

**THE
VOICE
OF**

Gizab

**TACTICAL RADIO SUPPORT TO
VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS**

After assuming command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in June 2009, General (GEN) Stanley A. McChrystal initiated a 'population-centric' counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) labeled their COIN approach 'Village Stability Operations' (VSO). In VSO, SOF worked with Afghans to build Afghan Local Police (ALP), oust the Taliban, and develop rural areas. SOF also helped bolster district, provincial, and national governments. Security, development, and governance were the watchwords of VSO. The Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) was the VSO proponent in-country, and its assets included a Tactical Military Information Support Operations (MISO) Company. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) soldiers from the Tactical MISO Company directly supported the regional Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs), Special Forces Operational Detachments - Alpha (ODAs), and other SOF units located at Village Stability Platforms (VSPs) across Afghanistan. As will be demonstrated, Tactical Radio Stations (TRSs) served as a key medium for PSYOP soldiers in VSO.¹

This brief article is an overview of tactical MISO in VSO. First, it outlines the structure and chain of command of tactical MISO elements under the CJSOTF-A. Second, it explains how the CJSOTF-A expected MISO to support VSO. Third, it describes the general makeup of Tactical Radio Stations and how they were



General Stanley A. McChrystal, ISAF commander.

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of personnel in photos are blocked out when not covered with dark visors or sunglasses, except when the photos were publicly released by a service or DoD. Source references (end notes) utilize the assigned pseudonym.



Outside of the 'Voice of Gizab' station are DJ Nawid Ahmed (center left), District Chief of Police Agha Lalai (center), and DJ Dawood Shah (center right), owner and announcers, in late 2011.

TRS Equipment Included:

1. Radio in a Box (RIAB)

- FM Stereo Transmitter
- Media Inputs (USB, MP3, CDs, SD cards)
- Digital AM/FM Tuner
- Microphone/Source Mixer
- Power Input

2. Omnidirectional antenna with cable (sold with the RIAB)

3. Microphone (sold with the RIAB)

4. Antenna mast

5. Generator for power

6. Laptop computer with programming software

7. Additional Audio/Visual Cables

Radio-In-A-Box (RIAB)



Furman Classic Series Power Conditioner (15 Amp)

ROLLS RM67 Microphone/Source Mixer

ROLLS RS80 Digital AM/FM Tuners

Galaxy Audio Rack Mount USB/MP3/CD/SD Players

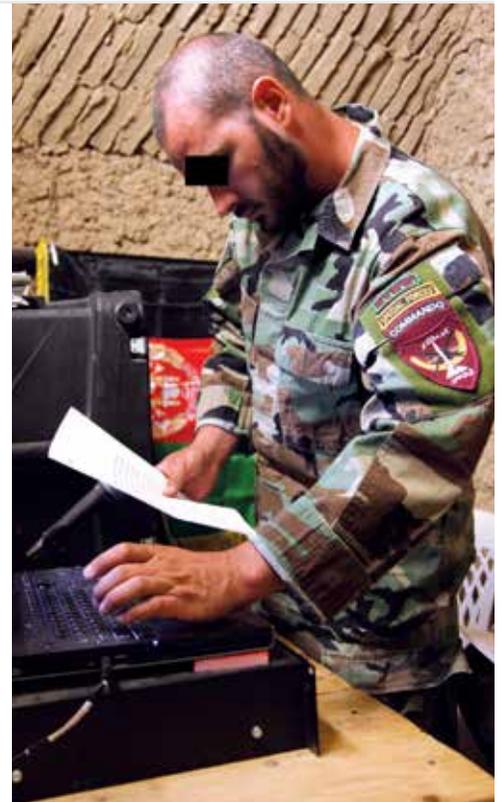
MIZAR FM Stereo Transmitter

RIAB weight (incl. antenna): approx. 250 lbs.
RIAB dimensions: approx. 22" (h) x 28" (w)

Counterinsurgency," a reference for planning, executing, supporting, and assessing VSO. It explained how SF ODAs, Marine Special Operations Teams, and Navy SEALs, as well as their SOF 'enablers' (including Civil Affairs, Cultural Support, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams), fit into VSO. The CJSOTF-A directed PSYOP soldiers to deliver truthful messages through various media and face-to-face interactions to persuade Afghan tribal, religious, and local political leaders to support VSO and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). These leaders would in turn influence their own constituencies to support VSO and GIROA.⁵

Tactical Radio Stations would prove to be a highly effective medium to achieve VSO objectives. Often the only station in remote areas, TRSs were "the primary means of communication" to reach the Afghan population. The CJSOTF-A elaborated: "The reach of the radio broadcasts is an important part of expanding security, development, and governance into key rural areas of Afghanistan."⁶ TRSs used vetted Afghan operators/announcers and broadcasted news, music, religious teachings, educational information, and messages from district and provincial officials.

The core of the TRS was the 'Radio in a Box' (RIAB), an 'off-the-shelf' broadcasting solution purchased from the New York-based Ramsey Electronics. According to Ramsey, "The standard RIAB is a stand-alone broadcast station for local origination, that includes various program source modules . . . including CD, CD-R, MP3, Cassette, and Digital Media players pre-wired into multichannel professional audio mixers for simple operator or 'DJ' operation. Two standard microphones for local production are also included and integrated into the mixer. The standard RIAB includes an easy to setup omnidirectional antenna and 100 feet of low loss antenna feed line, preassembled and ready to connect. The normal RIAB can be set up and on-the-air in less than 30 minutes."⁷



Some TRSs were operated by Afghan National Army Commando or Special Forces personnel trained in Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) by U.S. PSYOP soldiers at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan.

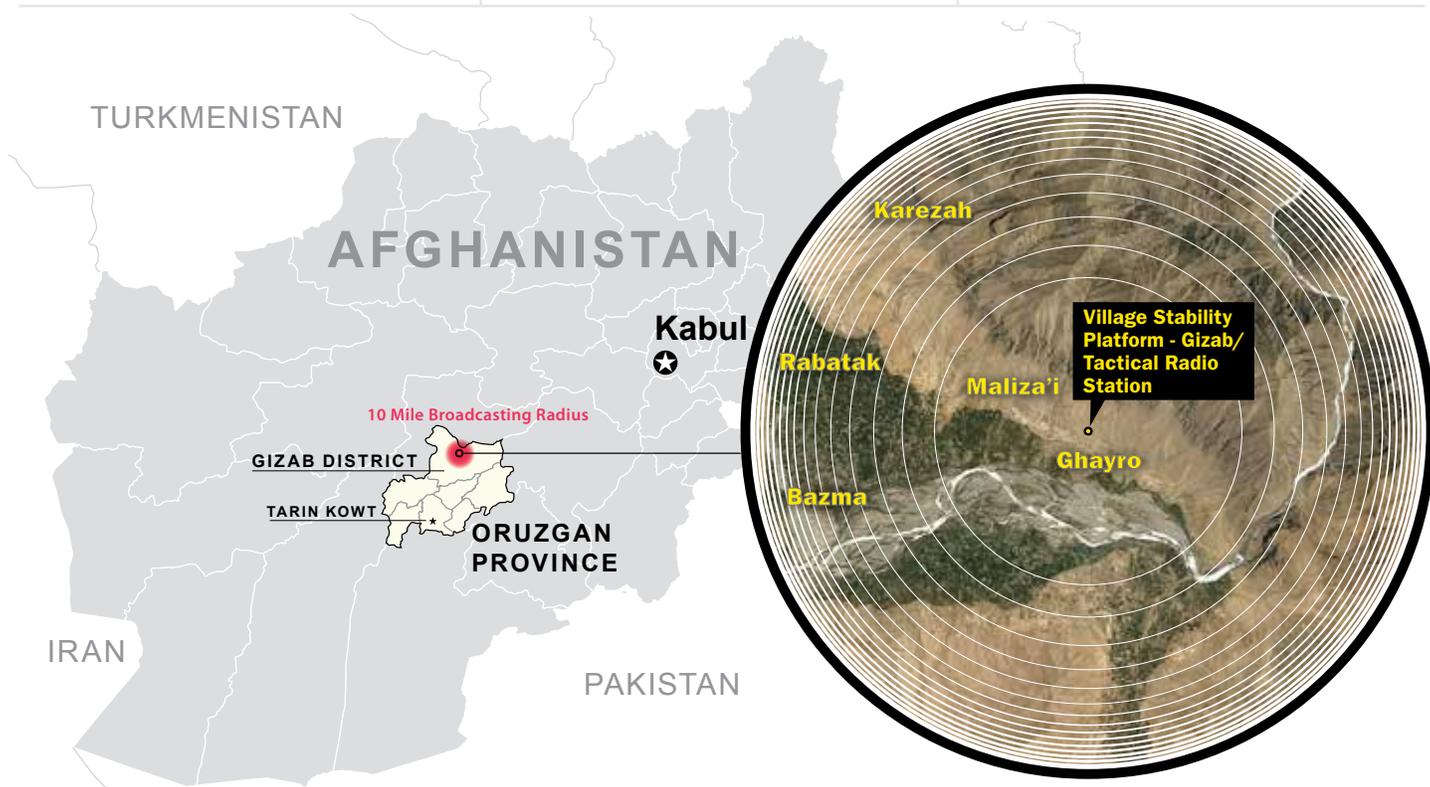
Based on ‘lessons learned’ while supporting SOTF-South in Kandahar Province in 2011, TMD 9C30 established *modus operandi* for constructing and operating TRSs. First, a TRS required other equipment besides the RIAB: a generator for power, an antenna mast and extended cable (if necessary), audio-video cables, and a laptop computer with programming software (typically Apple, Inc. MacBooks loaded with Radiologic DJ or Zarasoft software). Second, the TRS needed to be in a climate-controlled, dust-free room with enough space for equipment to be situated off the floor and for the disc jockey (DJ) and other personnel to work. The building housing the TRS should account for proximity to the antenna mast, accessibility, and security.⁸

TMD 9C30 believed that the most important aspect of TRS operations was that the stations must not appear as being overtly American controlled. “No MISO messages should be played until the TMT is sure that the local population is satisfied with the current programming. This will

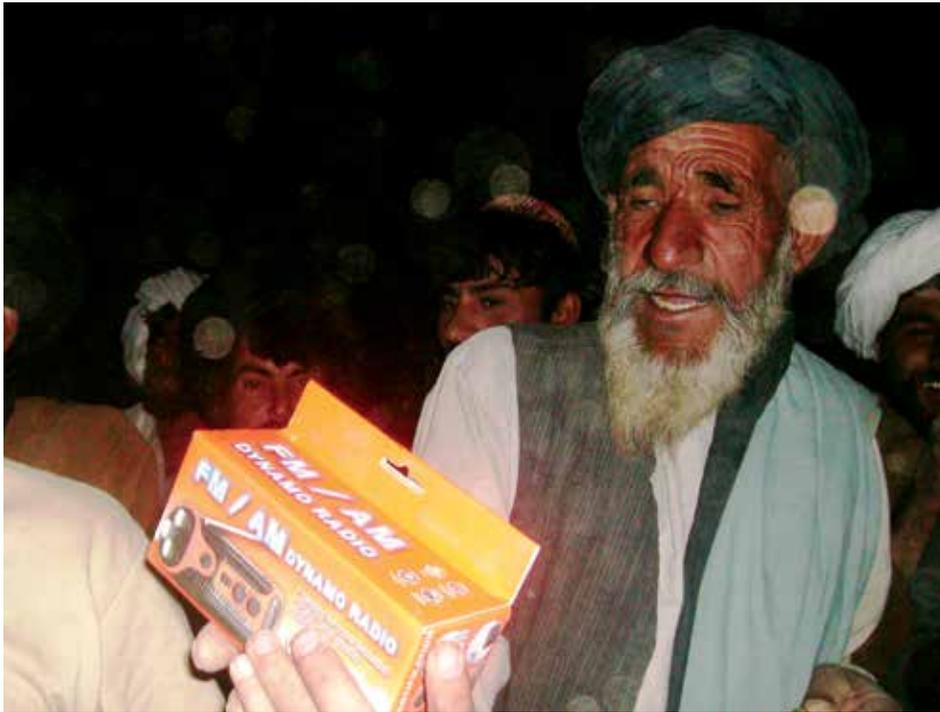
[We achieved] “the ‘Afghan face’ for which we always strive . . . since it is a local person putting messages out instead of US military personnel.”⁷ — TMD 9C30 personnel

ensure that the TRS earns a positive reputation and the people do not think of it as an ‘American owned’ radio station.” Getting ‘buy-in’ and participation from local tribal and religious leaders and district and provincial officials (such as governors and chiefs of police) was paramount. Doing this achieved “the ‘Afghan face’ for which we always strive . . . since it is a local person putting messages out instead of US military personnel.”⁹

The final objective of this article is to highlight the ‘Voice of Gizab’ in Oruzgan Province, a station that typified TRS support to VSO. Working with a 7th Special Forces Group ODA in SOTF-South, PSYOP soldiers from C Company, 9th POB, established that TRS during their July 2010-January 2011 deployment. Their replacements from E Company, 9th POB continued and fine-tuned the ‘Voice of Gizab’ during their January-July 2011 rotation. Deployed from July 2011 to January 2012, Sergeants (SGTs) Patrick M. Smith and John W. Scotland* of TMT 9C62 (C Company, 9th POB) were the last ‘owners’ of that station until it was turned over to the Gizab District Chief of Police in September 2011.¹⁰ What follows is a brief description of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ provided by C Company, 9th POB personnel who handled its transition to Afghan control.



While ‘Voice of Gizab’ programming could be heard by some listeners as far as 10 miles away (the approximate broadcasting radius of the TRS antennas), distance and terrain greatly impacted reception. The above map shows the location of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ TRS, and depicts signal degradation the further one gets from the station.



TMT 9C62 leader, SGT Patrick M. Smith, distributes hand-cranked AM/FM Dynamo Radio receivers to local Afghans.

*“We were given *carte blanche* to put whatever we wanted on our radio station.”— SGT Patrick M. Smith*



Leaflets complemented TRS broadcasts in promoting the VSO themes of security, development, and governance. The leaflet held by the girl on the left reads, “A Government Working for All Afghans. The Future of the Country Depends on Your Support.”

Commanded by MAJ Mark P. Cocherell*, C Company served as the CJSOTF-A Tactical MISO Company from July 2011 to January 2012. With 118 soldiers, it was “the largest deployment of a Tactical MISO Company ever deployed in support of a CJSOTF.”¹¹ Among its soldiers was Wilmington, Delaware, native SGT Patrick M. Smith, a former Light-Wheel Vehicle Mechanic on his third Afghanistan deployment. As the Team Leader of TMT 9C62 under TMD 9C60 (SOTF-Southeast), Smith’s mission was to provide MISO support to ODA 1333b at VSP-Gizab in Oruzgan Province.¹² (Led by SF Warrant Officer 2 [WO2] Donald M. Pearson*, ODA 1333b was a ‘split-team’ ODA from C Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SFG.) With no experience in radio operations, Smith and his Assistant Team Leader, John W. Scotland*, ‘fell in’ on the ‘Voice of Gizab’ early in the deployment.¹³

The ‘Voice of Gizab’ TRS was situated at VSP-Gizab and configured to broadcast in a roughly 10-mile radius around the site. SOF personnel at that site had earlier ‘seeded’ the area by distributing hand-cranked AM/FM Dynamo Radio receivers to local Afghans. The TRS already had solid programming and seasoned DJs by the time TMT 9C62 arrived. Smith described how TMTs found the ‘voices’ for their TRSs. “TMT leaders had the authority to hire DJs. We’d pay them with our own discretionary funds once a month.” Hiring DJs to operate the ‘Voice of Gizab’ had been no exception. PSYOP soldiers had previously built close ties with the Gizab District Chief of Police, Agha Lalai, and had hired his son, Dawood Shah, as DJ/radio operator. With family ties to the well-respected Lalai, a decent education, a radio-friendly voice, and the ability to quickly grasp English, Shah was the perfect fit for the station. In addition, Shah’s cousin, Nawid Ahmed, was hired as assistant radio operator.¹⁴

‘Voice of Gizab’ programming generally resembled that of TRSs elsewhere, while also accounting for

local preferences. “We were given *carte blanche* to put whatever we wanted on our radio station; we just had to let the TMD know at the SOTF so they could answer the question if asked.” ‘Voice of Gizab’ featured traditional and popular music, world news, agricultural and health programs, comedy shows, and stories for kids. The TRS also hosted a Radio Literacy Program (RLP) to help local children learn to read and write in Pashtun.¹⁵ Shah and Ahmed received listener feedback during face-to-face discussions with the local population. Listening to handheld receivers while out on patrol allowed U.S. SOF personnel a degree of quality control.

To support their primary duty of manning the ‘Voice of Gizab’ (FM 103.5), Shah and Ahmed began serving as “investigative journalists” starting in August 2011. This allowed them to gather information about current events while ‘taking the pulse’ of people in the listening area. “We interview people about events that occur like when the ALP successfully repels insurgent activities, or development occurring in the area,” said Shah. “The best part of my job is keeping people informed about what is going on in Gizab. I feel like the radio station helps unify people in this area.” One resident expressed appreciation for the TRS. “The radio station makes us feel like we have a voice, like government officials can hear our opinions.”¹⁶

Another highlight of the TRS was the ‘suggestion box.’ According to Smith, “We set up that box in the middle of the village so that locals could make musical requests or provide general comments about the radio station.” The box also allowed for informants to anonymously provide tips about Taliban members and activities. “One time, our translator told us that a local shopkeeper had placed a shopping list in the suggestion box. Apparently, the Taliban had come in and hadn’t paid him for the stuff that they took, including some 20 coats,



SGT Patrick M. Smith (right) and interpreter Wali John record a news message about recent ALP successes in the region to be broadcasted on the TRS.

“We interview people about events...like when ALP successfully repels insurgent activities.”— Dawood Shah



Face-to-face interaction proved critical for PSYOP personnel supporting VSO. Here, SGT Smith bonds with two Afghan children while assessing what they have learned through the Radio Literacy Program (RLP).

10 pairs of shoes, food, supplies, and other items. That tip gave us the size of that particular Taliban cell. Overall, the suggestion box was really effective.”¹⁷

The goal of VSO was to improve local security, development, and governance to the point that VSPs could be shut down and Afghans could assume full control over their own affairs. Once a location was deemed a success, U.S. and coalition units there would ‘roll back’ to the CJSOTF-A at

Bagram or move to another site. The ‘retrograde’ of American PSYOP personnel from forward VSPs presented an interesting dilemma for TRSs. Should TRSs be destroyed in place? Should they be packed up and shipped to another location? SGT Smith explained how this predicament played out in Gizab.

“SOTF-Southeast had decided that Gizab had been a successful VSO mission.” Smith became a vocal advocate of transferring it to Afghan custody. “We can’t just shut the station down, the people love it,” he reiterated to CPT Dominik V. Garizone*, TMD 9C60 OIC, and SFC Mitchell ‘Bryce’ Hurlbert*, the detachment NCOIC. He recommended that Chief Lalai, Gizab District Chief of Police, take ownership of the station (provided he was willing to do so). Operation of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ would not be an issue since Dawood Shah and Nawid Ahmed “already knew how to run everything, including the generators and the MacBook.”¹⁸

While TMT 9C62 received assurance of Chief Lalai’s willingness to assume ownership, TMD 9C60 worked to get approval for the transfer. Due to the inter-governmental nature of the transaction, the U.S. State Department Embassy in Kabul had to concur. In addition, because the turnover would involve the removal of items from the detachment property book, it required a legal review by the CJSOTF-A. Within weeks, the State Department had approved the transfer while the CJSOTF-A staff completed all legal reviews. On 4 September 2011, personnel from ODA 1333 and TMT 9C62 held a low-key ceremony to transfer the ‘Voice of Gizab’ to Afghan ownership.¹⁹ As an added bonus for the new ownership, “We also bought them two generators off the economy to help them sustain longer TRS operations,” recalled CPT Garizone*.²⁰ The turnover of ‘Voice of Gizab’ set in motion a cascade of others as additional VSPs closed and coalition forces retrograded. With the security burden falling increasingly on Afghans, locally owned and

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SOF personnel at VSP-Gizab built close ties with District Chief of Police Agha Lalai. TMT 9C62 leader SGT Patrick M. Smith (left) helped facilitate the transfer of the ‘Voice of Gizab’ to Chief Lalai (right) in late 2011.



‘Voice of Gizab’ DJ Dawood Shah (left) doubled as an ‘investigative journalist,’ interviewing local Afghans about recent events, as seen here.

operated TRSs proved invaluable to 'bridging the gap' between GIRoA and the local populace.

Tactical Radio Stations were highly valuable assets in MISO support to VSO. As TMD 9C10 explained in its 2011 post-deployment after action review, a TRS "can be as important as the Afghan Local Police [in] linking the populace to their govern[ment]."²¹ The 'Voice of Gizab' showcased how well-suited TRSs were to SOF's 'population-centric' approach of VSO. First, TRSs allowed U.S. personnel to deliver truthful, pro-ISAF, pro-GIRoA, and anti-insurgent messaging through vetted local Afghan operators/announcers and daily programming. Second, it gave local populations entertainment and information, as well as a sense of involvement in regional and national affairs. Finally, transitioning TRSs from coalition to Afghan control gave district and provincial leaders a direct role and stake in the security, development, and governance of their localities and the nation writ large.



Gizab District Chief of Police Agha Lalia signs the paperwork granting him ownership of the 'Voice of Gizab' on 4 September 2011 as Special Forces Warrant Officer 2 (WO2) Donald M. Pearson* of a 'split team' from ODA 1333 (foreground) and assistant radio operator Nawid Ahmed (background) observe.



Gizab District Chief of Police Afgha Lalai and WO2 Donald M. Pearson* of ODA 1333 make the transfer of the 'Voice of Gizab' to Afghan ownership official against the backdrop of the Afghanistan flag, held by Nawid Ahmed (left) and Dawood Shah (right).

Afterword

Tactical Radio Stations have been used in combat zones outside of Afghanistan. In early 2016, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) invited U.S. Army PSYOP personnel to train the Senior Officer of its Information Department and five other MoD officers on 'Radio in a Box' (RIAB) operations. In response, on 22-26 February 2016, four soldiers from A Company, 3rd POB deployed as a Broadcast Training Team (BTT) to Kyiv, Ukraine. The goal of the BTT was to enable the MoD to better counter Russian-Separatist propaganda. The BTT improved the MoD officers' understanding of basic broadcasting principles; RIAB set-up, maintenance, and trouble-shooting; the use of audio software; script-writing; 'on-air' best practices; and interviewing techniques. The BTT thus equipped the officers with the 'know-how' to establish TRSs in Eastern Ukraine and teach others on its use. TRSs continue to be employed by U.S. allies to further their own national and military objectives. ⬆

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Endnotes

- 1 In this article, the term 'PSYOP' is used to describe SOF soldiers holding that Military Occupational Specialty, as well as for official designations of units (e.g., 9th Psychological Operations Battalion). The term 'MISO' is used to describe the function of what PSYOP soldiers and units do, as well as for deployed elements serving under the CJSOTF-A (e.g., Tactical MISO Company, Tactical MISO Detachment, and Tactical MISO Team).
- 2 USASOC, "Annual Command History, Calendar Year 2011," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; SPC Ashley L. Bowman, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 4 September 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/76562/coalition-officials-gizab-turn-over-control-radio-station-district-chief-police#VriiP3Yo7y8>, accessed 15 January 2016.
- 3 Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 3-53: *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012), 4-5; Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual 3-53: *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), 4-5.
- 4 9th Military Information Support Battalion, "CAPABILITIES BRIEF," no date, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Doctrinally, a Tactical MISO Team should have three personnel (a Team Leader, an Assistant Team Leader, and a PSYOP Specialist), but the limited number of personnel forced units to conduct 'split-team' operations.
- 5 CJSOTF-A, "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police: Bottom-up Counterinsurgency," 1 April 2011, 1-2, 62-63, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 CJSOTF-A, "VSO and ALP: Bottom-up COIN," 62.
- 7 Ramsey Electronics, "User Guide: RIAB FM STEREO TRANSLATOR PXB30008D98S, 300 Watt, 8RU, 110-120VAC/60Hz," April 2011, 3, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 TMD 9C30, "Employment of the [RIAB] to Support Tactical [MISO]," December 2011, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 TMD 9C30, "Employment of the [RIAB]."
- 10 USASOC, "Annual Command History, Calendar Year 2011," USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 C Company, 9th POB, "SUBJECT: Charlie Company, 9th MISB (A) After Action Review," 12 March 2012, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Also supporting the split-team from ODA 1333 at VSP-Gizab were Civil Affairs Team 114; one Cultural Support Team soldier; a two-man District Augmentation Team; and a small security team of local Hazaran tribe members.
- 13 SGT Patrick M. Smith, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 4 December 2014, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Later in the deployment, Smith transferred to Tagaw, Shahidi Hassas District, Oruzgan Province, to support ODA 1335.
- 14 Smith interview, 4 December 2014; SPC Ashley L. Bowman, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 17 August 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/75717/gizab-now-has-voice-through-afghan-radio-station#VriiYHYo7y8>, accessed 15 January 2016.
- 15 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 16 Bowman, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 17 August 2011; RC-South/CJSOTF-A, "Gizab Now Has a Voice through Afghan Radio Station," 26 August 2011, <http://www.rs.nato.int/article/news/gizab-now-has-a-voice-through-afghan-radio-station.html>, accessed 3 February 2011.
- 17 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 18 Smith interview, 4 December 2014.
- 19 Bowman, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 4 September 2011; RC-South/CJSOTF-A, "Coalition Forces in Gizab Turn Over Control of Radio Station to District Chief of Police," 6 September 2011, <http://www.rs.nato.int/article/news/coalition-officials-in-gizab-turn-over-control-of-radio-station-to-district-chief-of-police.html>, accessed 3 February 2011.
- 20 CPT Dominik V. Garizone*, interview with Jared M. Tracy, 9 February 2016, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 21 TMD 9C10, "Tactical Military Information Support Operations in support of CJSOTF-A's Village Stability Operations," no date (ca. January 2011), copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



9th Psychological Operations Battalion DUI



Afghan National Army Commando Patch with Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) and Special Forces Tabs