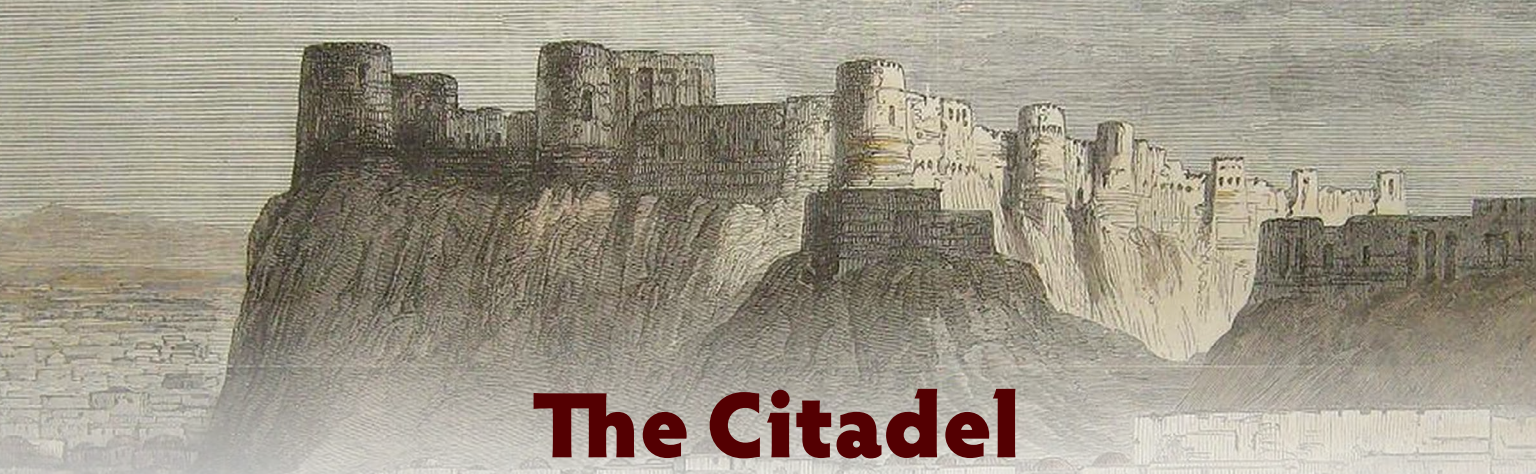

The Citadel

Eons flicker and fall
like flakes of empire to settle
at the bottom of an hour glass.

Yet stands the citadel,
assailed but untaken.

Turreted walls glare down
across the centuries,
dust piled high on their
shoulders,
bones fallow at their feet.

In aching memory:

A shivering tangle of axes and
spears,
bullets and whistling shells,
whispering reapers,
that cleave time and flesh,

and the savage will
that holds the dusty heights
cloudless and austere
while the blood laps
at bare and cracking feet.

About the ramparts
stomp the ghosts of Afghans before they were Afghans,
and the Persians,
and Macedonians hefting their silver shields,
Asian hordes with hardy ponies and humming arrows,
Tommies, Commies, and Yanks,
chiseled faces, frozen in youth.

Each a life spent in the churning nothing,
in the majestic absence
between Oxus and the snarling peaks.

For fun, for empire, for salt, for silk
For God, for you, for me, for
a disinterested democracy,
for nothing.

And the foe paces
over the stark parapets,
another ghost in his train,
bored with victory,
bored with defeat.

—Maj. Wes Moerbe, U.S. Army
Herat, Afghanistan