

## A GROUND'S EYE VIEW OF IEDS AND LANDMINES IN AFGHANISTAN

I recently had an opportunity to interview Petty Officer 1st Class Paul Joseph Walsh for articles I was writing on IEDs.

He is a Navy clearance diver who served in Afghanistan. (For the past two years, Canadian Navy clearance divers have been in Afghanistan, applying their expertise in underwater demolition to deal with IEDs and other explosive devices.)

Unfortunately not all of Paul Walsh's views got into the articles but I thought those that didn't make it were interesting enough to highlight here. (Paul informs me he is known to all as "Knobby"...most people would not recognize him by the name "Paul").

In Afghanistan, he noted that the U.S. attitude toward IEDs was to simply blow the devices up where they were found. The Canadian push, however, was to "exploit" IEDs to gather evidence and intelligence that could be used against bomb-makers. "We really forced the exploitation of the device," Walsh said. "Meaning you have to get down in the dirt, dig, cut wires. If you don't physically give evidence to people to prosecute, then you won't be able to stop these guys. And they'll just continue."

Ninety-nine percent of the explosives were from former Soviet ordnance, says Walsh. "We came across a lot of Italian anti-tank and anti-personnel stuff. Some Chinese stuff. But the stuff is everywhere." He and his crew also did not see a migration of IED techniques from the Iraq theatre into Afghanistan. "We've seen some of it," he said. "But we have typically found that the migration of what's happening in Iraq to Afghanistan is usually a year and a half behind."

Walsh said he and his comrades saw attempts at homemade napalm, using Ivory soap and gasoline. Working in the Afghan environment obviously wasn't easy.

On one of his first days at work in Afghanistan, the temperature was 58 degrees. Later a fellow bomb tech wore a protective suit during 52-degree heat and almost collapsed on the IED from heat exhaustion, Walsh added. "Sometimes that heavy equipment over there can be a hindrance," Knobby explained. "If you were in bomb suit and the thing went off, the (suit) wouldn't save you. Only distance would save you."

As an aside, "Knobby" and other members of the Clearance Diver community were in Ottawa in the spring to receive the 2007 John James Kinley Award for Maritime Affairs from The Navy League of Canada. (Among those were accepting the award in March were Lt.-Cmdr. Roland Leyte (North Sydney, NS), Walsh (New Glasgow, NS), Petty Officer 2nd Class Dave Poole (Bridgewater, NS) and Master Seaman Kevin March (Prince Albert, SK), Previously awarded to specific ships or individuals, this is the first time the award has been given to an entire trade for its dedication and bravery.

Cheers David Pugliese

(If you want information on books by David Pugliese check out his Web site or view his biography.)

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