



SPIRIT of AMERICA

A small civil military support element is operating out of the embassy. They see a need, but they have no funding to meet that need. What do they do? Since 2005, they have had the ability to turn to Spirit of America, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support the “safety and success of Americans serving abroad and the local people and partners they seek to help.” Retired Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, calls the group a “philanthropic rapid response team.”

The organization’s advisory board, a veritable who’s who in the Department of Defense, boasts members like Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Charles Cleveland, Gen. (Ret.) Jack Keane, Dr. David Kilcullen, Adm. (Ret.) Eric Olsen and Gen. (Ret.) James Mattis, who said he buys into the idea of Spirit of America because it opens “a whole new vista for direct support when U.S. Government money is not the answer.”

Founded by Jim Hake — a technology entrepreneur, who started one of the first Internet media companies — following the attacks of 9/11, Spirit of America provides private assistance in direct response to needs identified by American military and civilian personnel. Support comes in a variety of ways. For some, support is given through project funding. Working with a unit, Spirit of America can develop and fund solutions for U.S. civil-military teams, which include employment and job training, education, livestock health and small business assistance and village stability.

Help can also come in the form of know-how. Working with GLG Research, Spirit of America offers U.S. civil military teams access to more than 300,000 private-sector subject-matter experts. Of course, sometimes needs are more pressing and that’s when Spirit of America steps in and provides a variety of materiel goods from blankets and clothing to computers and school supplies. They also have access to wheelchairs and water purification, as well as sewing machines and playground equipment. The list really has no bounds, and when the need is made known, Spirit of America staffers find a way to make it happen, which includes delivering the supplies to the team.

In Georgia, a Civil Affairs team assigned to the 97th Civil Affairs Battalion recently put Spirit of America to work to support displaced children in a contested area of the country. In 2008, armed conflict broke out in Georgia when the Russian Army started peacekeeping operations in South Ossetia

and Abkhazia. During the five-day conflict, 170 servicemen, 14 policemen and 228 civilians from Georgia were killed and 1,747 wounded. Sixty-seven Russian servicemen were killed, 283 were wounded and 365 South Ossetian servicemen and civilians (combined) were killed, according to an official EU fact-finding report about the conflict. Georgian citizens fleeing from the ongoing tensions have found home in an Internally Displaced Persons Camp.

In the camp, a large number of families live in small homes. Each camp has its own school and community center. The schools are not well funded and are heated by wood heaters. In an effort to improve the living conditions and the efforts of the school, the CA team partnered with Spirit of America to provide books and toys to the children as well as a more efficient means of heating the center, where the children spend their days and nap.

Traveling with the CA team was Isaac Egan, a former Soldier who now works with Spirit of America and the staff of *Special Warfare*. Spirit of America’s goal isn’t just to help the military, it also puts former Soldiers to work. Egan’s job is to facilitate the organization’s work with the military. He gets to know the teams, he sees what they are doing and what they need. And then, as in this case, he helps them meet a need and in doing so, builds rapport with the Georgian people.

Members of the CA team speak easily with Egan. He understands them. He understands their limitations and he helps them build on their previous successes. During the day-long trip, the team visited two internally displaced persons camps and brought smiles not only to the children, who lined up to play with the toys and flip through the books, but also their teachers who work so hard to ensure the children have a safe place to learn. The team members are quick to point out that they couldn’t do what they were doing without the assistance of Spirit America. For Spirit of America, the goal is making U.S. troops and diplomats safer and more successful in their missions by helping local people who are not reached by large-scale aid programs. **SW**