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*This student spent a year abroad in Afghanistan serving with the US Army. This is a great example of a non-traditional abroad experience that is still applicable to the requirements. He sent his essays in a separate document from the application. This is not recommended, but we will accept essays separately if you are having difficulty with the provided form.*

## Language Experience

About two years prior to actually being deployed to Afghanistan in 2009, my unit received a warning order letting us know we would be getting deployed. This was only about one year after returning from Iraq. Our unit was battle hardened and prepared. As a part of our training we were told that Afghanistan is a completely different place than Iraq and we should be prepared. This statement turned out to be more real than we could have imagined.

As a part of our pre-mobilization training we received language courses, both in Dari and in Pashto. My initial impression was that the language courses were boring and a waste of time. Fast forward to actually being in country and being embedded with Afghan police and living day in and day out with people who did not speak the same language and completely different ways of doing things. The language classes suddenly were appreciated. We did have two interpreters with us to help us along. Both of them became very good friends of mine and they certainly helped me out with language.

It is extremely important to the Afghans that upon initial meeting you sit down with them, share tea and talk about non business areas of focus. They are curious about your family, and what it is like where we live. We exchange the same courtesies and it is so important that you at least attempt the language. One of my favorite phrases is Insh Allah. This means "God Willing." The phrase seems to have two meanings. One is somewhat sarcastic as a way of just appeasing what is being said, and the

other is very sincere. For example, "I hope nobody gets hurt today." The response would be, "Insh Allah."

The second experience I have had with language while deployed is while on combat patrols. I learned key phrases such as stop, get down, don't move, and put down your weapon. Of course these are combative phrases but not the only ones you use. Our mission was to start to transition the Afghan Police from a pseudo military force to community based policing. Walking through the streets, we simply stopped and talked to the people. Asking them how their day was going and is this area safe. Do the Taliban bother you here was part of everyday conversation.

Some of the things I learned from my Afghan counterparts I have kept in my life and some of the things I learned has been discarded. However, one of the most important things I learned is language is the key to understanding another culture and we should all at least attempt to learn more than our own language. The global community demands it.

## Team Work

I can think of no better example of team work than during combat. Plans are made and thrown away as soon as the first bullet flies. I am a combat medic in an infantry unit. I have the privilege of treating wounded soldiers in the line of duty while under fire. I can speak specifically to the challenge of working with individuals from different nations and cultures. Afghanistan is divided into zones with multi-national forces in each. However, each zone is controlled by a different nation. So, while I am an American Soldier, I was operating in a zone that the French army was responsible for and I was embedded with Afghan police and Afghan army. Without giving specific dates, one night at approximately 0200 hrs, gunshots rang out over the FOB I lived on. The warning came over the loud speakers from the French that the base was infiltrated. This turned out to not be true. This is an example of the fog of war. What did happen was two Afghan soldiers took bullet wounds and were hurt very bad. The base had one French doctor, a French nurse, and myself.

Both Afghan Soldiers were brought into our aid station and the two French medical staff and I went to work. The doctor spoke broken English and the nurse spoke none at all. I of course do not speak French. Our team work was so fluid my lieutenant later told me it was amazing to watch. We were able to communicate with some medical terminology and a lot of pointing. The first soldier had minor wounds meaning the wounds were serious but easy to control. I took care of everything with this patient and then moved on to help the doctor and the nurse with the more critical patient. This patient had been struck by a round in his abdomen and had a full evisceration. The French doctor was shouting commands and directions and the same time as myself and the French nurse. We ultimately divided our work area into three equal parts and started working. We were communicating everything we were

doing to an Afghan interpreter, who was then talking to an Afghan commander. Our instructions and descriptions of our interventions had to be clear and concise so that information could be accurately passed along to the commander.

Everything was done that could be done in a timely manner. It was like we had been working together for years. Sadly, the more critically wounded soldier passed away that night. He was simply hurt too badly to be saved. The Afghan commander thanked us for our tireless work and we went on about our night cleaning up our work area and paperwork that went along with the work we did. I will never forget that day for many reasons. That night was simply an example of the human determination to save a fellow soldier, who was wounded in combat.

## Cultural Relationships

In an effort to be completely honest in this regard, I did have a difficult time understanding a lot of the differences in what I perceive as the American culture and the Afghan culture. That being said, there are a number of things that I believe the Afghans get one hundred percent right and Americans get very wrong. The area I have the hardest time relating to is the role of women in Afghan society.

Very often while on patrol, you would pass by a group of women walking together covered from head to toe. This garment is called a burka. In my opinion, women are treated as third class citizens much less second class citizens. Quite often you would pass by a group of young girls who were dressed in bright vibrant colors and they were very beautiful. However, once that young girl reaches puberty things seem to change. They are covered in the burka and arranged marriages take place. The wife is now owned by their arranged husband. She is his property. The female can be stoned to death for such an infraction as eye contact with another man. Looking at this through American eyes just breaks my heart, yet this is an example of a cultural difference. This practice has been applied in Afghanistan for thousands of years. An area where I believe Afghans do better things than Americans is in the concept of extended family.

Several family groups continue to live together well into adult years with the oldest male being in charge. The elder is usually the grandfather, and then his sons with their families. Whereas with Americans, as children become adults, brothers and sisters part ways as they begin their own families. Often time these siblings move far way in opposite ends of the country. In Afghanistan, it is common for this large family group to never leave the valley in which they were born. This does several things for

the family. It shares labor responsibility. Farm land can be cultivated without hiring anyone to do the work for them, so the small amount of profit that is received stays in the family. More important than the ability to work their land is the bonds that are created. Afghans respect their elders. It is a sense of duty to the people who came before them that I was most impressed with.

If Americans would take notice of how well respected the elders in our society should be than I believe we would grow into more experienced adults. Our ability to communicate with each other would be magnified because of the experience that older generations have gained. Because of this, I believe there would be less tension in our American society.

## Community Service

In my case, working as not only the member of an infantry squad but also as a police mentor fighting an insurgency the benefits are clear. My team was able to help create a secure environment for the people of Afghanistan allowing several things to happen at the same time. My work as a police mentor gave the Afghan police better tools and techniques to serve their community.

Afghan police are severely underfunded and therefore very corrupt. My team and I had to start at the very basics of what the ethical way to police their community looked like. First we started with simple observation, which led to classes in the Afghan's weak areas and solidifying their strengths. Then we started helping them with the funding of their force which allowed for more officers and more patrolling. With more police in the area, the community as a whole felt safer to go about their daily lives. This process is ongoing and my team was one of the first to engage in this philosophy of mentorship. The Afghan police and the American Infantry Company were now a team and a force to be reckoned with. The Taliban identified us as a threat that they could not overcome and started to move to new territories.

As the insurgents move around they continue to find more competent Afghan Security Forces, and the insurgency is being squashed from the grass roots level and up. This has allowed ordinary citizens to take a more active role in their own security. Afghans feel safe to report activity that is seen. There seems to be less fear of reprisal if they act against the insurgent groups. Now that security is being established, infrastructure is beginning to be put in place as well.

Roads, schools, hospitals, dams, and many more projects are being built. In the past when these projects were undertaken, terrorists would simply attack and dismantle the facilities, or use it as their own headquarters. Depending on the area, this problem is less prevalent. I believe a tiny rock is rolling down the mountain that will soon cause an avalanche in Afghanistan.

The groundwork of combined effort to rebuild Afghanistan is taking place. I am proud to have served and to have been a part of a mission where I was able to directly effect change in the lives of people in that country. There is a long way to go, but the first steps have been taken.

## Global Learning

I have had the great fortune to be able to travel around the world. On one hand I work for a wonderful company that believes in giving back to the community both at home and abroad. I have traveled to Bolivia, Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua performing eye exams and dispensing glasses. I will never forget my first experience in Bolivia and how I was in tears when it was time to leave. My life was certainly changed from that moment on and that is when I realized that I wanted to help other people from that point forward.

On the other hand I have had the honor to serve in the United States Army. This is the most professional organization in the world. The bonds I have made through combat and the lives I have impacted as well as the impact in my life by the people I have worked with is hard for me to put into words. I have truly learned to appreciate all of the opportunity that has been laid before me, and that I have not earned any of it. By the experiences I have enjoyed, I see human existence as this; individuals coming together and working as one unit to make life easier for everyone. I suppose that has become my definition of society. With this in mind I understand that everyone has something to offer and that everyone is in need.

My professional growth will only be stronger through these experiences. I hope that my life's work will be recognized as simply creating an environment where the opportunity for success was created. I have an amazing career for a company where your limits are set by your own effort, and while I do not know yet where my path will wind up, I do know that I will be helping others along the way.