

# 'HEARTS & MINDS'

## ISAF IN AFGHANISTAN

FLYING LEAD THEATRE OF WAR BOOK



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& Ganesha Games, 2010



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# HEARTS & MINDS

## GAMING AFGHANISTAN A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE.

Gaming actions that are still occurring is seen by many people to be 'too close' for comfort, and in many ways they are right. However, it also plays a part both 'educational' and 'entertainment' wise and is prevalent in the video game world.

Playing any battle where the troops portray a particular unit while they are still 'around' is often thought to be a little crass and irreverent. Indeed until the last few years this is how I mainly viewed it, although I was drawn into 'typical' not 'actual' engagements, which often seemed like a fair compromise.

My attitude has slightly changed over the past couple of years, mainly due to talking to, and playing with, many veterans of not only WWII but the more recent conflicts. In many cases, they see no problem with portraying recent 'contacts' and I remember one veteran who was very happily sitting there with a figure on a minimi. He declared this was 'himself', reporting he had never got to fire one at the enemy... and was now making up for it. There was also the WWII veteran who was the caretaker for the hall '*Wargames Journal*' had hired out for a massive WWII game. He had been a Firefly commander who had three tanks shot out from under him in 1944-45. We were slightly hesitant about continuing to play as the Brit tanks were engaging some Germans. He spent about an hour cheering the Brit tanks on, rolling some dice and adding a lot of 'colour' to the game. It always seems, the games involving Vets turn into being more of a celebration and a way of saying 'thanks' to these people who had (and still were) giving up so much to ensure we have the choice of

playing what we want.

With this supplement however, I wanted to go a step further than just paying lip service to the troops, I wanted to do something 'concrete' to help. So after speaking to Henry Hyde from the excellent 'Battlegames' magazine I organised for a donation to be made to his 'Combat Stress' charity from every copy of 'Heart & Minds' sold. I hope in some little way this will help!

*Rich Jones*

June 2010

## MANY THANKS

First to the many service men and women that have served, or are serving and suffering in so many ways in Afghanistan.

Second to all those people who have made *Flying Lead* and *Hearts & Minds* possible :

- Andrea Sfligoi for designing the *Songs of Blades and Heroes* engine.
- Henry Hynde for producing the excellent *Battlegames* magazine and running his Combat Stress appeal through it!
- My family for putting up with having 'little men', skateboards and surfboards everywhere, doubt I'll ever grow up... sorry!
- Shaun McTague for putting up with my continual playtesting and seeming gaming ADHD.
- Black Cat Bases for providing most of the buildings seen in the built up area photos.
- Various 'public domain' photo sites where the 'real photos' have come from. Mainly: <http://www.freemilitaryphotos.com/location/afghanistan>
- The figures in the shots are from Empress Miniatures, Brooks Miniatures and Eureka. They have all been painted by myself. The military vehicles are from HLBS, TAG and Copplestone.

## **'THE GREAT GAME'**

Afghanistan is not a new destination for British and other foreign troops. In the 19th Century, Afghanistan was the buffer between British Colonial India and the might of the Russian Empire. Both 'super-powers' of the time looked upon the other's interest in the area with suspicion and a degree of malice. The British 'spy' and explorer Arthur Conolly coined the phrase, 'The Great Game' when referring to the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain, and their attempts to 'civilise' Asia. Afghanistan was destined to be the playing board.



1838 saw the Afghan ruler Dost Mohammed starting to ally himself heavily with the Russians to the north. Britain saw this as a threat and sent a force of around 20 000 men over the treacherous mountain passes and into Kabul. They 're-instated' Shah Shujah, who was not surprisingly very pro-British. Being on a bit of a 'sticky wicket' a couple of Brigades of Brits and a few 'advisors' staid on. This was viewed by many Afghans as being a force of occupation and in 1841 insurrection broke out, resulting in the British forces and assorted followers agreeing to pull out. But treachery resulted, and the Afghans attacked the British in the Khurd Kabul pass (Gandamak) in what ended up being a massacre. But the area remained a gaming board between Russia and Britain with further fighting in 1878 (Britain invaded again to prevent Russia establishing a political foothold). This Second Afghan War installed yet another Pro British ruler and the borders were drawn (they are still being

fought over today). In 1919 the Ruler's son was sick of being a 'puppet' and fought for independence. This conflict resulted in the first use of large scale aerial bombardment. However it was largely an inconclusive war and 'Independence' of the area was granted in 1921.

Not that stopped Afghanistan from being used as a buffer between Russia and the western powers, and later Pakistan. In the 70's a Marxist, pro Russian, Government was in power but under pressure from a group calling themselves the Mujahedeen, who were an Islamic resistance group. The resistance got both covert, and if some are to be believed, overt help from the US and their allies. The conflict has been called, Russia's Vietnam - a war they were never going to be really able to win.

The war was also the beginning of the rise of power for a young man, hailing from a rich Saudi family, he was named Osama bin Laden. He had gone to fight the Russians and helped finance the struggle. Even after the Russians pulled out, the civil war continued with fervour. However, with the demise of a common enemy, the militias' ethnic, clan, religious, and personality differences quickly surfaced. An interim Islamic Council was put in place, but conflict among rival factions intensified. The Taliban, a group of religious scholars and their followers, many who were well trained Mujahedeen, sought to quell the violence and enforce strict Islamic Law. At first, before the harsh realities of strict Islamic Fundamental Law sunk in, the Taliban seemed to be doing an excellent job. By the end of 2000 they controlled approximately 95% of the country. The main opposition was in the small northeast corner where the opposition formed the Afghan Northern Alliance. The Alliance was recognised by the UN as being the official Government.