

Afghan Journal March April 2009

March 27 Kabul Beer Faux Pax

The trip is going good so far. Wednesday Fary and I drove to LAX in a rental car and caught the non-stop Emeritus flight to Dubai. That takes about 16 hours in flight. We arrived at our hotel around 9:00 PM Thursday and then caught a 6:00 AM flight to Kabul. It was delayed a bit since some passengers were lost but their luggage was on the plane. Ishaq met us at the airport. We went to the German Guest House in the compound with the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education and checked in. The Ministry has several layers of security since Ministers have be targets of attack in the past.

We then went to the U.S. Embassy and met with Philip Cargile who is involved with Public Affairs. He is the one we are responsible to for our Global Connection and Exchange Program where we are connecting high school students in the US with high school students in Afghanistan. We also reviewed the process about to take place where we will attempt to bring as many as 30 Afghan professors and high school teachers to the US under various program this summer. We had lunch with Phil at a café in the embassy. McDonalds makes a better cheeseburger. Phil is going to follow up with us on some specific inquiries. He also is in charge of the Fulbright Scholarship application process. Afghanistan will have about 30 Fulbright's to award this year. We are encouraging Dr. Pardis to apply.

We then met with Sami Zdravko who works for USAID. He is from Macedonia—was in Rotary there and is a truly good guy. We talked about our Light Up Jalalabad project which in essence is to use CDMA EV-DO Rev. A. upgraded technology over much of Jalalabad and cover the public service sector. Our proposal also calls for [providing for end users through various classroom upgrades throughout various secondary schools and to build a classroom building at the Nangarhar University College of Education. and He advised this project is now under his supervision and they have found a way to qualify the project and allocate funds subject to a big unknown. There are other plans in the works to lay cable throughout Jalalabad and another plan to use redundant NATO satellite capacity and used NATO equipment which may substantially reduce the need for this project or require it to be scaled in some fashion.

March 30-31, 2009

Back in the Saddle after Adapters meltdown

Monday evening Fary and I returned to the guest house after a social visit with the “nerd surge” crew staying at the Taj (presence to be explained later) only to find our laptops on some type of life support. Both of our AC adapters were unable to provide power to the laptops and when we changed plugs for Fary’s adapter the dreaded blue/grey smoke appeared as her adapter melted. We had three lines of defense against a power surge (not to be confused with the nerd surge) in that we have sensitive circuit breakers (the low level air conditioner blows them), we run power from the outlet into a \$100 UPS device which is to take the first hit of a power surge, and then run the line to a power bar with its own surge protection. The locals look at us and say “what are you surprised about” at least your computers did not get fried. So I spent most of the night thinking about plans B-Z recognizing that adapters are not available in the Jalalabad Wal-Mart (the guy with a cart on the street). This morning I decided to go to the Taj where the nerd surge group loosely associated with San Diego~Jalalabad Sister Cities, and I don’t know who else, are here ostensibly to provide communication links into various parts of Jalalabad using things like oversize beach balls and empty tennis ball cans and the like. I ran into Ken, who is one of our favorites, who like most of the others has no apparent means of support, said he could solve the problem since he regularly carried about 20 extra adapters to suit about any computer. And sure enough, on the sixth try we found one that works. So I lost all that sleep last night developing plans B-Z not realizing that plan Q had a reasonable chance of success.

So a quick snapshot of the last two days activities include:

- The Chancellor and a colleague showed up early morning to pay greetings.
- Thereafter spent much of the day with Afghan Telecom folks plotting desired points to target internet hits for a WiMax system in Jalalabad covering all high schools and selected social services agencies. I was surprised that they did not have Google Earth on their office computer. I downloaded it and demonstrated how to put the pins in the GPS locations of the desired sites
- We then went to the NU College of Education Training Center where we have one of our Global Connection sites set up and met with the students involved in the program.
- We came back to the guest house and walked through the female dorm next door we are building which is in the final stages of construction—in which it has been for months. No one was present to work on things.
- We then arranged for the Medweb folks (here to assess Telemedicine options) to meet with us at the guest house with the Chancellor and explain what they are looking at for possibly bringing telemedicine into Jalalabad.
- We then went to the Taj and engaged in some compulsory social drinking ,interacting with the nerd surge team of geeks the best we could. Not sure how many there are but their numbers seem to be growing. Fary is happy since we were able to buy cheap red win at the Taj on the tertiary market to bring to our guest house.

- We returned relatively early to our guest house only to experience the adapter meltdown.
- This morning (Tuesday) started as indicate getting the replacement adapter which should serve both of our computers.
- We stopped by our carpenter's shop which is overflowing with cabinets he has made to be installed in the never to be completed dorm. One of the sons was using part of the electrical tool kit we were able to send over here through means that can not be discussed on a public web site. (We have been successful in getting power saws into Afghanistan through this channel-- if anyone else has such a need let me know.)
- We then went to the female dorm at the NU College of Ed. and took a look at the computer internet lab we set up there. It is working well although the female inmates complain it is slow-- but compared to what since they have never had access to internet before.
- We then went to the CETC and met with some more of the GCEP students using the internet to connect with the students in the US. We received the first of about 30 bouquets of flowers today at this site and many thank you's.
- We then proceeded to visit the following schools where our program is up and running: Bibi Zainaib girls, Bibi Ayshia girls, Abdul Wakail boys, and Mia Omer boys. We were overwhelmed with the enthusiasm the students have for the program. They love being able to communicate with students in the U.S, even though their participation out numbers the U.S. participation by about 10 to 1. We videotaped many testimonials. This program is really making a difference. Over 1,500 student positions in Afghanistan have participated in the program. (A student position represents a student in a class each month—often it may be the same person.)
- We then had lunch with Almas at a restaurant that has the Kabul River running right at its base. This is particularly handy since they throw all garbage into the river. When Fary raised an environmental objection, they responded it is OK since it flows into Pakistan.
- We then visited the Nasrat School site which has been identified as a site (with our assistance) where the Canadian Government and Canadian Rotarians want to build a school. We are facilitating this process. The site has issues since many buildings will be knocked down for the new building but one very ugly and run down building will probably remain. That would probably not be acceptable to the Canadians nor should it be.
- From there we met with Naqeeb who is a medical student running our computer lab at the medical school. We reviewed with him some opportunities that may be available through telemedicine, or running a pathology lab upon his graduation in a few months. This young man has a bright future.
- We then met with Mr. Azizi, Director of Education for Nangarhar Province. He advised that there are two sites for the Nasrat School and both need a new building. We should check the second

site and see which we would prefer. There is a German person who is building schools in Afghanistan and he has a big budget and will do what he wants. So if we recommend the site we have not yet seen, he will build on the other site, knock everything down, put German symbols everywhere, and build a very nice facility.

- So we went to the second site and it is ideal. There are some beautiful gardens surrounded by kids under tree, kids in tents, and kids in barracks. A building can be built to house all the students utilizing three shifts—about 4,000 in all 80% girls 20% boys in grades 1-12.
- We returned to the guest house to drop off our 30 bouquets we received from the students at the various schools and headed to the International Learning Center. We ran into Dr. Aziz, our contractor for the dorm, and told him of our concerns re his inability to finish construction. I advised I had run into a contractor finishing the Bibi Aysha School who is willing to do the finishing work if Dr. Aziz is not up to it. He promised to finish in three days –Inshalla
- We then had an informal meeting with a group of the Jalalabad Rotarians who wished to discuss two issues. The first was how to deal with some of the original members who were no longer participating. A universal issue in service organizations is how to balance some level of participation with cutting the string. I think we gave them some good guidance. The second issue is that some AGI's (Anti Governments Elements—usually meaning a polite way of referring to Taliban here) have been planting seeds that Rotary is a Christian organization. We pointed out that this should not have much credibility since the RC of Jalalabad is made up exclusively of Muslim men—no ex-pats are even part of the club. We presented some ideas of ways to deal with reducing this perception i.e. pointing out the several Muslim counties where Rotary is thriving.

We then adjourned to the guest house and are in the process of working on the schedule for the next couple of days.

April 2, 2009

We are still having connectivity problems and need to go to the Taj to upload and download. We did that yesterday morning and then came back to the guest house and met with the dormitory contractor Dr. Aziz to review punch list items. We then met with the Mayor. We talked about the bridge project and he agreed to get his engineering staff involved. He also advised that there are rumors that Rotary is a Christian organization and that makes it sensitive for the municipality to become directly involved in our activities. I think there is more to it than that and we know that AGE (Anti-Government elements) will do what they can discourage interaction with the West by spreading untrue propaganda. We gave the Mayor a Dari version of the ABD/s of rotary and a brochure translated into Dari.

We returned to the guest house and met further with Dr. Aziz. After that we went to the Taj and were joined by the geek squad to go to the river to assess the bridge situation. We have been trying to determine the exact length of the crossing. I brought a ball of twine exactly 160 meters in length but for some reason there were no takers to swim the glacial rapidly moving river with string in hand to help get a precise measurement. NU Engineering professor, Ajmal, joined us (after getting some help getting his car out of the mud) and an agreement was reached with the City engineers as to the appropriate location of the towers for the suspension bridge. It is probable that the bridge will span 160 meters. A less expensive option is available that would result in water moving around the base of one tower part of the year but that creates some further structural issues. There are many opinions as to what to do—all the way from buying a flotilla of boats for a fraction of the cost to what this will spend to, using a single high wire cable for a small gondola type of transport, to ignoring the engineers altogether and go with a design that is less expensive but “should” work. Bottom line is that Fary and I will not approve funds being spent unless we are confident that appropriate engineers are comfortable with what is proposed. Fary fully agrees and this is her pet project. We believe the direct beneficiaries will be about 600 families made up of about 3,000 individuals. But we learned today that there are many more families originally from the area but presently living in Pakistan who will return to the area when they learn that a foot bridge has been provided. My guess is it will cost around \$200,000 and we have Rotary commitments of \$67,000. USAID has expressed a strong interest (but no commitment) to this project. It is our job to make the case to USAID and provide the supporting data. We can make a strong case and show them a picture of the new school on the other side of the river.

We then returned to the guest house and went back to the dorm finding a skeleton crew working. Dr. Aziz promised it will be finished in three days but there is no way for that.

I then went to the Taj to greet Karl Stucki and James Stunkel. We arranged for them to arrive via USAID AIR so that they could undertake an assessment of providing heart monitoring equipment for the Nangarhar Public Hospital. There was a transportation glitch in that the arrangement. I thought I had made arrangements to get them from the tarmac to the street did not materialize so they had to walk about a mile to get to the street where the secondary transportation I had arranged was there to greet them. They are seasoned travelers and good sports and as they realized that the Taj had a full bar, they were able to quickly forgive this mishap.

I then returned to the guest house where Fary had been joined by a NU Vice Chancellor whose daughter we have selected for a Rotary program to come to the U.S. this summer.

I had the usual tomato soup and beer for dinner. We wanted a history Channel Documentary regarding Charlie Wilson. I think it is far better than the movie Charlie Wilson's war.

Tomorrow the Brown Moini Afghan travel agency will be in full swing as we deal with our own schedule and the logistics of those we are helping out while they are here. I am not complaining. It is a great opportunity for Fary and me to be able to facilitate those who can bring things to the table such as telemedicine and heart monitoring equipment.

April 2, 2009

We went to the Taj to pick up Karl and Jim and take them to the Nangarhar Public Hospital to start their assessment work regarding putting in heart monitoring equipment at that facility. Dr. Pardis has arranged for their assessment to take place. This could result in as much as \$500,000 of heart monitoring equipment being installed.

We then went to the Taj for connectivity. There we picked up Pete and Kim and went to the PRT. We met Sabagul—a three year old girl who needs heart surgery to survive. She was there with her father. The PRT (through Dr. Captain Millis) had request funding help and through a Rotary program centered in New York known as “Gift of Life” Fary was able to secure \$1,000 for the first phase of the surgery. A shunt will be inserted until she is strong enough a few years down the road to have the larger surgery required. Doctors in Pakistan will perform the surgery.

Pete and Kim then talked about telemedicine prospects for Jalalabad with Dr. Millis and it looks like there may be some good opportunities to collaborate with some of the civilian side of what the PRT is undertaking in the medical field.

I inquired about the four deaths the PRT had incurred a couple of months ago. Four men were killed by EIDs. Two survived the initial hit but died during treatment at the PRT. I assume Dr. Millis was the attending physician but did not ask.

We then picked up four boxes we had shipped to the PRT using the military mailing address.

From there we went to our local bank to free up some funds we had wired over two weeks ago. For some reason the New York office of the National Bank of Pakistan wanted to know the relationship between the sending account party and the receiving account party and how the funds are to be used. The banker we had been dealing with was kidnapped a few months ago just inside the Pakistan border. He has recently been freed after payment of about \$120,000 but has not yet returned.

We then went to the Rotary School-unannounced. We have been told in the past this is a rather insecure area so go unannounced, don't stay too long ,and take a different route back. They say the school has about 4,900 students with a little less than 1/3rd girls. It had been raining and we were there for the second shift. Attendance seemed a bit light. Yet for the first time one of the classes for girls was being taught in the courtyard for lack of classroom space.

We spent time in the computer lab. We talked to the instructor about issues relative to girls using the computer. He advised there had been some complaints by the locals but he has held community meetings and the problems have been resolved. The girls are not strong enough in English to communicate with the students in the U.S. but the boys are communicating. There are about 70 students taking advantage of the computer training—about 1/3rd girls.

We took a new road back that we had never been on. It is the first cement highway we have ever seen in Afghanistan. It presents quite a contrast to the living quarters along the side of the road.

I went the to Taj for the compulsory Thursday night celebration since Friday is the day off here and some of the people for local NGO's show up and exchange info. Dave Warner had coined this as the "beer for data" program. I met an individual there whose company has received \$10M from the US Counter-Narcotics folks to build micro-hydro projects in Nangarhar Province sort of as a reward for the successful voluntary poppy reduction program.

April 4, 2009

Yesterday (Friday) is like our Sunday where things are pretty well shut down. We walked around the university grounds in the morning. We engaged in a very lively dialogue with some of the men at their dormitory. They wanted to talk about the U.S. interests in Afghanistan. They are unhappy with the lack of progress and wonder if we plan to be there forever. They acknowledge that it is better than times when the Russians were here, probably better than when the Taliban controlled the country and acknowledged if the coalition forces were to leave on short notice the country would erupt into chaos. But they want better conditions at the university and throughout the country. They seem a bit unappreciative about all the rebuilding that is taking place at the university and elsewhere. The dialogue was cordial and thoughtful. They also had very strong opinions about the U.S. invasion in Iraq and are convinced that Iraq was better for its people under Saddam Hussein. I emphasized to them that the future of Afghanistan rests in their hands—not ours. I don't believe U.S. folks have a long term interest in remaining in Afghanistan. I believe these face to face dialogues are important. Not that an argument

will be won but that there is a high level exchange of differing points of views. They have little opportunity for that here.

We came back to the guest house and made a list of the things we need to do and prioritized. It is amazing how much we have already accomplished on our list we started out with. Ishaq showed up unannounced and we conversed for about five hours on a wide range of topics. It reminded me a bit of the 1950's when neighbors used to just drop in to say hello. It seems that we have pretty much lost that over the years in the U.S.

Today we went to the campus and met with Professor Shinwary- who heads the literature faculty where the ESL program resides. We were joined by Israr and Sayed (two professors who have received Rotary scholarships in ESL) and walked to the remote building where the English classes are held. The building has no electricity, the windows are broken and it is basically falling apart. The classrooms are small size which does accommodate the small sizes of the ESL classes. But it is a shame that World Bank is investing \$2,000,000 to develop the English language program at NU and the facility for delivering instruction resembles more of a facility at the humane society than university classrooms. But I still believe it is more important what takes place in the classroom compared to the physical facility itself.

We then went to the ILC and met with Ishaq. I have to be a bit vague in my journal here but I will report that I learned earlier this morning that a major Rotary related event we were planning needed to be aborted. We discussed this with Ishaq and others in the inner circle and evaluated options.

We then returned to the guest house and had our umpteenth vegetarian meal. From there we went to the Taj and picked up Jim Stunkel to take him to his USAID flight at the "Jalalabad airport". I guess for security reasons there is no indication as to where to go to get your flight. This is a totally secure US base. We drove around for awhile and the only flight I saw takeoff was a drone which I assume was not meant for Jim. I called USAID AIR and was told we should deposit Jim near the Chinook helicopters. We did that and left him in the hands of a U.S. military guy who was waiting to pick up someone in the mystery location. Since I have not heard from Jim, I assume he made his flight.

We then went to the Public Hospital and met with Dr. Pardis. We gave him some stuff we had shipped from the States for him. We talked about proceeding with the major Rotary event with a different cast of characters. It is possible the Minister of Public Health will attend and we can have a very special meeting for him.

We then returned to our guest house and went to the dorm to inspect the work underway to install the carpet. Some of the pad has been laid.

We ate more than our usual allocation of dust today so upon return to the guest house felt obligated to wash it away with beer and wine.

We did learn today that Ishaq had an audience with President Reagan at the White house when the U.S. was indirectly fighting the Russians. We also learned that Ishaq spent some time with Charlie Wilson when he was leading the effort to obtain funding to fight the Russians. Ishaq said Charlie had a very attractive girl with him. This encounter was arrange by freedom fighter Abdul Haq a close friend of Ishaq.

April 5, 2009

The Afghans are coming.

Today Fary and I met with 22 Afghan teachers and professors who will be applying for U.S. visas to come to San Diego this summer under various programs in which we are involved. Some are NU English professors who will be involved in the SDSU summer institute funded by World Bank, some are male high school English teachers who will be taking classes to improve their English and English teaching skill fund by Rotary's Group Study Exchange Program and two females (or perhaps three) will be coming to San Diego under Rotary's Cultural Scholarship program to improve their English and English teaching skills. All of these are "sponsored" under the U.S. Department of State's Global Connection and Exchange program. Additionally we have three NU Professors who will be traveling to the US for work on their Master's Degree programs—all of which are or have been funded by the Rotary Foundation. We explained about the inter-relationship between the various programs, the funding sources, accommodation arrangements, and what they will be doing while in the U.S. Some of the participants have been successful in obtaining U.S. visas in the past and they described their personal experiences in the interview process. It was a very good session but it was a bit overwhelming to look at the room full of people and realize that most of them may be with us this summer. And this does not take into account the 10 Engineering professors who also will be applying to come this summer. We will have a separate session with them in a couple of days. Let's hope a high percentage will be approved for their U.S. visas.

Earlier in the day we spent a few hours with our carpenter walking through the dorm identifying items we will need like shelves and mirrors in the bathrooms, shelves in the laundry room, cabinets in the kitchen etc. We then took him to the guest house to suggest some modifications to the way the front door locks. Someone from the outside could lock the door and because we have bars on all windows, we have no way to get out. We also took him to the ILC so that he can design some cubby holes for attendees to put personal belongings. We probably need the same outside for the shoe jungle created by those inside.

We visited the new very large library. They are in the process of moving the old and unusable textbooks from the previous storage location to fill the first floor of this building where they will remain unused.

We have some spare change from one of the Rotary Foundation grants and need to spend it on campus so we are looking for places. Israr suggested we spend some at the Shira Law department since the folks there are most critical of money being spent in the English language program. We think this is a good idea and will check it out. This department is where the strongest anti-west feelings reside.

We had takeout Afghan food at the guest house with Ishaq, Sayad and Israr. This ended my streak of about 5 days with no beef.

I had about a half an hour phone call with Walter from the Netherlands who is overseeing bringing NATO bandwidth into several universities in Afghanistan. I am trying to figure out how this may relate to the Light up Jalalabad proposal we have been working on and also the bandwidth the geek squad at the Taj is working on for the university and other places. In essence, NATO has had a program in place for several years bring bandwidth into developing countries. Their program in the Caucuses is terminating because they now have access to fiber so the equipment and bandwidth is being transferred to Afghanistan for use at university sites and other sites. But all NATO does is bring the bandwidth to a fixed location and it is up to the university to figure out how to distribute it. There is a grant program available to receive funding for establishing a distribution network but no funding for on the ground activities like computers, polycomms etc. Also, if anyone from a European country is embedded with the PRT near the university then an additional €500,000 is available in funding. I have had the Jalalabad PRT turn itself upside down looking for a European working there but they can't find one. Apparently even a European cook would make the funding accessible.

I am still processing the NATO info and met with Dave and Ken (the super geeks) to get their read on the NATO possibilities and how it may affect their plans. On the latter point what they are up to and how it is funded, and why, is somewhere in the modern version of the twilight zone but the NATO potential does not seem to impact their program. I am not sure how to re-configure the Light up Jalalabad program or if I should just let it die. The attractive thing is that the NATO funding can probably be treated as cost sharing which could generate a fair amount of funds from USAID for providing on the ground resources complimentary to what NATO brings in-- and all the NATO bandwidth is free for about 3.5 years. But the NATO bandwidth will be about 5mbb or perhaps a bit more in connecting to the WWW and we can not spread that over too many end users and keep up decent upload and download speeds. The detailed analysis on my part will take more than just a few Heineken's to adequately process—and that reminds me it is time to sign off and get to other activities.

Saturday, April 11, 2009

I am presently in a Sheraton Hotel at the Frankfort airport and plan to fly direct to LAX tomorrow morning. So I have some time to document what has transpired over the last six days. I need to be a bit vague on some issues and won't name names of some folks who helped me by perhaps assisting in ways that are best left undocumented

I went to bed Sunday night feeling perfectly healthy. Around midnight I had a very sore throat and very runny nose. I took a Sucrets and figured I would deal with it in the morning. I got up around 6:30 and took two Z-PAC antibiotics we had left at the guest house from our last trip and I took my regular routine of morning meds for blood pressure and other stuff. Around 8:00 AM I have developed severe lower back pain so I took two old Codeine derivative tablets I have that were well expired. Around 10:00 AM I developed pain in my upper abdomen like I had never had. I could tell that it was not indigestion. As the pain increased I wondered if "drug wars" were taking place in my body. We (Fary and I) noticed that the Z-PAC said to not take within two hours of taking an anti acid. One of my routine meds is a strong anti acid for acid reflux. So at that point I figured let the drug as fight it out and when their potency is reduced then the abdominal pain should go away.

Fary contacted Dr. Pardis (director of Public Health for Nangarhar Province) who is a good friend. He said he would come to the guest house after the Jalalabad Rotary meeting (which Fary and I would miss).

He came over around 2:00 PM with Ishaq and asked a few questions. He then arranged for an Afghan doctor who works with local UN local folks to come over. He arrived about 3:00 and took my vital signs which were normal. The Afghan doc then made a call to a US Army doctor who works at the Army base at the Jalalabad Airport. I talked to this doc who is a surgeon and he said without seeing him he had no idea what was going on with me. He did not seem interested to see me but asked if I had access to the base. I told him I thought I could get there but did not tell him how.

We then contacted IF Hope who has an Afghan driver with a pass to the airfield to pick up passengers but we knew if we could get to the airfield we could get to the medical facility at the army base. They sent a driver for me. At this point I was having second thoughts. The ride would be miserable—about 40 minutes—and what would they do for me at the army base with an indifferent surgeon? Plus I thought I felt about 10% better and maybe the drug wars were subsiding. Fary and Ishaq convinced me to go anyway just for "peace of mind".

So we (Fary, Ishaq, the driver and I) get onto the airstrip around 4:30 and make our way to the Army facility. We find basically a converted warehouse that is the intake station for wounded or sick coalition soldiers. We talk to the intake folks who asked how we got there, who I was, and a series of questions that kept coming up down the road—what branch of military am I in, where is my ID card, where are my

orders, am I am contractor working for the US government who is my employer etc. A J'Bad Army doc shows up (not the one I talked to on the phone) and decides it is time for an examination and the questions can wait till later. He takes me to the warehouse which has little or no heat and puts me on a hard cold table and apologizes for the primitive condition. He draws blood, gets an IV going, brings in a portable X-Ray machine, and uses a portable ultrasound machine which he was not happy with. After about an hour he advises that I have a high white blood cell count and given the location of the pain and the best he could tell from the ultrasound, he believes I have cholecystitis which is an infected gall bladder. I advised I would be returning to the States in about 10 days and asked if perhaps he can give me some meds to treat it in the interim.

The doc said this needed to be dealt with immediately if his diagnosis was correct. He was arranging for a helicopter evacuation to take me to Baghram (the big military base about an hour from Kabul) where they could confirm his diagnosis and if it was correct, I would be operated on that night. He said the helicopter would leave in a couple of hours and there would be another passenger who was an Afghan under his care who had been shot up. So Fary, Ishaq and the driver left with plans for Fary to return with my meds, my international cell phone, and a change of clothes.

About 15 minutes after Fary left they said the chopper was ready to go. I borrowed a cell phone and advised Fary she would not make it back in time. So they wrap me in aluminum foil for warmth since the helicopter is not heated, mummify me onto a gurney, put me on a rickshaw and transport me into a vehicle that takes bodies in slots like a big version of what the airlines use to serve meals. We get loaded on the chopper from the vehicle and then they abort the mission because of lightning. We reverse the process and are told the chopper will leave in an hour. I call Fary with the update but advise nothing seems definite. After a few minutes they advise the chopper won't be going tonight because of the weather. I then call Fary again and let her know that it looks like we will be going out at 8:00 AM in the morning so she could stop by early morning with my stuff.

They then move me to the most comfortable bed I have been in for days. After settling in for about 5 minutes they say the mission is back on so I am re-mummified in aluminum foil and onto the chopper. They have a medic traveling with me. I guess for space reasons he is hooked to the top of the chopper and travels upside taking my vital signs for the 1 hour flight. We are then taken to the medical ward at Baghram. They go through the who are you and why are you're here series of questions but the medical staff soon supersede over the processing staff. They run a barrage of tests including taking another ultrasound test with a very fancy machine. I met a lady doc who advised she is a surgeon and if surgery is necessary she will be me doc. (She looks like the twin of my niece Katie.) The ultrasound was reviewed by a radiologist and my surgeon and the verdict was I needed immediate surgery. I borrowed a cell phone and gave Fary the update. I had also been asking her to call Susan to keep her informed since I had no way to do that. So then I met my anesthesiologist and went in for the surgery. I think this was about midnight Monday.

The surgery went well. I was advised by the surgeon that the gall bladder was worse than expected. If left alone septic fluids would soon have spread throughout my body and what would have followed would be a grim scenario.

So I again called Fary and she advised she would make her way to Baghram using Qaher our regular driver. I said be sure to bring my meds since that may be her "ticket" onto the base. Don't give them up. We had also arranged with the J'bad doc to give her Orders which would give her access privileges at Baghram.

For a few hours after the surgery things seemed to be going well. I anticipated quick recovery and return to activities in Jalalabad. About this time, day or night made no difference to me for the next few days. I was under constant attention by military medical staff who were absolutely wonderful and so professional. The contrast to what you get in the US was remarkable (sorry Mike Barden).

Fary showed up at the Baghram gate about noon Tuesday. I had no phone to communicate with but could borrow a phone from staff on occasion. After about five hours of Fary's arguing with the gate staff they finally sent someone to get my meds from Fary. A sympathetic ear (or maybe someone who wanted Fary off of his back) arranged for her to bring in the meds with some of my personal belongings.

But my recovery did not go as I had anticipated. At one point a guy came to me with a catheter and Fary suggested I make my way to the restroom and return with a canister of what they wanted and suggest I don't need a catheter. Great advice and they decided it was unnecessary.

The local doc became concerned that my oxygen blood count was not responding as it should following surgery. They said they wanted to conduct a few tests. By this time I had had Susan chase down the cell number for my San Diego physician since I wanted to bring him into the decision making process. He talked to the military docs and they agreed on the appropriate round of tests. The military docs were concerned that a blood clot had developed somewhere. The tests eventually proved negative on that.

That evening they gave Fary a reclining chair and she spent the night. About the middle of Wednesday someone pulled open the curtain and there were about 15 people standing looking at me for what I guess is "Grand Rounds". I recognized about half the people who had been assisting with me. The head doc who I had not seen before said the decision had been made that I was going to Germany for further treatment. My blood oxygen was not responding satisfactorily. He advised because of the seriousness of the situation they were arranging for an in-flight medical doc to escort me on the trip which would be about 7.5 hours in the air.

I was advised that the flight to Germany would leave about 2:00 AM the next morning. So Fary contacted Qaher who had brought her to the base and had overnighted in Kabul. She requested he go to

the guest house and gather together anything that looked like it belonged to me and bring it to Baghram. There should be enough time since that process would only take about 6 hours. It was sadly very clear to me that once in Germany I would not be returning to Afghanistan during this venture. Qaher was able to make the round trip to Jalalabad and get my stuff to the gate. A staff person brought it to me. A few minor things were not there that Fary can bring after she returns from Iran.

Then the more serious questions began to surface and to who I was and why was I there. In the past inquiries people simply gave up trying to figure this out and went on with their medical treatment. They figured it was up to someone else to figure this out. About a half hour before the flight was to leave they said there were some issues with my paperwork that were in the process of being resolved. They sent my luggage ahead to the plane and said I would be the last one loaded. They put me on the gurney partially mummified and placed me on top of a rickshaw.

Then some new faces showed up with the same round of questions. I would tell a common theme had to do with was I here under a government contract. They advised that they know I said I was affiliated with Rotary but all data bases had been searched and there is no US Government contract with Rotary. I then laid out the specifics of the fact that our Rotary Club Foundation has a contract with the US Dept. of State to use technology for students in Afghanistan to use the internet to connect with students in San Diego. I advised that I am present of our club's foundation and provided the full name. They continued to ask who my employer is, who I report to and who is responsible for me. I told them I report to no one and I am responsible to myself. This concept does not register for government contractors. And our club foundation is only a contractor in the very technical sense. They then asked for copy of the contract. I advised I have an electronic version with my computer on the plane. They fetched my computer and I was able to bring up the contract. They insisted on a hard copy which I did not have and would not allow me to put it on a flash drive for printing. (Flash drives are not allowed for use since they may carry viruses.) So then one of the interrogators says he can borrow my computer and scan from my screen into their system. By this time I learned that decisions regarding me are being made by a military command team in Qatar. They guy returns and advises the scan is impossible. We are then told a call just came in that I can't get on the plane and the next plane leaves in two days. Maybe in the interim they can figure out who I am and why I am here. They seemed bit offended by my suggestion what someone read the terms of the contract from my computer team to the team in Qatar.

About 60 seconds later a nurse came running in saying Centom had just been overruled and I was cleared to go on the flight. My escort doc (a full colonel and a wonderful person) whispered to me that a "one star" or higher must have intervened.

So I said a tearful goodbye to Fary, thanked her constant attention, and was taken by ambulance onto the tarmac for the awaiting plane. It is basically a traveling military medical hospital with gurneys stacked three deep on each side of the fuselage. It took about an hour of fussing around and we were eventually in the air. My escort doc was with me at all time and I remained on oxygen.

Each step of the way no one locally could tell me what to expect at the next station. That remained the case. We arrived at an airfield and were taken by a gurney wagon to Lundstuhl Regional Medical Center which serves all US Military coming out of the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters as well as military serving in Europe. The first person to greet me was a military chaplain just to say hello and wish me well. The facility may be the only remaining US medical facility of consequence serving a radius of 10,000 miles. Apparently it used to be a youth training camp under Hitler.

Unfortunately this place more resembled a U.S. type of hospital when it came to staff attitude and patient care. You rarely saw a doc, nursing care was pretty indifferent, and no one could tell you what was going on or what to expect next. By this time I was pretty tired of bad attempts at inserting IV connectors and drawing of blood. Under the best of circumstances my veins are hard to hit successfully. By the time I had been at this place for a while and counting previous experiences. I had no less than fifty pokes for various activities—most unsuccessful. For the first time someone asked about next of kin and if I wanted to see a chaplain. I think it was just routine but did not like hearing the word “chaplain” twice upon my arrival. I figured I would call my friend Father Wayne if I needed spiritual counseling. I gave them my Rotary card and wrote Susan’s cell on in it and pointed out Fary could be reached at the Afghan cell number. I was also asked if I have insurance and they made a copy of my insurance card. I have no idea regarding the financial consequences of any of this.

Shortly after arrival I received a call from a person who identified himself as a U.S. Dept. of State person working in Germany. I thought this is probably not good news. There is a reason I was concerned about this I can not share in this blog. All information I had given was true but perhaps might be considered as incomplete. He asked about the nature of the contract I was working under—providing connectivity between high school students in Jalalabad and San Diego. He said that sounded like a great program. This did not seem to fit under his responsibility for organizations under contract with the US Government but if there was anything he could do for me to let him know—whew.

I felt the need to shave after several days. Jack my civilian hippie nurse from Santa Monica found a 50’s type blade and some shaving cream. The room did not have a mirror. When I wiped my face clean the washcloth had blood all over it. Fortunately I had a stepic pencil with me but I now have the appearance of someone wounded in action—rugged unkempt hair, no shower for several days, protruding belly from surgery but otherwise features someone who loss of weight recently, now a scabbed up face and one other disability to discuss later.

I was able to discern that my diagnosis was that I have lungs with symptoms of a smoker and they don’t respond very quickly in rebuilding capacity after surgery. The treatment is passage of time, getting some exercise (which is impossible to do with various tubes in you and being hooked up to a continual EKG machine) and blowing into a plastic portable thing I would take with me. I kept a close eye on my oxygen

blood level with and without breathing from the oxygen tube. I passed this information on to my San Diego doc. We considered the impact of a 12 hour flight pressurized to the equivalent of 8,000 feet. I arrived on Thursday and on Friday the local docs said I needed to stay in the hospital until Tuesday of next week. I arranged for the local docs to then talk to my San Diego doc. They did and my San Diego doc confirmed to me it should be OK to leave now.

So then my next challenge was to figure out how to escape from a military hospital in Germany and arrange forward transit from a location where I did not know where I was. With a help or a local nurse I learned I was about an hour and a half from Frankfurt and he gave me a phone number of a local shuttle service. I called them mid morning and booked a seat on their next shuttle run at 8:00PM that night.

I was in good contact with Susan from this facility. I could use a land line and an Elks club in New York donates phone cards for US military in this facility to call the US. In the middle of her night Susan found a Sheraton Hotel located at the airport and gave me their phone number. I booked a room for two nights using my international cell since the phone card only worked for calls to the U.S. A mental compromise I made was that I would spend an extra day in Germany recuperating but not in the hospital but in a hotel. Susan and I worked with our travel agent Laura and booked a business class seat for Sunday. Thus the escape route was in place and I just needed to figure out how to get out of the facility.

In asking around I learned that since I was not in the US military nor accountable to an organization, the hospital probably did not have a way to keep me there against my will. So I decided to confront my doctor directly with my decision and felt that since I had my transit plans in place they could not stop me. That proved correct. I needed my meds replaced which somehow got lost between Baghram and Germany. For some reason staff at Baghram did not trust me with my own meds, passport or wallet. I had given priority treatment to my passport and wallet and computer when transitioning. Once in German, to the consternation of the hospital, I insisted keeping all my belonging with me in my room at all times.

After much grimacing, the doc said they would basically give me what I consider to be a "dishonorable discharge" from the hospital and order up my meds. Someone would see me to the door and I was on my own. My last IV inserts were taking out by a lady older than George Mannshreck which caused some spurting of blood. She comments ---"my it bleeds when you take them out". The old lady and I then go to the hospital pharmacy as it is closing and get them to stay open long enough to get my traveling meds

So I get escorted by a male nurse to the gate waiting for the shuttle. By this time I am a bit admired by the local staff other than the doc. They had never seen anyone escape before and privately agreed with my decision. The shuttle is nowhere to be seen but eventually shows up a half our late. I reflected that I was in deep trouble once I had escaped if my 8:00 PM shuttle was a no show and I am in the middle of nowhere with no backup plan.

I am in the shuttle for about 15 minutes and suddenly my lower back pain returned that I had not felt since last Monday when this ordeal began. I realized that with all the meds I had in hand, none were pain medication. By the time we get to the hotel. I am close to immobile. I get registered and my luggage taken to my room. I pull out the old codeine pills and take a couple and go to bed.

This morning I check with the hotel regarding medical services for my back. There is a medical clinic in the airport. So I get wheel chaired over there, see a doc, get an injection of pain killer and go to the pharmacy and get pain pills to last for the next three days. I was glad I did not need to get into the issue of the gall bladder surgery with the local doc. (At one time a doc at the German hospital said they could issue an order to the airline that I was unfit to fly. I said that would make me a prisoner in Germany and he backed off. I was also careful not to disclose my flight info to that doc.) I get wheeled back to the hotel and have my first real meal since last Sunday—breakfast.

Then I get wheeled to my room and am typing this story. I think I will try to get up and move around and close with the results and additional thoughts.

I'm back—somewhat ambulatory. I will do some walking around which should help.

Thoughts about my ordeal.

Being able to communicate through the telephone was very important. Having an international cell phone was a lifeline. Fary's presence and then availability by phone and Susan's availability by phone made all the difference.

Don't let important personal belongings get out of sight. If possible keep these attached to yourself. Have multiple printouts of your regular meds. At the last minute I made a printout from the guest house when I thought I was going for a routine medical visit to the Army base in Jalalabad. My list quickly got lost in the transitions and my meds eventually got lost in the transitions.

I have nothing but the best to say about the medical treatment I received at the first two stations-J'bad Army Hospital and Baghram. Also, my treatment was always more important to those folks than who I was and why I was there. In Germany people were just doing their jobs sometimes without much enthusiasm. People were usually courteous and professional but lack of the military discipline I had gotten used to was missing.

Life can be full of adventures. One should not be afraid to go to faraway places but should also be prepared to accept the consequences when stuff happens.

I am disappointed that the trip was cut short since there were so many things I still wanted to do or be involved in. But Fary can fully carry out those things on her own. I just wish I could be there to share the enjoyment with our local Afghan friends. They have been inquiring about my well being regularly. I appreciate all the concerns and well wishes from my friends in San Diego as well.

I have not read or responded to my e-mails that have come in since last Sunday. I will likely continue to check e-mail from the hotel and I believe Lufthansa has internet access on the plane. I leave at 10:30 Sunday morning and arrive at LAX around noon or so on Sunday (around 9 hours time difference). Susan will pick me up and we will drive to San Diego.

I look forward to getting home.

Steve

[Entries from Fary after I left follow]

Dear Steve,

I was going to send this to Dan but find out you already sent your report, any way if you like to add or get some of it and put it in your journal. I will send you the pictures separately.

Monday April 6, 2009,

Today as usual we were planning to have few meetings but as you already know part of the story Steve woke up not feeling well and he took few medication and went back to bed, while he was resting I went and met with the Dean of Sharia Law and Dean of Arabic department for assessing the situation of their departments and their needs like computers, copy machine. They were very pleased that we are thinking about them and they feel very isolated from other departments and they have been neglected in many ways, so it was a good meeting. Also, I had a short conversation with the female students in their break, we talked about the new dorm and how many of them will be interested to live there, they are looking forward to visit the dorm and there are about 15 girls. When I came back Steve felt very sick I called Dr. Pardis and he came with another Afghan doctor and Ishaq, both suggested and arranged for us to go to the military base to see Doctor Kyle Remick. Ishaq arranged transportation and we went to the base and after few tests, his doctor advised he should be transferred to the Bagram air base in Kabul because he

suspects he might have gall bladder infection or gall stone. At 10.00 pm they transferred him to Bagram and urgently went through surgery for gall bladder infection.

Tuesday April 7

I left the guest house around 8.00am went to the base and got a letter of permission to enter the Bagram Air base from Dr. Remick and left for Kabul around 8.30am, it is cloudy and rainy day , it took me about 4 hours to reach the base and the worst was I have to wait for 5 hours in the rain and cold weather because around Kabul snowed in and I could not call in and he needed his medications and looks like the letter I got was totally useless and nobody knows any thing about any body, any way long story short I got to the hospital around 5.30 pm and We were hoping he will be discharged and I reserve rooms at the German guest house and thought we will stay one night and next day will go to Jalalabad so he can rest and feel better but boy we were dreaming,

I stayed over and one things I have to mentioned in spite of the chaos in the gate inside the hospital every body was wonderful, his nurses and doctors and their medical service was excellent, they even brought me a recliner chair to rest. Of course every few minutes they woke him up for different things, medication ,injection and much more.....

Wed. April 8

This morning during the doctors round they suggested few more test because of his low level of oxygen in his blood and put him on oxygen, I called Ishaq to call Susan because I was not able to call international from the base (Total isolation from out side world) and let her know what is going on and also, get the phone # of Dr. Hamed Bayat his cardiologist in San Diego to have second opinion because they said there might be a blood clot in one of his lungs and that is the reason he could not breath well. I got the phone # and request Dr. McCarthy (his doctor) to get in touch with and thanks to Dr. Bayat who suggested to take some special tests, scan, ultra sound which helped to dismiss their diagnosis and gave us the good news that there is no blood clot and nothing serious and due to the surgery and pain (he wants to act a macho man) he was not able to breath deep and did not take pain killer.

But they suggested he has to be transferred to Germany for further treatment and transit to U.S. Taking constant oxygen and pain killer helped the level of Oxygen and I called our Driver to drive back to J-Abad to pick up his suite case and bring them to the hospital for flying to Germany. Every thing happened so fast that I do not have time to think or what to do, start to pack every thing for his travel to Germany.

We always thought we might be attacked by TERRORIST but instead he was attacked by GALL BLADDER.....

Thursday April 9

They informed him that he will be leaving at 1.30 am to Germany but because of he is a civilian they have to get the permission from the military to get him in the plain. After hours of waiting he left at 3.00 am business class, his flight will be for 7 hours, the pictures are attached. I stayed in the hospital and told my driver to pick me up at 6.00am but I felt asleep and woke up at 7.00 am and walked about an hour to reach the gate and just wanted to get away from Kabul, I do not like this city dirty, crowded, noisy and cold.

I reached Jalalabad around 11.00am , visited the Dorm to see the progress , called Susan and briefed her about Steve's travel , talked to Baba our carpenter to start putting furniture inside, the carpeting was completed, curtain was in place, it really look great. Also, talked to Dr. Aziz regarding the land escaping of the dorm and finishing up the painting of the out side and working on Friday which is their day off but because we are running out of time he has to work on Friday.

Back to gust house for taking rest.

Friday April, 10, 09

8.30 am went to Dorm and started putting furniture in place, Baba and his son's showed up with most of the cabinet's and chairs, painters started the out side painting, lots of activities I invited every body for lunch which we order from out side, that is the way I bribe them to work on their Friday which is their day off.

I called Almas to set an appointment with the Dean of Education collage just a courtesy visit and arranging the students visit to Nangarhar university. Ishaq and Israr paid a visit. Called Dr. Pardis and Dave warner regarding Steve's condition, I had lots of calls and every body is concerned about him and sends their prayer and good wishes.

At 2.00 pm picked up Dave Warner and a young gentleman David from Taj to attend the Elder's shura (Group) close to Rotary school in Molavi Khalis community which was requested by one of their members who is a professor at the NU.

This shura (group) consist of 25 powerful and influential elders of the area and the Rotary school principal is one of them, in case of any problem arise at their community such as family ,economy , social issues they are the one who will solve the problem among themselves. Israr and Sherzad members of the J-Abad Rotary club joined us as well, the meeting went very well and the elder's requested few things:

- 1- Repair of the school
- 2- Additional Water tank in the girls section.
- 3- Surrounding wall
- 4- Sport play ground for children
- 5- Electricity
- 6- Road to be asphalted

I informed them that we are putting a request to PRT for repair and possible surrounding wall of the school which is a big concern of the community for the safety of their children, because the school is located close to the street. I told them this is what their community should do, and they said they can not afford this but the whole community are ready to put up their sleeves and work as laborer as their share of their commitment.

I requested to get few estimate for the wall, play ground and the repair of the school interior which will be added to the proposal to PRT.

Regarding the water tank we will get an estimate, which is doable, Rotarian Sherzad promised to talk to the Mayor for the road to be asphalted and he will help the local to put a request together for the mayor and U.S AID. One of the members of the community is working in the city and will follow up with the electricity.

While we visited the upon our first week school there were rumors and threatening letters that they have to close the computer lab. So, I asked the elders about the rumors and how they feel and their answer was: if the children around the world learning how to use the high technology why our children should be prevented, they are fully supporting us to bring any high tech. equipments to the school and said do not worry about the trouble makers they know how to deal with them, that is their school and their children are studying there and they request more computers and very grateful to our effort. I presented a translated Farsi version of ABC of Rotary and Israr and Sherzad explain what is Rotary and their main goal in Pashto. One of the elders said some thing which was very interesting when I mentioned that we are requesting PRT to help us, he said that will strengthens their relation ship and they will talk to every body in their community about the U.S. military team efforts to rebuild and assist their community, he said we know they relate us to Al Qida and extremist but our community looking for a peaceful solution and these kind of activities bring us closer and build a better relation ship. They emphasize that it help us to convince the whole community that U.S. military have done good for our children and we have to support them. Dave asked are you sure the PRT are welcome to come to this are and they are not putting you and your children in risk and harm way and they all said no and there will not be any risk at all and they will support and cooperate with them fully. We took few pictures and drink 3 cups of Green tea and said good bye.

Dave and David came to NU and we visited Dorm, guest house and I have to confess I offer Steve's beer to them and they took the solar stick to the Taj for experimenting how it works and let me know. Mohammad Ishaq and his 2 son's came and visited me. It was a beautiful day of spring, See you

Saturday, April 11

9.30 am visited Mr. Farmanullah Dean of Education collage and he wanted to meet me at 3.00 pm to go and have a meeting with ladies at the Dorm. 10.30 had a brief meeting with Mr. Azizi director of education regarding the selection of 2nd Nasrat School for Canadian project, he conveyed his best wishes for Steve's recovery, we talked about the Rotary school and I told him about my meeting with the Elders and he was pleased to hear that we have the support of the locals.

Went to the Market and ordered oven, fridge for the female Dorm at the COE to be delivered in the afternoon. Went to Almas office to arrange all the teachers (GSE Team) will be at the NU for their Visa application, visited the GCEP computer lab at collage of Education (COE) and talked to few female students, they were very appreciative of this program and the only concern they had was the lack of communication from U.S. students and slow speed of the internet, mostly they are communicating and emailing each other and most of them speak English well.

12.30 pm came back to the NU and visited ETT English Technology Training center (ETT) with Sayad and Maqsood for doing some carpentry work that they need. 15 minutes to 1 I thought I will drop in and see how the female Dorm is doing and guess what I saw in front of the Door the security Guy was sleeping in his bed, then I enter the building in the office area Dr. Aziz and his Engineer were sleeping and the son of Baba carpenter and the rest of the workers were comfortably sleeping all around down stairs and upstairs and I wish some body had a video camera and took a video of that moment specially from my face and my reaction, I just stand their for few minutes with amazement, my blood pressure went all the way up and I was furious and just said What is going on. Every body got up and rushed towards me rubbing their sleepy eyes and trying to convince me every thing is under control. I am laughing about it now but I was really angry, went back to ILC to meet with the teachers and when I told Ishaq he started to laugh so hard picturing what happened. All the GSE team and Almas were there and Ishaq put a power point together and guide them how to apply for visa and give another orientation about the interview and went through f do and don't during interview.

3.00 pm Almas and I went back to COE to meet with the Dean and female students at their dorm, he complain that the girls are careless about their place and do not value the things we buy them so, here is Mother Fary started to lecture them, OK do not start with me Mr. Brown I know what you usually say when I am jumping up and down and lecturing, I was very Nice and actually when we were leaving they asked me if I will have a cup of tea with them and I spent time with them until 5.00pm they asked me lots of personal questions about my life and if I am happy and we discussed about religion and my belief and much more.

One thing made me sad was one of the ladies said I love music and I never get tired of listening to it but according to Islam it is not good and it is evil to enjoy music and I hope I convince her that actually it is Godly to enjoy music because it is been used in Sufism which is a branch of Islam to listen to music and dance to connect to your source, another one said How could I be happy when I can not find happiness around me, they want me to be back for dinner but time to go back to NU, I do not want to be out side when it gets dark.

Almas showed up with 4 workers and one fridge and oven, they all helped to clean up the set the kitchen and Qaher our driver will be there tomorrow to bring some body to set them up. 6.30 pm and time to go and I am really hungry, I pour my self a glass of Really bad wine I have and made a quick veggie food for my self, Bon e petite

Fary Moini

