

## Diary Entry 2

***The following diary entries are Ron Hamilton's personal observations, musings and thoughts while commissioned by World Bank to review governance and monitoring in the SOE sector in Kabul during 2009.***

### ***"I know we're not in Kansas."* Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz"**

5 May 2009

Last night's dinner at John's accommodation was an all-male affair. About 200 metres from the compound but we still had to take the SUV. A cross-section of World Bank officials, local WB staff and a few consultants. One of the last-named was relieved that alcohol was served and I enjoyed the Heineken but spirits and Cointreau seemed popular. Good, if basic food – curries, rice and Afghan bread, supplemented by fruit. My chats with John aside, much of the conversation was about local issues I know little about. And about security. Pleasant, but still good to get into the SUV and head "home".

I spent much of the day swatting up and waiting for my schedule of meetings. Still waiting for an ID – indeed, one of the guards was a bit cool about my not having one. Being adjacent to the Canadian Embassy, he expected all hands to have one. So, using the webcam, I took my photo and e-mailed it off. Guest House Two faces a closed street. The Bank's offices are on the other side of the Embassy's compound, although I can see the ambassador's swimming pool right next to my accommodation. Each time I move between the Bank's area and "home" I pass by several armed guards and a couple of check points.

Talking of the Canadian Embassy, those with Google Earth can locate "Camp Hammers" by doing a search for it in that medium. You can do the same for the Ministry of Finance.

6 May 2009

This is a view from my balcony. The mountain peak is one of several surrounding Kabul. Most have communication devices – which sadly don't deliver Vodafone NZ – and all seem to have houses halfway up their steep sides. My several readings of the Flashman "diaries" return to me often and it was with something of a surprise that I came across an Afghan magazine in the guest house which referred to Flashman's daughter – a pointer to the daughter of George Macdonald Fraser and her obituary of the latter. One of my readers will find it moderately interesting when I bring it home. Flashman readers will know that the first book is about his experiences in, inter alia, Afghanistan and his involvement in the first British retreat from Kabul.



John has saved the otherwise slow day by doing a "beer run". He shot out to the UN commissariat and I am now the proud owner of a bottle of Captain Morgan and several bottles of beer!

.....

This morning, we visited the legal adviser to the Vice President. His office is in a building reminiscent of the old Dunedin Club. Old ambience, wide stairs, high ceilings and many interesting paintings. One, just in the main hall was striking – hill near Bamyán (the NZ construction team is located there) where the Buddhas were destroyed by the Taliban. The two Buddha's have been painted out and the elongated black holes are somewhat striking. Waiting for the car, a number of people arrived for an emergency meeting – apparently related to the US efforts of yesterday. So many civilians killed! Extremely sad but somehow, this tranquil garden seems to be in another country. "Bad things", as one of my Afghan colleagues says, happen outside the city.

Still waiting for my schedule of meetings and, although I have commenced drafting now, it could be premature.