

FROM GAMBERI

Volume 1, Issue 4

WATCH OUT

AN MRAP TURRET GUNNER PROVIDES SECURITY DURING A CONVOY



FROM GAMBERI

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

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U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jeffery Wiltsey, a native of Anchorage, Alaska, stands vigilant in the gunner's turret atop a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle during a convoy en route to Forward Operating Base Naghlu High, May 1. MRAP gunners are the eyes-and-ears for personnel inside the fortified vehicles and provide information to the truck commander. Wiltsey serves as personnel officer assigned to Security Force Assistance Advisory Team-15, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

This installment of the FROM GAMBERI magazine features a set of pictures of the Jordanian Engagement Team. The Muslim scholars visited FOB Gamberi to meet with Afghan National Army 201st Corps soldiers. The JET presented the soldiers with prayer rugs, copies of the Quran and delivered sermons at the mosque on FOB Gamberi.

A story with pictures of U.S. Army food service specialists who were in the dining facility when three rockets struck FOB Naghlu High. No one was hurt but the experience is something they will not soon forget.

A set of pictures from a visit by the SEAC who spoke to servicemembers on FOB Gamberi and met with senior leadership during his brief stay.

A story about the U.S. Army G1 advising the ANA G1 on personnel matters and how they both learn from one another.

Pictures and a story of U.S. Army weapons experts training ANA on how to service and repair various weapon systems.

The last story is about 5 U.S. Soldiers who were killed in southern Afghanistan. Even though they are not from Gamberi, these Soldiers are part of our family; our brothers in arms.

If you wish to contribute to this newsletter with a picture or have a story idea contact Maj. Miller or Staff Sgt. Andrade in the Public Affairs Office on FOB Gamberi.

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JORDANIAN ENGAGEMENT TEAM VISITS FOB GAMBERI

From left to right, Jordanian army 2nd Lt. Fawaz Salem Alqudah, a Muslim scholar assigned to the Jordanian Engagement Team, and U.S. Army Maj. Steve Prost, brigade chaplain, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, listen as an interpreter translates for them during a meeting at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. Alqudah and 2nd Lt. Thabet Salehbani Amir, right spoke to members of the Afghan National Army's 201st Corps and distributed Islamic literature during their two day visit. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Jordanian army 2nd Lt. Thabet Salehbani Amir, right, a Muslim scholar serving with the Jordanian Engagement Team, greets an Afghan National Army soldier after delivering a sermon at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Jordanian army 2nd Lt. Fawaz Salem Alqudah, right, a Muslim scholar serving with the Jordanian Engagement Team provides a religious pamphlet to an Afghan soldier at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. Alqudah and other members of the JET discussed the teaching of Islam and with soldiers assigned to the Afghan National Army 201st Corps. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



JORDANIAN ENGAGEMENT TEAM VISITS FOB GAMBERI

Jordanian army 2nd Lt. Fawaz Salem Alqudah, center, a Muslim scholar serving with the Jordanian Engagement Team shares a light moment with soldiers assigned to the Afghan National Army 201st Corps at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. The Jordanian team delivered sermons to Afghan soldiers and distributed prayer rugs along with copies of the Quran. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Muslim scholars serving with the Jordanian Engagement Team, center, listen as a counterpart speaks with members of the Afghan National Army 201st Corps at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. The Jordanian team handed out prayer rugs, copies of the Quran and delivered sermons during their visit. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Jordanian army 2nd Lt. Fawaz Salem Alqudah, a Muslim scholar serving with the Jordanian Engagement Team, provides books on Islam to members of the ANA, 201st Corps at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 24. During their visit the scholars delivered sermons to Afghan soldiers and distributed prayer rugs along with copies of the Quran. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

COOKS DO NOT LET ROCKET ATTACK BRING THEM DOWN

By Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade
Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs

As the Soldiers of Headquarters Company 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment begin to wrap up their rotation to Afghanistan, they can look back over some of the defining moments of the deployment.

Though they do not happen as often as they used to, rocket attacks are still a tool of choice for insurgents. Once the rocket reaches its target, shrapnel flies everywhere, ripping through whatever or whoever is near.

Indirect-fire drills are conducted on military bases throughout Afghanistan and serve as a reminder that the threat is real. Personnel are told to lay face-down on the ground in the event of a rocket attack then move to concrete bunkers where they are told to stay until the “all clear” is announced.

On December 23, 2012, a few minutes after noon, Staff Sgt. Gregory Roush and Sgt. Margaret Hammond were working in the back office of the Forward Operating Base Naghlu High dining facility. Hammond stepped out of the room and less than a minute later a rocket pierced through the ceiling, narrowly missing Roush, broke a hole through the wall and detonated in the kitchen.

Roush serves as noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the FOB Naghlu High DFAC. He was sitting behind his desk in the office when the rocket fell through one corner of the room, flew behind him and crashed through the wall detonating in the next room.

“I was sitting behind the computer, next thing I know I’m on the floor next to the desk,” said Roush. “I got up and grabbed my flashlight because the lights had gone out.”

The rocket hit a water heater in the corner of the kitchen. Roush said water was everywhere and he tripped over the mess on the floor trying to find the water cut-off valve.

The West Milford, N.J., native said he felt lucky the wall the rocket had gone through was made of inexpensive materials.

“If it hadn’t been for that wall, the rocket would have detonated in the office, then, I’d have been screwed,” said Roush.

Had the wall been made with stronger construction material the rocket would have detonated in the room Roush was working in, resulting in his injury or death.

Hammond recalled having to step out of the back office and twenty seconds later, she heard an explosion.

“I got really worried because it was a loud sound,” said Hammond, a native of Lihue, Hawaii. “I wondered if Staff Sgt. Roush was alright.”

Following the explosion, everyone in the DFAC was evacuated and filled the fortified bunkers in the surrounding area.

“At first I heard a loud click sound,” said Spc. James Young, a native of Coquille, Ore., “Next thing I know I feel a force hit me on my left shoulder, pick me up and toss me up against the wall.”

The first thing he thought was a water heater blew up in the kitchen. He got up and proceeded to shut off all the kitchen equipment. Young said he was initially confused, noticed the kitchen walls and ceiling were black and the door had a lot of damage to it. He then walked out and sat in the concrete bunker outside the dining facility.

Young said he is a big guy and can really take a hit. “But after the blast knocked me off of my feet, I was pretty shaken up.”

“[Staff Sgt.] Roush got accountability for the cooks, looked out for us and helped put us at ease,” Young said.

“My first instinct was to get everybody out of the DFAC and into the bunker,” said Hammond. “After we all were inside the bunker, we heard another rocket hit.”

The “all clear” message was announced over loudspeakers and everyone emptied the bunkers throughout the FOB, some walked to the troop medical clinic for a check-up.

While Hammond was being treated at the aid station, she said another rocket hit the FOB and everyone immediately returned to the bunkers.

Once inside the bunker she said, “Wow, I get fireworks on my birthday.” Everyone in the bunker with her began to sing “Happy Birthday.”

Following the ordeal Hammond said she was glad to be alive, “I thank



U.S. Army Spc. James Young, a native of Coquille, Ore., moves a refrigerator to expose the hole on the wall one of three rockets made on December 23, 2012, at the dining facility Forward Operating Base Naghlu High. Young serves as a food service specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

God I’m alive, he protected me that day.”

The rocket that hit the DFAC would have struck Hammond, had she not walked out of the office only moments earlier.

“I had just left the office. It was aiming right at me,” said Hammond. She said she thinks about the incident at least once a day.

“It is pretty memorable, I will never forget it,” said Hammond.

Hammond, a native of Lihue, Hawaii, has been in the Army for almost 9 years and looks forward to moving up to the next rank.

“I love to see everybody smile when they eat here,” said Hammond. “I love what I do, I love cooking for Soldiers.”

The incident brought the cooks and DFAC workers closer together. They even have nicknames for each other. Hammond calls Staff Sgt. Roush, “Grandpa Roush.”

The 16-year Army veteran said the experience just rolled off of his shoulder. Roush is on his fifth deployment and said when the time comes; he would like to retire in Germany.

Following the rocket attacks no one was seriously hurt. The cooks were given 24-hour quarters and a chance to rest in their rooms. Roush calls himself a work-a-holic and said he tried to go to the DFAC and was sent back to his room. His reasoning was all the preparation that needed to hap-

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SEAC VISITS FOB GAMBERI



Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia (front left), walks with Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Menton, (front, second from left), senior enlisted advisor for the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and Command Sgt. Maj. Alonzo J. Smith, senior enlisted advisor for Combined Joint Task Force-101, 101st Airborne Division, after arriving at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, May 4. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia, speaks with servicemembers during a question and answer session at the Forward Operating Base Gamberi dining facility, May 4, 2013. Battaglia serves as Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Right to left, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Ronald Lewis, the 101st Airborne Division's deputy commanding general for support listens to Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia during a meeting in the conference room at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, May 4, 2013. During his visit to Gamberi, the SEAC spoke with servicemembers and met with senior leadership. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

SEAC VISITS FOB GAMBERI



Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan Battaglia, senior enlisted advisor to the chairman, speaks with Soldiers assigned to 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, at the motor pool on Forward Operating Base Gamberi, May 4. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia (front left), shares a light moment with a Soldier assigned to 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division at the motor pool on Forward Operating Base Gamberi, May 4. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



Right to left, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Ronald Lewis, the 101st Airborne Division's deputy commanding general for support and Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia listen to Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Menton, senior enlisted advisor for the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, during a meeting in the conference room at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, May 4. Portions of this image were blurred for operational security reasons. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

G1 OFFICE KEEPS ANA SOLDIERS FOCUSED ON THEIR MISSION



A group of Afghan National Army soldiers assigned to the 1st Brigade, 201st Corps, wait for the beginning of an outdoor ceremony held at Forward Operating Base Mehtar Lam. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

By Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade
Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs

As the Afghan National Army grows and develops into a professional force, it is experiencing challenges that other professional forces have faced in the past.

One of those challenges is soldiers who go absent without leave and are eventually dropped from roles. Though significant, this challenge is not unique to the Afghan army.

In U.S. history, the Continental Army struggled with AWOLs. During the American Civil War, the Union Army had a high number of deserters. With the imminent withdrawal of Coalition Forces, Afghan personnel officers are working to overcome these challenges with the help of those who already have.

U.S. Army Capt. Jeffrey Kocian, assigned to Tactical Action Center-1, G-1, or administration office, advises ANA Col. Qurban Nazar, 201st Corps, G1, on administrative matters at Forward Operating Base Gamberi.

Kocian works hand-in-hand with his counterpart as Nazar is responsible for ANA personnel services including administrative, discipline and manning issues.

He received pre-deployment training at the Security Force Advise and Assist Team Academy at the Joint Readiness Training Center, in Fort Polk, La. The lessons covered Afghan culture and language training, general advisor training and an overview of how Afghan National Security Forces function.

“A lot of good information was provided to set us up for success, especially for me, who has never been an advisor before,” said Kocian, a native of Houston, Texas, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 5th Battal-

ion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas.

This is Kocian's first deployment to Afghanistan, having previously deployed to Iraq. He said he didn't know what to expect prior to this deployment. Kocian said he just passed the halfway mark in his deployment and said the ANA are a lot better off than what he anticipated.

Kocian attends the 201st Corps daily update brief. He said the morning meeting provides an overview of each ANA brigade's operations, discussing any significant activities with each staff section giving a quick run-down of logistics and intelligence reports.

Kocian advises Nazar as he provides guidance to ANA brigades and battalions. Nazar indirectly assists with the in-processing of new soldiers and accountability of ANA troops.

“I prepare and manage Corps personnel including assignments, promotions, legal actions and even retirements,” said Nazar.

If an ANA soldier has issues with his pay, promotion or leave paperwork, he must notify their respective chain of command. Nazar said, the paperwork flows from individual units, up to the soldiers' chain of command and arrives at the 201st Corps, for final review and receive the commanding general's signature of approval.

With over 24 years of experience in the ANA, Nazar said he stays busy as the 201st Corps, G1, but enjoys every minute of his job. Nazar makes time in his busy schedule to speak to new ANA soldiers and lets them know how important and historic being part of the Afghan Army is.

In his opinion Nazar said the ANA's priority is to make good quality, noncommissioned officers, with good leadership skills. He said admin-

istration plays a vital role in his soldiers' welfare and morale. But his attention to detail does not end there.

“Due to the insider threat, we make sure to screen bad people and make sure they do not join or stay in the Army,” said Nazar.

He said he makes sure ANA company commanders are inspected on a regular basis. Nazar said he has worked with many coalition partners since the fall of the Taliban.

While reviewing ANA AWOL statistics, Kocian said he made a discovery that can dramatically alter the number of reported AWOL cases.

The ANA G1 puts together a monthly personnel status report that includes a list of soldiers who have been dropped from roles after having been reported as AWOL. The report also includes soldiers being transferred out of the 201st corps, finished their time in the army (ETS), casualties, natural deaths, retirements and promotions.

“As I was looking at the last 12 months of data, one of the numbers jumped out at me, which was their ETS numbers,” said Kocian. “Over the last year there were 469 soldiers, total, ETS from the 201st Corps.”

According to his data, Kocian said the current ETS average is higher than it should be.

“What I think is happening is that the ANA soldiers' battalion S1 (personnel staff office), aren't able to quickly identify and process soldiers who are supposed to ETS. There are soldiers who their finance department finds out they are not supposed to be getting paid anymore and so their pay stops, and then they go AWOL. The soldiers are DFR instead of being processed out of the army the normal way,” said Kocian.

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US ARMY WEAPONS EXPERTS INSTRUCT ANA TO TRAIN THEMSELVES



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Gary Ramosnunez, (center), a Cidra, Puerto Rico native, and Pfc. William Eldridge (left), a native of Boise, Idaho, show Afghan National Army soldiers how to disassemble an M16 rifle during a weapons instructor course on Forward Operating Base Naghlu High, April 30. They train Afghan soldiers to become instructors so they can instruct other ANA soldiers in their units how to properly maintain and repair weapons. Both serve as small arms/artillery repairers assigned to Company A, 27th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (Courtesy photo)



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Gary Ramosnunez, (right), a Cidra, Puerto Rico native, and Pfc. William Eldridge (left), show Afghan National Army soldiers the proper way to change out a barrel of an M16 rifle in the motor pool at Forward Operating Base Naghlu High, April 30. The two weapons experts serve as small arms/artillery repairers assigned to Company A, 27th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

By Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade
Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs

An Afghan National Army vehicle hit an improvised explosive device during a patrol. Every soldier survived but an M-16 rifle inside the vehicle received damage to its barrel.

United States Army small arms/artillery repairers are training ANA soldiers on the maintenance and repair of M-16 rifles at Forward Operating Base Naghlu High, so they can repair damaged weapons and put them back in the fight.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Gary Ramosnunez and Pfc. William Eldridge's mission is to visit forward operating bases in Regional Command-East and make sure Soldiers' weapon systems work.

Eldridge said they are trained to fix various weapons systems, from the "triple sevens," [M777 howitzer], to mortars, all the way down to pistols.

The weapons experts work at Bagram Airfield and are responsible for keeping their brigade's weapon systems fully mission capable. Both serve as small arms and artillery repairers assigned to Company A, 27th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas.

Eldridge, a native of Boise, Idaho, said he has been busy since arriving in Afghanistan because some weapons he encountered in-country were overdue for services. He has visited FOB Naghlu High, FOB Gamberi, FOB Xio Haq, and FOB Tagab. Basically, anywhere there are 4-1 Soldiers with weapons needing repair or service, he has been there.

"When any [weapons system] is broken we travel to the FOB and fix it," said Ramosnunez.

"We have people going in and out of the FOBs on convoys, we want to make sure every weapon system works, in case they ever have to use it," said Ramosnunez.

Another aspect of his job is training the ANA on various weapon systems. He trains Afghan soldiers into becoming instructors. Once qualified they can train fellow soldiers in their units how to properly maintain and repair their weapons.

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COOKS story

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U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Gregory Roush, a West Milford, N.J., native, holds shrapnel from the rocket that narrowly missed him while he worked in the back office of the Forward Operating Base Naghlu High dining facility, May 1, 2013. The rocket hit the DFAC December 23, 2012, causing minor damage but no one was seriously hurt. Roush serves as a food service specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

pen prior to the Christmas meal, just two days away.

After 8 hours of work, replacing lights, mopping the floor, changing out tables, the DFAC was up and running. Roush said it is one of the best DFACs compared to other bases.

After a long day's work, when clean up is done and no one else is around, the cooks and DFAC workers decompress by hanging out at the DFAC and playing music.

"We just turn up the music and dance, I mean, I know it's silly but we enjoy it," said Young.

This is Young's first deployment and said he has learned a lot. He said he wasn't too excited about deploying to Afghanistan and being away from his family.

"I was a different person coming in than I am coming out," said Young.

Two days after that working with information from the local population, Coalition Forces captured an insurgent who was believed to be responsible for the rocket attacks.

G1 story

Continued from page 7

He believes that many of the AWOL numbers are really soldiers who completed their term of service in the Afghan army and should be counted accordingly.

"I think that is skewing the AWOL rate numbers," said Kocian. "Basically if they were able to better identify soldiers whose contracts are about to expire, there would be a drop in the AWOL and subsequently the DFR rate."

Kocian will use this information to help teach the ANA personnel officers how to more accurately track the status of soldiers and their time in service. It is expected that this will result in a reduced AWOL rate for the 201st Corps.

In his opinion, keeping accountability for soldiers can be time consuming but as the ANA numbers grow in size, the Corps G1 will have to communicate more with the ANA kandaks.

Kocian said the attrition rate has been on a downward trend and the AWOL rate is the lowest it has ever been.

As the Corps makes changes to their AWOL policy and educates their soldiers, it will help contribute to the decline in the AWOL numbers.

"I have learned a lot from my U.S. advisor, and enjoy my partnership with Coalition Forces," said Nazar.

"Understanding how [the ANA] conduct business, trying to make recommendations to help improve their processes, figuring out how the best way to tackle a problem," said Kocian. "It is a challenge, but I am definitely enjoying it."

"Advising can be frustrating at times, but it can also be very rewarding," Kocian said.

ANA grows and becomes better organized it will have to rely on officers like Nazar to maintain accountability of soldiers in their unit. ANA G-1 personnel will correct information for an individual an entire unit, so soldiers' needs are taken care of and they can focus on their mission at hand.

Weapons instructors story

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"It's a pretty fulfilling job," said Eldridge. "I enjoy it because I like to repair things."

He said the plan is to teach them day-by-day so the ANA soldiers are not overwhelmed. Eldridge said they will eventually train the ANA on the M249 light machine gun and .50-caliber machine gun.

Ramosnunez, a native of Cidra, Puerto Rico, said he loves his job and enjoys interacting with ANA soldiers during the weapons instructor course. He says the ANA he trains are very motivated, and want to do their job. In his opinion, training them how to fix their weapons systems will give them an edge in the fight.

Ramosnunez has three previous deployments to Iraq; this is his first deployment to Afghanistan.

For the ANA, the role of weapons maintainer is vital. They will act as first-line maintainers on their unit's weapon systems.

"It is important for their force protection, so



An Afghan National Army soldier shows U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Gary Ramosnunez, (center), a native of Cidra, Puerto Rico, a damaged upper receiver of an M16 rifle in the motor pool at Forward Operating Base Naghlu High, April 30. The weapon was damaged while in a vehicle struck by an improvised explosive device. Ramosnunez instructs ANA soldiers so they can train other soldiers in their units how to properly maintain and repair weapons. Ramosnunez serves as a small arms/artillery repairer assigned to Company A, 27th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (Courtesy photo)

when we leave, they will be self-sustained," said Ramosnunez.

Most of the ANA soldiers have experience from previous weapons training, so for some it was a refresher course.

Ramosnunez said the class is driven by the ANA, noting that they are quick to learn and learn faster by working hands-on.

"Yesterday they asked me if we could teach them how to change a barrel on an M16, so today we showed them how to do it with the correct tools," said Ramosnunez. "We do whatever they want to do or whatever they want to know about a weapon."

The informal class demonstrations are supposed to familiarize them with the mechanics of an M16; they take it apart and put it back together again. During the weapons instructor course, the ANA soldiers are encouraged to ask questions to make sure they understand each step. A translator is there to facilitate communications between them.

The two weapons specialists showed the ANA soldiers how to properly change the barrel of the M16 damaged in a vehicle hit by an IED. With the proper tools he made sure the ANA soldiers had a chance to do it, not just watch.

Once the ANA soldiers have completed the weapons instructor course they should be experienced and confident enough to instruct their fellow soldiers in proper weapons maintenance and repair.

"We provide the tools, technical manuals and instruction," said Ramosnunez. "So that when we leave they should be able to fix their own weapon systems."

Blast kills 5 Fort Bliss Soldiers

By David Burge
El Paso Times

FORT BLISS -- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to exact a huge toll on Fort Bliss, as five Fort Bliss soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, were killed Saturday in a bomb blast in southern Afghanistan.

"The toll of this has hit this community hard," Fort Bliss spokesman Maj. Joe Buccino said Monday. "This brings it home."

The soldiers killed were: 1st Lt. Brandon James Landrum, 26, Lawton, Okla.; Staff Sgt. Francis Gene Phillips IV, 28, Meridian, N.Y.; Spc. Kevin Cardoza, 19, Mercedes, Texas; Spc. Brandon Joseph Prescott, 24, Bend, Ore.; Spc. Thomas Paige Murach, 22, Meridian, Idaho.

The soldiers were more than halfway through a nine-month deployment, Buccino said.

They were out on a patrol in the Maiwand District in Kandahar Province when the vehicle they were in hit a roadside bomb.

"Five (fatalities) in one blast is extremely unusual and horrific," Buccino said. "This casts a shadow over the entire community. The entire community has reached out to us -- the Chamber of Commerce, leaders, El Pasoans who are not in the military. We are appreciative of that."

"All of Fort Bliss is really saddened," Buccino said. "The reality of this has been felt tremendously in this community and El Paso. It wasn't even a year ago that we lost six soldiers (from the 978th Military Police Company) in one blast and now this."

Six MPs, all from Fort Bliss, were killed in a bomb blast July 8, 2012, in Afghanistan.

REST IN PEACE, HEROES



SPC KEVIN CARDOZA



SPC BRANDON JOSEPH PRESCOTT



SSG FRANCIS GENE PHILLIPS IV



SPC THOMAS PAIGE MURACH



1LT BRANDON J. LANDRUM



Fort Bliss also lost nine soldiers in a single day when the 507th Maintenance Company was ambushed at the outset of the Iraq war in March 2003.

Eighty-three Fort Bliss soldiers have died in Iraq and Afghanistan since Sept. 11, 2001.

"Your hearts go out to the families and the soldiers in the Ready First (the 1st Brigade's nickname) who are dealing with this," Buccino said. "There are a lot of people touched by this and are affected by it. It personalizes the war in a very tragic way."

Retired Brig. Gen. Richard Behrenhausen, who lives in El Paso, said he gets emotional any time he hears about a soldier dying.

"Service to the nation does include the potential for the ultimate sacrifice," said Behrenhausen, the first commander of what is now called Joint Task Force North, which is headquartered at Fort Bliss. "I really believe every

soldier and every soldier's family member understands that, thinks about it and sometimes dreads it, but in the tradition of the military, they soldier on.

"It's never easy to lose a single soldier," Behrenhausen said. "It's never easy, whether it is one, five or 10."

Behrenhausen was a captain and then a major during the Vietnam War. The infantry battalion he was in lost 165 soldiers in one year.

"That is a terrible toll," he said. "I get emotional thinking about it."

Retired Lt. Col. Bob Chisolm, of Anthony, N.M., saw combat in World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

He also said he gets emotional whenever he hears about soldiers dying.

"I have had an opportunity to talk to a lot of these young men who have served in Afghanistan or Iraq," Chisolm said. "I tell you, it just seems like they and their

families are having it a lot rougher than those who served in World War II, Korea or Vietnam."

Current service members sometimes have five, six or even seven tours of duty, which wasn't the case in the past, Chisolm said.

"It's such a burden on the families of these troops," he said. "The families are suffering terribly in this conflict."

Landrum left behind a wife, a son and daughter. Murach is survived by three brothers and his parents. Phillips left behind a wife and daughter. Prescott is survived by his parents and three brothers. Cardoza left behind two daughters. Cardoza's Facebook page had him listed as engaged to Ashley Marie Vasquez of El Paso.

All soldiers were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division

They deployed from Fort Bliss in December 2012.



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