

# GOD'S LIGHT SHINING IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan

story by Christmas McGaughey  
photos by U.S. Marines

Christian Marines have been shining the light of Christ in predominantly Muslim Afghanistan—a tiny, war-torn, impoverished country that supplies most of the world's opium and where children play among dangerous minefields.

“The kids there are tough as nails,” said U.S. Marine Colonel Hobie Smith, who attends CC Santa Barbara and served in Bagram, 30 miles north of the capital city of Kabul. “Of all the wounded kids I saw—some missing arms and legs—I only saw one cry, after getting a shot.”

“I’ll never forget the day I visited the hospital,” Hobie said. A 12-year-old boy had been severely injured by a mine and was flown to a nearby hospital. “He should have died; it blew up in his face.”

The colonel went to the hospital with the boy. Hobie’s heart went out to other injured children. Even though Afghan children are taught in school how to identify and avoid the different kinds of mines, the country is riddled with 400,000 mines still hidden after decades of war.

“The Lord put it on my heart: I started going to the hospital every day to see the kids,” he



photo by Sgt. Robert M. Storm



Col. Hobie Smith, right, of CC Santa Barbara, CA, gave school supplies to Afghan children.

From left to right, machine gunners Lance Cpl. Jacob Kareus, from Fort Smith, AR, Lance Cpl. Andrew T. Farlaino, from Helper, UT, and Lance Cpl. Aaron S. Carnaban, from Peoria, AZ, return fire at insurgents in the Korengal Valley. Three insurgents were confirmed killed.



photo by Sgt. Robert M. Swann

**Marines from Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, quickly man the perimeter during an indirect fire attack against Camp Blessing. Blessing is the most remote manned Marine Corps post in Afghanistan, and constantly receives enemy fire.**



**Although this school has 700 students, less than 30 can fit in the building; others meet outside. Col. Hobie Smith, left, visits.**

said. “I saw miracle after miracle—kids who shouldn’t even have been brought in alive.”

While he couldn’t openly share the Gospel, he prayed for the children. Hobie’s presence seemed to comfort them. “Oftentimes, they couldn’t see their parents; some were maybe 100 or 200 miles from home.” A few parents rode bicycles hours over rough terrain to visit their children.

He became an instrument of blessing to the hospital children, as well as to hundreds of school children in the area. First, Hobie’s sister’s church sent several boxes of toys for the hospital children. His wife, Cheryl, coordinated fundraisers and volunteers from the Santa Barbara area and shipped more than 1,500 kits of school supplies. Each kit was identical: a notebook, notepad, crayons, pencils and eraser.

Hobie remembered the first time he delivered the kits. He rode with other government officials to a remote area where they

were expecting over 300 children. “There were no villages, nothing,” as they pulled up next to a small, 20 x 20-foot adobe building and announced, “We’re here.”

“All of a sudden, kids started coming out of these nooks and valleys around us.” Nearly 400 kids lined up eagerly to get their kits, many missing fingers and limbs. An old but still active minefield was just 20 feet from the school building.

Deputy Director of Operations at the base, Hobie started two weekly Bible studies with other Christians and nonbelievers—some from other countries.

“All of us drew strength from those studies. We saw the Lord work in many different ways—miracles on the battlefield, and people coming to the Lord in tough times.” He counseled, prayed with and encouraged many service men and service women who were struggling with fear or homesickness.



**Lt. Col. Mike Varmette**

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Varmette, who has served in the Marine Corps for 22 years, was stationed in Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, for 6 months. He helped in the formation and training of the Afghan National Army’s Acquisition Agency. He is currently an instructor at the Defense Acquisition University, Fort Belvoir, VA. Mike attends CC Fredericksburg, VA.

As he showed people Christ’s love through personal interaction, some responded with curiosity about his own faith. Mike shared about Christianity through an interpreter. “They really listened,” he said. “It was amazing the respect you got back when you shared with them.”

Mike had been praying about Psalm 27:8, “When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek.’” He was sitting in his tent with the door-flap open and felt the Lord lift his eyes to the Afghanistan countryside. He thought of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:35–36: “I was hungry and you gave Me food ... I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me ...”



photo by Sgt. Robert M. Swann

**Lt. Robert L. Long, scout sniper platoon commander, from Berkeley Heights, NJ, hands village girls new school outfits. Over 600 girls were given new clothes to wear to school. For most, this was the first new clothing received in over a year.**



**Hobie hands out school kits to grateful schoolteachers and students.**

Suddenly Mike realized that this verse applied to the Afghan people. “It was very emotional for me to realize that,” he said. “That’s one of the times I felt closest to Him.”

Being a Marine for more than two decades has also taught him several things about being a Christian soldier.

“Unfortunately, when we’re in the U.S. we feel safe. We forget that we’re in a constant battle,” he said. “We have to make ourselves aware of every situation.” Christians need to be on guard against spiritual attacks and the enemy’s traps. One way to be prepared is by staying in the Word of God.

“As a real soldier, we always train, train, train for the situation,” he said. Spiritual training

means continually studying the Bible and applying it to our lives—a practice that gets easier the more we do it, just like training for long hikes.

Interpreters told him the Afghan people welcomed the American and coalition forces because the day the Taliban was ousted, it started to rain. “It had been a 7-year drought, and the people saw it as a sign from God.” Many had negative ideas about Christians, he said, propagated by the Taliban.

Mike has a deep respect for the Afghan people. “Because they’re poor, it doesn’t mean we’re better or even more educated than them,” he said. Some have been to universities and even those who have no degree can speak five or more languages. ☞