Organizing the Church in Afghanistan

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Asia
The Afghanistan coat of arms.
Roughly the size of Texas, with a population of thirty-one million people, Afghanistan has suffered almost four decades of continuous warfare. The mountainous terrain and forbidding weather can be harsh. War has destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure, making it one of the poorest nations on earth. Ninety-nine percent of the country is Muslim—predominantly Sunni. With a 75 percent illiteracy rate, life expectancy is only forty-three years, and the infant mortality rate is the highest in the world. Almost half of the country is over six thousand feet in altitude. Only 12 percent of the land can support agriculture, and water is scarce. Poverty, drug trafficking, and other criminal enterprises are widespread. It has been said, only partly in jest, that the only measure in which Afghanistan leads the other nations of the
world is alphabetically. Afghanistan is challenging—geographically and culturally.

**Getting Organized: 2001–2007**

The limited introduction of the gospel in Afghanistan is directly connected to the Al-Qaeda-orchestrated attack unleashed at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The first Latter-day Saint combatants arrived during the earliest days of Operation Enduring Freedom—the designation given to military operations there. As numerous military units, mostly American, stormed into Afghanistan in the following months, many of them brought LDS servicemen group leaders who were called and set apart by stake presidents in the United States who assumed they had authority to call priesthood leaders to serve in Afghanistan. While well intentioned, this practice sometimes led to confusion as multiple military units, each with their own Latter-day Saint group leader, arrived at the same location in Afghanistan.

Initially, there was no centralized or formal Church organization or authority within the country. Rather, LDS soldiers and civilians organized and met independently, which was similar to what had taken place during previous military conflicts. The major difference this time was the fact that the military was operating within a Muslim country where open proselyting was forbidden. Military service member groups quickly formed across the country, though. The nature of conflict meant that travel between Church groups was difficult and often dangerous. One of the biggest initial challenges was that no one knew where organized Church groups were meeting within the country.

In mid-2003, Church headquarters in Salt Lake City determined that Afghanistan would fall under the Asia Area headquartered in Hong Kong. Area Seventy William K. Jackson—a physician working
for the U.S. State Department in New Delhi, India—whose position enabled him to travel throughout Afghanistan—was given the responsibility to organize the Church within Afghanistan. Things were disjointed at first. As Elder Jackson noted, “We just sort of felt our way the first few months.” In the fall of that year, LDS chaplain (Major) Mark L. Allison, who was stationed in-country, was invited to work closely with scattered LDS group leaders across the country to create and maintain a “shepherd’s list”—a weekly by-name roster of Latter-day Saints in Afghanistan.

The first Church conference, with approximately seventy members attending, was held at Bagram Air Base in December 2003. Elder Jackson, who presided, said it was interesting to see “a stack of rifles along the back instead of strollers.” Two additional Church conferences were held in Afghanistan during the following year.
The first baptism recorded in Afghanistan took place in 2004. Alexandro Rangel, a twenty-one-year-old United States Marine, was baptized in “an improvised wading pool made by U.S. Marines near the flight line at the Coalition Forces Base at Bagram and surrounded on all sides by weapons and munitions of war.” Chaplain Allison noted, “As I made preparations for this battlefield baptism and knowing we lacked any white clothing, I spoke up at a meeting of fellow military chaplains and asked if any of them had white clothing I could borrow for a Latter-day Saint baptism. My request was met with awkward silence, until suddenly Father Hubbs, a Roman Catholic priest and army chaplain, said, ‘Yes, I have two white cleric robes you are welcome to use . . . if you don’t mind using Catholic priest robes.’” One of the other attendees chided Father Hubbs, stating “You don’t want to do that. The water will be dirty and will stain your white robes.” To which Father Hubbs answered, “If that happens it will be for a good cause.” Chaplain Allison commented, “I will always be grateful to this colleague, priest and friend for his kindness shown on this occasion to Latter-day Saints military personnel.”

By 2005, Elder Jackson reported that “we were feeling a little more organized.” Latter-day Saints were meeting in small groups that varied widely in size. Captain Jon Petty, U.S. Army, shared one example of how church services were conducted during this period:

When I arrived in Kandahar, Afghanistan, the LDS servicemembers’ group met twice a week: Sunday mornings for church and Thursdays for FHE. . . . We met in . . . our makeshift chapel, an old mud building built to house the generators that ran the Kandahar Airfield during Taliban rule. It was also the chaplain’s quarters. There was free food on the table next to us during our meetings. It was not uncommon to be giving a talk on Sunday and have half of the group munching on something at the same time. . . . I suggested we meet together more often. No one objected. . . . Some of these same men patrolled daily outside the wire in Afghanistan. They knew that
they could be taken at any time. . . . Our motto was “you put on your garments, put on your body armor, say a prayer and go.”

In 2006, when Eugene “Gene” J. Wikle, a retired U.S. Air Force officer who served as a senior civilian advisor to the Afghan Air Force, arrived in Afghanistan there were six Church members who met for Church each week at Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital. By February 2007 there were twenty-one members, and Wikle was called as the Camp Eggers servicemen’s group leader. Two months later, Elder William K. Jackson set him apart as the senior servicemen’s group leader for the entire country. Discussions began in December with the
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Church Military Relations Office in Salt Lake City regarding “the possibility of creating a military district in Afghanistan.”


The Kabul Afghanistan Military District of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized on July 1, 2008—“the only combat district in the Church.” Gene Wikle was called as the district president—possibly “the only district president in the Church who [did] not have his eternal companion with him.” According to President Wikle, “The primary purpose of creating a military district was to provide a judge in Israel and to have the ecclesiastical authority that was needed in Afghanistan.” He received a special letter of “expanded priesthood authority” from the First Presidency.

Kabul Afghanistan Military District Leadership (July 2009). Left to right: John Oravis, District Clerk; Winn Noyes, First Counselor; Gene Wikle, District President; Robert Horner, Second Counselor; Carol Thompson, District Relief Society President. (Courtesy of Gene Wikle.)
and the Quorum of the Twelve authorizing him to “issue temple recommends, handle Church disciplinary matters, ordain Melchizedek Priesthood holders, recommend and release missionaries, and undertake other such priesthood work as may be necessary.” He was told, “With specific review and approval of the headquarters-based General Authorities directing your work, you are given authority to oversee the baptism and confirmation of converts in the few locations where such activities are permissible and approved.” Creation of a new Middle East/Africa North Area, that included oversight responsibility for Afghanistan, followed on August 1.¹²

There were approximately 400 members in the Kabul Afghanistan District when it was created—soldiers, sailors, Marines, government employees, contractors, visiting university professors, nongovernmental organization employees, and humanitarian workers from more than a dozen countries. The Kabul Military Branch at Camp
Eggers was the first branch established in Afghanistan (organized on Friday, August 29, 2008). The branch consisted of U.S. embassy personnel, military servicemembers, civilian and contractor military advisers, university faculty, general contractors, and others. A total of four branches were initially established at coalition military bases that had larger numbers of Latter-day Saints. Servicemen’s groups, varying in size from several dozen people to a single member, were created wherever Latter-day Saints were stationed throughout the country. The district organization was extremely fluid, with dozens of servicemen’s groups. Between troop rotations and work reassignments, there was seldom a week in which one or more servicemen’s groups were not either organized or closed.

The Church in a War Zone

Organizationally, administratively, and procedurally, the Church in Afghanistan was unique. Thursday and Friday is the Islamic weekend, and the U.S. embassy in Kabul is closed on Fridays, so the Kabul Branch, which had a higher percentage of civilian and nonmilitary Latter-day Saints than other Church units in the district, held its weekly church meetings on Fridays. The other branches and servicemen’s groups all met on Sundays on “U.S. military or coalition force bases.” Some Church meetings were held in base or camp chapels; others met anywhere available space could be found. Church meetings were held in tents or even outside at some of the smaller forward-operating bases. Most units held weekly two-hour meetings, as work requirements permitted few of the Church members to attend an entire three-hour block of meetings. Many branches and groups held two separate sacrament meetings every week in an attempt to accommodate the varied schedules of their members. Every Church unit within the district was asked to report membership and meeting attendance weekly. For some isolated Church members, the only real
contact with the Church each week came in the form of an inspirational email message sent by one of the members of the district presidency.

Church meetings, “to put it in a wartime perspective,” were clearly different. “You have men and women who come in there who are fully armed with their issued weapons—sitting in sacrament meeting—be it a nine-millimeter [pistol] on their hip or an M-16 [rifle] slung over their shoulder, and we have priesthood brethren who kneel down and bless the sacrament who have a weapon on them.” During a branch sacrament meeting at Kandahar Air Base, while the “sacrament is being blessed, you can hear rockets impacting around you. The siren is going off. [Branch] President Cox looked up in the middle of the prayer to see what the other members were doing. Nobody moved. There was not a word of hesitation in saying the sacramental prayer. The members just continued on as if nothing was going on around them. There was a sense of peace and calm in that chapel that they were able to have, and they continued on to bless that sacrament while they were under a rocket attack.”

The fact that the Kabul Afghanistan Military District functioned in a war zone influenced the way that many Church leaders received callings and were set apart to serve in those callings. Because at any given time there were several dozen to over seventy separate Church units within the district, the administrative demands on the district presidency were significant. The fact that Afghanistan was an active

This small chapel at Camp Leatherneck in Helmand Province is an example of the varied facilities where Latter-day Saint congregations held religious services in Afghanistan. (Courtesy of Gene Wikle.)

The Worldwide Church
war zone and the district presidency was unable to visit many—if not most—of the member locations, added a unique challenge regarding calling new branch and servicemen group leaders. Out of necessity, email and phone calls replaced face-to-face interviews. As President Wikle observed, “Because we’re in a war zone, as a district presidency, we cannot freely travel around a country that’s the size of Texas. For obvious security reasons, we cannot just get in a car and drive down the road to visit another branch or service member’s group. So everything that we do in administering the affairs of the Church throughout this country is done primarily by email, occasionally by cell phone, rarely in person because of the security situation.” He explained how the process worked: “When I’m extending a call, be it to a branch president, a counselor in a branch presidency, an elders quorum president, or a district council member . . . [I] send them a set of personal priesthood interview questions and ask them to please respond to those questions and then for the district presidency to prayerfully consider the response and prayerfully consider calling this individual. And then when we feel so inspired and directed by the Lord . . . [we] email a response back to that individual and extend a call to them via email.”  

He further explained, “I have called men to be branch presidents, group leaders, and elders quorum presidents that I have never met, and I probably will never meet in this lifetime.”

Setting apart new leaders was equally problematic. “The majority of the people who will serve as a servicemen’s group leader will never actually have hands laid on [them] and be set apart,” said Wikle. LDS military chaplains and district high councilors were authorized to set leaders apart whenever possible. The Church Military Relations Committee, through the approval of the First Presidency and Area Presidency, sent an official letter of appointment to servicemen group leaders, district council members, and members of the district presidency signifying that they had been set apart to function in their new positions. To help train new leaders, the district presidency developed
seven in-country, in-service lessons that were distributed by email. It was significant that they were “in the middle of a war zone,” but the goal of the district presidency was, as far as possible, “to function the same way as a [regular] stake and a ward would.”

Relief Society offered another distinctive challenge. Unlike earlier military conflicts in which the participants were exclusively men, recent conflicts have had an increasing number of women serving in the ranks, and the district presidency felt keenly the responsibility to help meet their needs. The conflict in Afghanistan is the first time in Church history that district and local Relief Society units have been organized within an active war zone. Carol Wilson Thompson—originally from Provo, Utah, and teaching with her husband at a university in Kabul—was called as the first Relief Society president for the newly created Kabul Branch and then as the first district Relief Society president. Commenting on her unique callings, Thompson stated, “I
received an email from President Wikle. I had received emails before from him . . . so I didn’t think anything about it. I clicked on it to open it and noticed that it said ‘Called to Serve.’ I thought, ‘Hmmm. Another message. Some inspirational thing.’ I read it, and it was asking me to serve as the district Relief Society president.” She was “flabbergasted but very honored and very humbled. . . . After I had picked myself up off the floor, I thought, ‘I wonder what that’s going to be like. What will I do? How will I accomplish this?’ . . . It was very frustrating. Most of the sisters in the Kabul Branch were not able to move around the city. They couldn’t freely go to visit someone. The only contact they had was at church or through email.”

Missionary work was also different. When the Kabul Afghanistan Military District was created in 2008, President Wikle was “called and set apart, to not only serve as a district president, but as a mission president” as well. Shortly after the Middle East/Africa North Area was organized, the new area presidency, in coordination with the Afghanistan district presidency, released guidelines for sharing the gospel in Afghanistan. Their directive stated that “the following guidelines for sharing the gospel should be followed by all LDS military and civilian members stationed in Afghanistan:”

One: Sharing the gospel. Sharing the gospel with non-Muslim members of the coalition forces is permitted provided they express an interest in learning more about the Church and the gospel. Proselyting of any kind among Muslims is strictly prohibited. Please be respectful of their beliefs and be an example of the gospel and the way you live your life.

Two: Church attendance. Non-Muslim friends or acquaintances who express an interest in learning more about the Church may be invited to attend church services and activities. You should not invite Muslims to attend. Their mere association with Christian faith groups may result in harm or death to them or their family members.

Three: Gospel teaching. A non-Muslim person who has expressed a desire to learn more about the gospel and has attended church services
may receive the missionary lessons with prior approval of the district president of the Kabul Afghanistan Military District. . . .

If we follow these simple guidelines, we will all receive great blessings in accomplishing the Lord's will in this part of his vineyard.21

Additional Challenges

Living the Word of Wisdom in Afghanistan could also be challenging. Only six percent of the available water within the country is safe to drink, so Afghans boil their water before drinking it, and boiled water can easily be made into tea. Afghan tea, known as chai, plays a major role in Afghan society. One American military veteran explained the important social role that chai fills this way: “A Talib[an] will not kill you while offering you hospitality. It just isn't done. They may have been shooting at you an hour before, and they will be planning their next ambush even as you sit there with them, but they won't kill you during chai or while you are leaving immediately afterwards. A mile up the road is a different story, but not during chai.” The website Afghan Lessons Learned for Soldiers counsels service members that “more often [than not], the offer of chai was not an obligatory gesture but a genuine expression of friendship and a desire to have relaxed conversation with another. Either way, refusal of an invitation is a delicate thing. . . . Chai is more than the tea. If an Afghan ever offers you chai, take him up on it.”22 Advice and military counsel such as this certainly placed Latter-day Saint service members in a potentially difficult position as almost everyone in Afghanistan is frequently invited to drink chai.

President Wikle emailed counsel to the members in his district regarding living the Word of Wisdom in Afghanistan. On January 1, 2010, he counseled:

I received inquiries from members who are recently arrived in Afghanistan asking about the Afghan custom of drinking tea in the
appropriate responses when offered tea to drink. You should not drink the tea. The Afghans as part of their custom will always offer you tea to drink. I counsel all of our members to always take a bottle of water with you when you meet with the Afghans. You’ll have an Afghan translator with you. Prior to meeting with the Afghans, you need to explain to your translator you do not drink tea for religious purposes. You can explain that you have made covenants with God not to drink the tea.

When you meet with the Afghans and are invited to drink tea, you can then politely explain to your translator you do not drink tea. You can further explain you had brought the bottled water to drink instead of the tea. Kindly thank the Afghans for their hospitality. I have always found that the Afghans will respect your religious beliefs. . . . Your example of living the gospel including the Word of Wisdom is the best example we can give the Afghans. The Lord will bless you for observing the Word of Wisdom and for your positive example of living the gospel of Jesus Christ. 23

Home teaching and visiting teaching programs were likewise adapted to wartime conditions in Afghanistan. As one LDS soldier stated, “Home teaching and visiting teaching means a lot over there when you’re in a war zone.” 24 In addition to standard home and visiting teaching assignments, the district presidency “by inspiration . . . implemented what we call Mormon Battle Buddies: . . . combat home teaching and combat visiting teaching.” The program was instigated because “more and more of our members [were] serving their second, third, fourth, or even fifth combat tour.” District leadership noticed increasing “signs of stress among our LDS members” and “felt that we needed to do more than just assign people to be a ‘home teacher’ or a ‘visiting teacher.’” When members arrived in a new area, the presiding authorities assigned him or her “a Mormon battle buddy that they can actually meet. The purpose being that if you run into a stressful situation, if you need somebody to just talk to, if you need help in any form or fashion, the first Latter-day Saint you can turn to is your Mormon battle buddy.” 25

Establishing the Church in Afghanistan often required ingenuity and creativity. The first semiannual district conference was no
exception. Operating within a war zone, it was impossible for the entire district to meet together. In April 2009, President Wikle suggested to his area presidency that “if you want to be able to reach one hundred percent of all the members [in the Kabul Afghanistan Military District], we need to do a conference and record it on a DVD . . . and they could watch the district conference.”26 Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, with the assistance of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Sister Julie Beck (Relief Society general president), and members of the area presidency videotaped district conference talks. Talks were similarly recorded in Kabul by Eugene Wikle, district president, and Carol Thompson, the district Relief Society president. Their talks were added to the “virtual district conference” DVD produced in Salt Lake City. The district had five hundred members at that time, but one thousand copies of the DVD were shipped to

On Friday, March 5, 2010, members of the Kabul Afghanistan Branch participated in a country-wide “virtual district conference” on recorded video. (Courtesy of Gene Wikle.)
Kabul so that a copy could be given to current as well as future members. Copies of the DVD were distributed throughout the district and viewed by Latter-day Saints across Afghanistan in June 2009. Copies of the district conference DVD were also distributed to many family members, which provided much-needed comfort and assurance.

**Tender Mercies**

In 1 Nephi 1:20, Nephi wrote, “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith.” During a general conference address in 2005, Elder David A. Bednar explained that “the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. . . . Truly, the Lord suits ‘his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men’ (D&C 46:15).”

Many Latter-day Saints serving in Afghanistan felt they received the Lord’s tender mercies. Two examples of the many tender mercies experienced in Afghanistan illustrate the Lord’s watchful eye over Latter-day Saints serving there. The first is from Area Seventy William K. Jackson, and the second is from Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland.

On November 16, 2005, Elder Jackson was in Kandahar, Afghanistan, to complete State Department responsibilities, take care of medical patients, and conduct Church business. He was traveling down a narrow road through the city center in an armored six-ton SUV, the third in a six-vehicle convoy led by a Toyota Hilux brimming with Afghan soldiers and a fifty-caliber machine gun mounted on the open truck bed. Between a large cement median in the middle of the road and storefronts built up to the very edge of the road, there was little maneuver room for drivers. The convoy’s fourth and fifth vehicles were empty flatbed trucks going to Kabul Airport to pick up supplies. The driver of the vehicle immediately behind Elder Jackson’s SUV stopped briefly “to pick up his fifteen-year-old
nephew who had skipped school that day to go out to the American air force base.”

As their convoy passed the city market, a green sedan abruptly squeezed into the middle of the convoy in front of Elder Jackson’s vehicle. At a point where the road widened slightly, the embassy SUV driver attempted to pass the green car, but “he kind of took up residence in the middle of the road, so we were unable to get past him.” A few moments later, the SUV driver was able to pull alongside of the green sedan. Elder Jackson looked into the car and saw a “young Afghan man with a beard like every other man on the street. As we were just getting by him . . . I knew he was going to hit us . . . I consciously sort of tensed my muscles [and] leaned over in the seat.” But instead of “hearing the grinding metallic destruction of his vehicle, what I heard instead was a deafening explosion. He was a suicide bomber, first one in the history of Kandahar. And he had swung back over to broadside us and detonated. There was this big explosion. And then everything went black, and I felt weightless.” His twelve-thousand-pound vehicle came “crashing to the ground forty meters down the road. We landed on our roof, and we spun around in the road and rolled over on the passenger side of the street.” His security detail yelled at him to exit the vehicle, which he did through a hole where the windshield had been a few seconds before.

What greeted his view was “something out of Hollywood, but it was real. There were people screaming and yelling everywhere. Down the road where we were facing was a big black mushroom cloud going up where the bomber’s car had exploded. . . . There were people crying, I could see cars that had been blown into buildings. I could see pieces of people. There had been a motorcycle right next to us when this guy detonated; I can’t imagine that he stood any kind of chance at all. Even the fifteen-year-old boy who was joyriding with his uncle was killed instantly. It was surreal.” He started to return to the vehicle to retrieve his briefcase when one of his protective detail shouted at
him, “Doc, are you crazy. There’s no way you’re going back over there.” At that split second, “Almost on cue, the diesel tank erupted and blew up. And there was a second deafening explosion as our car just disappeared inside of a bright orange mushroom cloud.” Miraculously, they quickly discovered that “other than a singe on one of the soldiers and a little cut, none of us were injured, no broken bones, no ear-drum injuries, no loss of consciousness. Our car, as I would see later in pictures, was destroyed completely; [it] was just torn to pieces, . . . and] the bomber’s car was completely atomized. The only recogniz-able part of his car that was left was the front bumper. And it was a football field farther down the road. . . . And yet we walked away.”

The second tender mercy had the power to affect every Latter-day Saint serving in Afghanistan. In 2009, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was the last speaker on the first district conference DVD for the Kabul Afghanistan Military District. As he reached the end of his conference address, he stated, “Brethren and sisters, we’ve had a wonderful district conference with you. As I said at the beginning, I only wish we could see your faces. I wish we could have stood with you to sing as we stood here to sing, wish we could shake your hand. More than that, I wish we could lay our hands on the head of each one of you, and give you a blessing. So, in lieu of being able to do that personally, I’m going to do it apostolically. I’m going to do it by the authority that is mine, through this telecast, and onto this DVD.” Elder Holland then announced that “by the power of the holy priesthood that I hold, and the authority that I’ve been given, I pronounce a blessing on each one of you within the sound of my voice, and the reach of this tele-cast. I do it as if indeed my hands were upon your head, and with the power of the priesthood upon you just that efficaciously.” He blessed “each one of you, that although you are in harm’s way daily, that you will have the power of heaven upon you, including the attendance of angels, on your right hand, and on your left. I bless you that you will know that you are being prayed for at home and abroad, and
especially by the leaders of the Church here at headquarters, all of us. And we pray for your loved ones, wherever they may be, wherever home is.” He also blessed the district members to “be men and women on a mission, and that you’ll strive to help others to embrace the gospel, and live their religion. I bless you that such a time of war, and such a period away from home, will be a strengthening time, not a debilitating time in your life, in the formation of your character, and in the strengthening of your faith. I bless you that you will draw nearer to God, and that you will know how much all of us need Him, in good times or bad, in war time, or in peace.” He then extended his apostolic blessing, stating, “I bless you that you will not worry about your loved ones, and . . . I pronounce in this blessing, a blessing on them, as if they were in this congregation.”

In December 2014, President Barack Obama announced that active combat operations in Afghanistan would cease at the end of that month. In response to the president’s announcement, the Kabul Afghanistan Military District was disbanded on December 21, 2014. The Kabul Military Branch continued, though, to function with oversight responsibility for the few remaining Church groups in Afghanistan.

Several valuable lessons were learned during the six-year life of the Kabul Afghanistan Military District that can be applied to future military deployments. First, in order to avoid or reduce confusion and conflicting lines of authority, it is important to provide organizational guidance to ecclesiastical leaders as close to the beginning of a military deployment as possible. Second, military districts can provide needed priesthood keys to members while deployed. And third, the Church is extremely adaptable and can organize anywhere under almost any conditions to effectively meet the needs of its members.

Service in Afghanistan was difficult, but Latter-day Saints serving there found that if they would “pray always, and be believing” then “all things shall work together for your good” as the Lord has promised
(D&C 90:24). As President Wikle observed, “I have yet to ever hear the testimony or receive an email from a Latter-day Saint who has said that their experience in Afghanistan has not uplifted them, has not strengthened their testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Notes

3. William K. Jackson, interview.
9. Eugene J. Wikle, interview, April 6, 2010, 112. The military district in Afghanistan worked so well that in 2009 a similarly organized military district was established within Iraq to meet the needs of Latter-day Saints serving there.
13. Eugene J. Wikle, interview, April 3, 2009, 1–2; April 6, 2010, 84. The Kabul Branch had the most diverse membership. President Wikle explained, “You have diplomats serving at the U.S. embassy in Kabul in a variety of different positions. We have a number of members who are serving with the United States Agency for International Development—USAID—who are doing a great
deal of capacity building within the country. We have DOD—Department of Defense—contractors—such as myself,—civilians, who are working there. We have educators. We’ve had college professors advising at Kabul University and at other private institutions. We have non-government aid workers, who are working for different UN or private agencies providing relief to the people of Afghanistan.” Eugene J. Wikle, interview, April 6, 2010, 84–85.

29. William K. Jackson, interview.
The organizational lessons learned in Afghanistan were put into practice a little over a year later when Elder Paul B. Pieper of the Seventy formed the similarly organized Baghdad Iraq Military District on November 9, 2009. See “LDS Military District,” www.mormonwiki.com/LDS_Military_District.

Eugene J. Wikle, interview, April 6, 2010, 104.