

## **Afghanistan: June '07**

### **Author: IWPR**

Reuters impressed with IWPR trainees in Helmand, while local PRT press spokesman says journalists are asking him tougher questions.

A little publicity goes a long way, as IWPR found out in mid-June, when a Reuters correspondent visited our training in Lashkar Gah, capital of Helmand province.

Peter Graff, who covers defence topics for the news agency, had been embedded with the British troops for over a week, and faced a barrage of tough questions from the ten or so trainees assembled in our computer centre.

Several of the Afghan journalists had been with Peter at a shura, or council, in Sangin district centre the week before, and they were openly sceptical about his take on things.

“You did not talk to any of the people, you disappeared right after the official meeting,” said one.

“How can you cover Helmand when you are with the British military?” said another.

A third put him on the spot by asking, in front of a representative from the Provincial Reconstruction team, PRT, “How do you think the British soldiers treat Afghan people?”

Peter’s response, an obvious attempt at diplomacy, was “I’ve seen worse.”

After more than an hour of frank and furious discussion, Peter, sweating a bit, got up to go.

But he left a lasting legacy. In a blog posted on the Reuters website, he described the encounter, ending with, “If this is the future of Afghan journalism, I’m impressed.”

James Mortimer, Press and Public Affairs Officer at the PRT, was probably only half joking when he said, “Life used to be so easy before this training. Now these journalists give us such a hard time.”

But those journalists have been able to cover stories and go places that no other reporters have been. IWPR continues to produce top quality reporting about a place that most of the world knows very little about.

IWPR’s outstanding stories from Afghanistan, and the professionalism of its journalists, have made the organisation a source of information for diplomats, researchers, and other journalists.

The BBC’s Alastair Leithead visited IWPR’s radio training to recruit two of our reporters as stringers for the

BBC. He expressed enthusiasm and delight at finding reporters who had already been trained to a high international standard, and who could provide background for the BBC's Helmand stories.

Hafizullah Gardesh, our local editor, was invited to the Norwegian embassy for an extensive de-brief with their political officer.

The diplomat, who had been reading Gardesh's coverage of the political games being played in Kabul, was looking for some background on the various parties, ethnic groups, long-standing alliances and enmities, etc.

Country Director Jean MacKenzie has been interviewed extensively by the international media. In June, she was called by National Public Radio in the United States, by Agence France Presse, and Radio Liberty, for her take on various issues such as the tragic murder of a woman journalist in Parwan province, weapons coming into the country from Iran; and the role of poppy production in Afghanistan's economy.

**Location:** Iraqi Kurdistan  
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**Topic:** Training

**Focus:** Afghanistan

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