judy Moudy, a supervisor at the Lower Township facility.

Slough lived through 21 presidents and seven U.S. wars.

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