

USD

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disinformation and propaganda with frequent meetings with village elders, mullahs and tribal leaders," Mercado said. "We wanted to be first with the truth and we wanted our Afghan partners to be right there by our side."

Equally important was the company's mindset, he said. The company focused on discipline, strength, honor and fraternity.

"This is important because this mindset sets the conditions for effective counterinsurgency," Mercado said. "Maintaining a proper mindset is critical to bringing fence-sitters into the fold and to reconcile or reintegrate accidental or former gorillas."

When the company finally arrived in Afghanistan, it had to wait to implement its plan.

Mercado said the soldiers first had to build a combat outpost in Imam Sahib, as the commute from the current operating base to the company's area of responsibility was more than three hours. However, it had a small window to do so.

"Intelligence showed the insurgents fighting around Imam Sahib were not local. They had left the area for the winter months and weren't expected back until the start of the spring offensive," Mercado said. "We had a limited opportunity to build the outpost uncontested. If successful, I could literally build and seize the initiative from the insurgents and force them to fight on my terms. I could literally change the nature of the fight with the opening move and control the tempo with subsequent actions."

The Bushmaster Company took the gamble and began building the outpost in extreme conditions. The soldiers stayed on site, only traveling for supplies. They had no running water, no sewage

and slept in the dirt.

"The conditions were terrible, and we loved every single minute of it," Mercado said. "We knew it was only a matter of time before we transformed our outpost into a well protected fort that provided our soldiers with everything they needed and much more."

Completing the task on time was an operational victory, he said, because it allowed the company to project influence over the district from a local center and allowed for a rapid response within the district.

"Most importantly, it allowed us to foster better relationships with the Afghan people we were charged to protect," Mercado said.

The Bushmaster Company next turned its attention to the enemy's headquarters, and were again met with an obstacle. The Taliban had retreated toward Dast-e Archi following a long battle with the previous unit, and it had destroyed many roads and bridges along the way.

After repairing the roadways, the company moved into Dast-e Archi, finding success where many thought it was impossible.

"We had been warned that Dast-e Archi was so dangerous, that we would be unable to penetrate into the district at all," Mercado said. "Our first mission, however, resulted in us clearing through nearly the entire district."

Having penetrated deep into an enemy stronghold, the company was determined to hold the ground it had fought desperately to seize, he said. This required some help.

"Too small of a company to physically hold the terrain by ourselves, we created space for the local police to move in and for (a local security force) to hold the terrain," Mercado said.

With everything in place, the Bushmaster Company finally began implementing its campaign.

The plan targeted the relationship between the enemy and the people of the region with a combination of infantry missions and more peaceful solutions.

"In addition to more conventional infantry-type combat operations like raids, ambushes, reconnaissance and security patrols to clear Imam Sahib and Archi Districts of insurgent activity, we often found ourselves engaged in situations that required a more delicate touch, including mediation, conflict resolution and crisis management," Mercado said.

After several successful months, he said the company transitioned from "a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign to a security force assistance mission," and he relinquished his command to assume command of his battalion's Headquarters & Headquarters Company.

While he is unsure of the mark the Bushmaster Company's work will make on the region, Mercado said he was pleased with the success of the mission. However, he knows the war is not over.


"Looking back on the experience, I know that though we accomplished much, much more remains for others to complete," he said.

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Vermillion Medical Clinic, P.C. is pleased to announce the association of Amy M. Fluit, MPAS, PA-C. Fluit specializes in the practice of Family Medicine. She is a graduate of the University of South Dakota Physician Assistant Studies Program, Vermillion, SD.

Amy comes to the Vermillion Medical Clinic after serving as a PA in an OB/GYN clinic. The clinic welcomes her to our team of care. She will assist Drs. Dendinger and Yelverton; and Michelle Chaussee, MPAS, PA-C in providing comprehensive primary care to patients of all ages.

Please join us in welcoming Amy, her husband Justin, and their children, Frankie, Henry, and Eddie.



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