

# DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

DR. MICHAEL R. EDWARDS

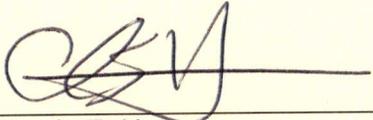
IS PRESENTED THE

## COMMANDER'S AWARD FOR CIVILIAN SERVICE

FROM 18 JANUARY 2011 TO 4 JUNE 2011

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HQ, NTM-A/CSTC-A  
Kabul, Afghanistan



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C. E. House  
Colonel, US Army  
Chief of Staff

## NARRATIVE

### THE COMMANDER'S AWARD FOR CIVILIAN SERVICE FOR

#### DR. MICHAEL R. EDWARDS

Dr. Michael R. Edwards, United States Military Academy, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service as an Academic Advisor to the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA), NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, from 18 January 2011 to 4 June 2011 during OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. As advisor to the Department of Foreign Languages, Dr. Edwards' dedication, hard work, and leadership significantly improved NMAA's capacity to graduate Afghan National Army (ANA) lieutenants with greater proficiency in English language and culture. He also strengthened the NMAA faculty's ability to evaluate and improve their own curriculum and teaching, both boosting the ANA's ability to communicate with coalition forces and contributing to NMAA's ability to become a self-sustaining and superior institution of higher education in Afghanistan. He diligently worked with the head of the Languages Department to develop a system to link American Language Course textbooks and student performance outcomes to specific courses in the English language sequence and the English Language and Culture major sequence, thereby developing both sequences into a curricular framework sustainable by NMAA and eventually independent of the need for support by foreign advisors. He was instrumental in leading the development and implementation of a two-stage assessment tool to place arriving cadets into the new NMAA Mathematics and English honors program that will eventually send some of the best students in Afghanistan to study at and graduate from American military academies before returning to lend their knowledge and training to the further professionalization of ANA. Dr. Edwards also worked with Afghan faculty and the head of the Languages Department to help them develop criteria for assessing texts for suitability for use in the honors program and English language sequence and English Language and Culture major sequence, contributing to sustainable long-term practices for assigning and ordering texts rather than simply recommending the texts that the mentor team might consider appropriate for the immediate future. In conjunction with this effort, he initiated the building of an English language professional development library collection owned and used by Afghan faculty to support pedagogical best practices in the areas of teaching developmental reading and writing and second-language instruction and classroom practice. He also coordinated the effort with other members of the mentor team to verify instructor credentials and qualification levels in order to support sharing that information with the Ministry of Defense and assist Department heads in tracking and promoting faculty development. Through his distinctive accomplishments, Dr. Edwards reflects great credit upon himself, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, the United States Military academy, and the Department of Defense.

**INCENTIVE AWARD NOMINATION AND APPROVAL**

For use of this form, see AR 672-20; the proponent agency is Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel

**PART I - TO BE COMPLETED BY OPERATING OFFICE**

1. EMPLOYEE'S LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MI  EDWARDS, MICHAEL R.	2. ORGANIZATION (No abbreviations)  NATIONAL MILITARY ACADEMY OF AFGHANISTAN
3. PRESENT POSITION, TITLE, GRADE AND SALARY  ACADEMIC ADVISOR, 00 (GRADE)	4. POSITION HELD DURING PERIOD COVERED IN NOMINATION (If other than that shown in item 3)  18 January 2011 - 4 June 2011
5. TYPE OF AWARD RECOMMENDED	
ALL NOMINATIONS WILL BE JUSTIFIED AND INCLUDE THE DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED BY DA PAM 672-20.	
a. HONORARY	b. MONETARY
<input type="checkbox"/> DECORATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CIVILIAN SERVICE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMANDER'S AWARD FOR CIVILIAN SERVICE
<input type="checkbox"/> MERITORIOUS CIVILIAN SERVICE AWARD	<input type="checkbox"/> ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL FOR CIVILIAN SERVICE
<input type="checkbox"/> SUPERIOR CIVILIAN SERVICE AWARD	<input type="checkbox"/> CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> QUALITY STEP INCREASE
	<input type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE AWARD \$
	<input type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL ACT/SERVICE AWARD \$
	<input type="checkbox"/> ON-THE-SPOT CASH AWARD \$
	<input type="checkbox"/> TIME OFF AWARD
c. PERIOD OF SERVICE TO BE RECOGNIZED (MO/YR - MO/YR) 01/2011-06/2011	

6. NOMINATING OFFICIAL			
a. TYPED NAME AND TITLE	b. SIGNATURE	c. TELEPHONE NUMBER	d. DATE
RICKIE A. MCPEAK., COL Team Chief, NMAA	<i>Rickie McPeak</i>	AREA CODE ( 070 )  224-6884	11 April 2011

**PART II - TO BE COMPLETED ONLY FOR AWARDS FORWARDED TO HQDA (DAPE-CPL)**

7. INDICATE IF NOMINATION IS CONSISTENT WITH PARAGRAPH 2-2 IN AR 672-20 (Circle yes or no - If no, please explain on separate page)		
YES	a. TYPED NAME EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY OFFICER	b. SIGNATURE
NO		
YES	d. TYPED NAME CIVILIAN PERSONNEL OFFICER	e. SIGNATURE
NO		
		c. DATE
		f. DATE

**PART III - TO BE COMPLETED BY LOCAL INCENTIVE AWARDS COMMITTEE - RECOMMEND**

8. APPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/>	DISAPPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER <input type="checkbox"/>
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**COMPLETE FOR MONETARY AWARDS RECOMMENDED**

AMOUNT RECOMMENDED \$	TANGIBLE MONETARY BENEFITS \$	INTANGIBLE BENEFITS	ESTIMATED FIRST YEAR SAVINGS \$
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**PART IV TO BE COMPLETED BY APPROPRIATE APPROVING AUTHORITY (IES)**

ACTION LEVEL	APPROVED (If monetary, indicate amount)	DIS-APPROVED	ADDITIONAL CASH AWARD	SIGNATURE, TITLE AND DATE
9. LOCAL COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON				
10. INSTALLATION COMMANDER OR DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE				
11. MAJOR COMMAND REVIEW COMMITTEE				
12. COMMANDER OF MAJOR COMMAND OR DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE				<i>[Signature]</i> House, C. E. Chief of Staff
13. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY INCENTIVE AWARDS BOARD				

*Approved!*



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
**UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY**  
WEST POINT, NY 10996-1791

MADN-DEP

30 July 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: NMAA Mentor After-Action Report (Dr. Michael Edwards)

1. General (deployment dates 18 JAN 11–1 JUN 11): In my role as an academic mentor at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA), I worked to improve the English-language curriculum and instruction in the Languages Department, to develop and improve the English Language and Culture Major elective courses and instruction, to assist the Deputy Department Head in administering the Languages Department, to move forward with plans to implement sectioning by ability in the English-language curriculum, to help develop the new Math and English Honors Program, to mentor and develop NMAA cadets, to mentor and develop NMAA faculty, and to improve the use of instructional technology at NMAA. In so doing, I gained a deep appreciation not only of the efforts the Afghan faculty, staff, and cadets are making to improve their nation, but also of just how much we take for granted in the American system of higher education: the Afghans are literally reinventing the university in every way, and while their levels of achievement thus far might seem low to an American observer, they are working to re-create in one institution every advance made across higher education as a system since its modern inception.

2. English Language Instruction: In preparation for my deployment, I familiarized myself with foundational scholarship on English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and reviewed the reports of previous Languages department academic mentors. At this point, approximately 85% of NMAA cadets study English as their required foreign language, using the unfortunately dated Defense Language Institute (DLI) American Language Course (ALC) curriculum. This curriculum is designed to be administered intensively in daily six-hour blocks of classes, with each book in the course taking 30 hours or roughly one week to complete. The books are poorly written and incoherent, and in the hands of inexperienced instructors can often serve as impediments to learning: I frequently consulted with instructors and offered them guidance to correct errors, unclear points, and obsolete idiomatic expressions in the books. Furthermore, adapting an intensive language curriculum to a semester-long 45-lesson course teaching two books per semester offers its own pacing difficulties and in ensuring students receive adequate learning reinforcement. As it is currently designed, the NMAA adaptation of the ALC curriculum requires faculty to assign more work outside of class

than they or students are willing to undertake, and its outcomes in terms of the pace and consistency of improving language competence suffer as a consequence.

3. English Language and Culture Major: I met regularly with the 9% of eligible cadets who are enrolled in the English Language and Culture (ELC) major in both formal and informal conversation and discussion classes to help them promote their speaking and listening skills and to help inform them about American culture, and found those students to be intelligent, highly motivated, and eager to learn. That 9% is a declining number as a result of the Languages Department's incomplete articulation of the value of the major beyond simple language competence: many cadets have little curiosity about how the ELC major might broaden their horizons beyond that simple competence. Their lack of curiosity may be due in part to how new the major is and the fact that faculty have not yet designed or taught all its projected classes and therefore have not articulated for themselves how the value of the major might go beyond linguistic competence. In planning those projected classes, the Languages Department is receiving conflicting messages from the DLI English mentors, who focus on and promote that competence even in electives at the expense of cultural studies and inquiry, and academic mentors from the service academies, who see the English language instruction in the ALC curriculum as largely sufficient for building competence and focus on and promote college-level cultural studies and inquiry in the elective courses. I worked closely with four Languages Department instructors to help them develop the electives they were projected to teach: Major (MAJ) Sayed Nazir will teach Writing (LE491), Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Atiqullah Muneeb will teach Military Readings in English (LE391), and Mr. Mustafa Behzad is teaching Current Events and Culture (LE471), each instance being the first iteration of that course. In my work with these instructors, I limited my role to that of advisor and mentor rather than designing the syllabi for them, having seen the number of previously mentor-developed ELC syllabi that had been deemed too challenging by the Afghan instructors and therefore discarded. This approach was influenced by the guidance of the National Training Mission—Afghanistan (NTM-A) leadership, who consistently emphasized the importance of Afghan self-leadership and preparing for the Afghans to take over complete responsibility for training and leading their own security forces by 2014.

4. Languages Department Administration: I worked closely with the Acting Head of the Languages Department, LTC Atiqullah Muneeb, to assist him in hiring and managing new instructors and conducting the business of the Department and its interactions with other organizations. This included working with LTC Muneeb to improved hiring practices (including helping LTC Muneeb conduct interviews with prospective hires and piloting a system of peer-mentored teaching observations for them), helping the DLI English mentor administer placement tests for students and faculty, developing long-range training projections and schedules for faculty, resolving supply issues, and coordinating meetings among CJ-7 (NATO's Training & Education branch of NTM-A), the NMAA S1, the Languages Department, the DLI English mentor, and the company providing contract instructors. I also worked with LTC Muneeb to develop a system to link American Language Course textbooks and student performance

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outcomes to specific courses in the English language sequence and the English Language and Culture major sequence, thereby developing both sequences into a curricular framework sustainable by NMAA and eventually independent of the need for support by foreign advisors. At the direction of the NMAA Team Chief (Colonel Ed Naessens) and Senior Academic Mentor (Colonel Rickie McPeak), I put together a sectioning plan for transitioning all of the NMAA Languages Department classes from a homeroom system to a movement by section system. Due to reluctance on the part of the NMAA Dean to move away from a homeroom system, that plan was shelved for at least one semester. Future academic mentors may do well to understand that years of upheaval and strife and recent dependence upon foreign aid have resulted in a mindset among NMAA faculty whereby they are reluctant to tamper with any already-working system.

5. Math and English Honors Program: At the instruction of Colonel McPeak, I led the development and implementation of a three-stage assessment tool to place arriving cadets into the pilot NMAA mathematics and English honors program, combining a two-part scored oral interview with written English and math tests, and instructed mentor team members in applying and scoring that assessment tool. I weighted and ranked the math and English honors program candidates based on those scores and determined the final list of 15 candidates who would take a year of intensive math and English training in order to become eligible to study at and graduate from American military academies before returning to lend their knowledge and training to the further professionalization of the Afghan National Army. Once the candidates had been selected and the semester was underway, I led twice-weekly informal conversation classes with them to help them improve their knowledge of the English language and American culture. These students are some of the brightest at NMAA and certainly possess the intelligence and the ability to excel in any academic setting: their challenges, I believe, lie in the uneven foundations provided by their primary and secondary school education.

6. Cadet Mentoring: In addition to the informal discussion classes with the honors program cadets, I also led weekly separate official discussion classes with sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the English Language and Culture major, and conducted individual mentoring with both these cadets and the honors candidates. Students in the English Language and Culture major were for the most part not as proficient or as motivated as the students in the honors program, but were eager to learn. Several expressed eagerness to correspond with West Point cadets, and I have put them in touch with prior students of mine who have expressed a similar eagerness. So far, this pilot e-mail pen-pal program has seen limited success due to the NMAA cadets not having computers or internet and the West Point cadets being otherwise engaged in summer training, but I have received word from NMAA that some cadets there have been issued laptops, and I will again encourage the West Point cadets to make and maintain contact once the fall semester starts. As with all matters concerning NMAA, follow-through seems essential in order to promote long-term sustainable results.

7. Faculty Development: I worked with Afghan faculty and the head of the Languages Department to help them develop criteria for assessing texts for suitability for use in the honors

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program and English language sequence and English Language and Culture major sequence. My goal was to build sustainable long-term practices for assigning and ordering texts rather than simply recommending the texts that the mentor team might consider appropriate for the immediate future. The latter approach has in the past seemed to view NMAA as a satellite campus of the American service academies with Afghan instructors serving as adjunct substitutes for absent American instructors. Such an approach impeded Afghan leadership and autonomous sustainability for NMAA.

In conjunction with my efforts in helping the Afghans to develop selection criteria for class texts, I initiated building an English language professional development library collection owned and used by Afghan faculty to support pedagogical best practices in the areas of teaching developmental reading and writing and second-language instruction and classroom practice. I also established professional contacts between the Languages Department and academic publishers and scholars at other institutions to enable the Afghan faculty to continue expanding that professional development library on their own.

Additionally, I started and led a project working with the Dean and the heads of the other academic Departments to collect and integrate instructor information (including information about instructor education and qualifications) into the first NMAA-wide instructor roster. I coordinated the effort with other members of the mentor team to verify instructor credentials and qualification levels in order to support sharing that information with the Ministry of Defense and assist Department heads in tracking and promoting faculty development. That project was a necessary component of my coordination of American and Turkish mentor team faculty observations with NMAA's emerging instructor assessment efforts in order to establish a systematic program of faculty assessment and development independently sustainable by the NMAA faculty and administration beyond the departure of foreign advisors. There were several challenges in maintaining that assessment program: while the obvious language and logistical barriers simply required patience and coordination to overcome, some of the NMAA faculty were very uneasy about having foreign advisors observe teaching in any sort of official capacity, and some of the Department heads indicated a desire to use the observations as a way to circumvent personnel processes in ways that would damage the trust that the mentor team continues to work to develop. In conjunction with the Turkish mentor team leader, I made it clear to the Dean and Department heads and faculty that any foreign mentor team observations were to be used only for developmental purposes.

To support the faculty development program, I spearheaded a series of weekly two-hour faculty development workshops for the Languages Department. These workshops combined theoretical foundations, discussions of pedagogical strategies, and examples of practical classroom applications, and I sequenced them in an arc structured to imitate and support the trajectories of the language and culture courses that the English-language faculty teach. Additionally, they were designed to culminate in the most qualified and diligent Afghan instructors in the workshops taking over the program's execution upon my departure, and MAJ Sayed Nazir has since taken

over the leadership role with continuing guidance from the DLI English mentor. While most of the faculty were eager to develop and improve, some struggled with levels of language fluency that sometimes lagged behind those of the students they taught. Additionally, the younger instructors were almost universally more competent and adaptable than their more senior colleagues, and I suspect this is in large part due to the waning influence of the old Soviet model of lecture-based rote learning: teaching at NMAA will continue to improve as more new teachers join the faculty and older teachers retire.

8. Instructional Technology: I coordinated input from American scholars and leaders in the field of computer-assisted postsecondary instruction to lead an initiative to integrate computers into NMAA's curriculum and day-to-day administration, classroom instruction, and student classwork and homework. This initiative, designed to take effect when cadets are issued computers, builds upon scholarly research pioneered by Charles Moran and Patricia Fitzsimmons-Hunter that demonstrated the need to attend as much to instructor training and education as to the technology itself. I developed a survey instrument that polled approximately thirty percent of incoming first-year students about their experiences with computers (both in school and outside of school) and developed a similar instrument for the NMAA faculty, almost all of whom responded. I then shared the findings of those surveys with Ms. Kimberly Ekholm, the Special Advisor for Computers and Automation Training and Education for the Afghan Minister of Defense, and we used those findings to design an education program to get faculty trained in using computers before the \$5.6 million procurement contract takes effect when cadets are issued their computers in October. This program ensures through careful planning for consistent and thoughtful pedagogical uses of digital technologies and applications that the computers do not go unused, damaged, or sold, a genuine and potentially very expensive risk in Afghanistan's education- and resource-poor society. This program also ensures long-term affordability for the Afghans by relying on widely-adopted and UNESCO-recommended free and open source courseware and learning management systems. I have maintained contact with Ms. Ekholm and with the members of the mentor team who took over responsibility for implementing the continued training, and I project that it will be at least a year before any rough determination can be made as to the program's success.

9. Future Projects and Follow-Through: Much remains to be done to help the Afghans build NMAA into an independently sustainable modern institution of higher education. Two examples may illustrate the nature of the challenges facing future academic mentors. First: NMAA currently owns an Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) program for their library, purchased by the mentor team through the Ministry of Defense, which they do not use due to the librarian's unfamiliarity with and reservations about computers. Second: the West Point Electrical Engineering and Computer Science faculty began and then abandoned an automated registration, scheduling, and grading management system for NMAA, and so all those tasks are currently conducted by hand on paper. These two problems strike me as representative of the dangers of an overly hasty approach in working with the Afghans, in that they illustrate a habit of applying decontextualized solutions that do not take into account preexisting Afghan cultural and

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institutional structures and practices. That hasty approach seems driven by the projected 2014 departure date of U.S. forces, but is largely contradicted by the guidance from NTM-A to help the Afghans build an Academy that is sustainable in the long term. The Afghans have already made enormous strides in doing so, putting together a functioning institution of higher education from almost nothing within the space of a few short years, and I admire their determination, their will to succeed, and their perseverance. They face significant risks and enormous obstacles in working to move forward, but I believe their perseverance in particular will serve them well. While my efforts and the mentor team's efforts have contributed substantially to their endeavors, their eventual success will be (and must be) entirely their own: the balance I attempted to strike was one between following through with the Afghans on efforts that they had initiated and ensuring that the leadership on all efforts was always on the part of the Afghans. Striking that balance was a challenge, but I believe doing so was essential to my own success, and will be essential to the success of future mentors.

10. Please address any questions to the undersigned at x4363.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael R. Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MICHAEL R. EDWARDS  
Assistant Professor