

2ND BATTALION, 377TH PARACHUTE FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT
FOB SALERNO, AFGHANISTAN

STEELTIMES

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TF STEEL

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM 12-13

COMMANDER'S CUT



CSM Moore (left) and LTC Stanco listen attentively to the guest speaker's remarks at the Transfer of Authority (TOA) Ceremony between 1-6 FA, 1 ID and 2-377 PFAR (24 DEC 11)

Dear Families and Friends of Task Force STEEL,

We trust you will enjoy the first edition of the STEEL TIMES, our monthly unit newsletter from the front lines of Afghanistan. The intent of this publication is to stay connected to everyone back home and keep you informed on the happenings in Task Force STEEL as we are operating across Regional Command East. Every edition will include an update from each of the units along with stories of interest and highlights of our outstanding Soldiers from across the Task Force as they execute their daily mission. We plan to include pictures from award ceremonies, promotions, Paratroopers living and working, as well as, other special events. Our Rear Detachment Commander, Captain Ben Mannion, will ensure that this publication is distributed to all and posted on our 2-377th PFAR FACEBOOK page and Virtual Family Readiness Group page.

It is amazing how quickly our Paratroopers adapt to our new environment, understand the critical needs of the mission, and execute with precision. Our Paratroopers are already setting new standards of excellence in their respective jobs at each forward and company operating base. Our top priority is partnering with Afghanistan Security Forces (ANSF), both Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and Afghanistan National Police (ANP), side by side. Watching the remarkable gains every day, definitely allows everyone to understand the importance of the mission and contribution over here. Partnering is only one aspect of what we are doing; the firing elements are employing howitzers in support of maneuver operations; maneuver elements are conducting combined patrols and facilitating increased security; support elements are not only providing maintenance but also conducting recovery missions, providing security, and training ANSF on a number of tasks, and finally our headquarters element is overseeing all these things and resourcing each element in order that they can best complete the task at hand, along with training alongside their ANSF counterpart and providing security.

There is no doubt that our pace is fast and furious, but rest assured, your Soldier is up for the task and we are proud of the great start to our rotation.

On behalf of CSM Moore and Task Force STEEL, thanks again for your tremendous support during our train-up and recent deployment. You all are missed and remain in our thoughts and prayers. You truly have the hardest job, and we never forget the sacrifices that you are making right now. Thank you and God bless.

Sincerely,
LTC Frank J. Stanco
Commander, Task Force STEEL
SPARTAN STEEL 6



TF STEEL command team uncasing the BN colors during the TOA ceremony at FOB SALERNO (24 DEC 11)

MESSAGE FROM STEEL 7

Greetings from Afghanistan! Hello and how is everyone doing in Alaska? I was told that the highs have been in the mid 50s to low 60s and the lows have been in the mid 30s. Oh, never mind, I messed up that's what the temperature has been like around here lately. I was told that I could not refer to you all as PFAR you know **Pretty Female Angelic Representatives**, because all are not pretty and all are not females that are a part of our great PFAR family. Yes, I was joking about the all are not pretty part, but the all is not female part is true. We do have men that are a part of our PFAR family and we want to make sure that they are welcome and not left out of the equation. It's not a matter of being politically correct, we just want to be correct in how we honor and respect the contributions and sacrifices of all spouses.

Now, to the real reason why I am writing this letter; to let you all know how all of your honey buns, cup cakes, beef cakes, and other names that I cannot state in this newsletter are doing. In case you haven't guessed already the food over here is great.

The transition from JBER to Afghanistan is complete and was finalized in an official Transfer of Authority Ceremony on Christmas Eve. I was told that the ceremony was posted on

the Brigade's Facebook page, but I have not been able to find it. That does not mean that it's not there, that just means that when it comes to Facebook, I am a novice. I really only have an account to check up on my kids, but that will be our little secret, lol. The ceremony was conducted like we conduct all of our missions to the highest standard and in a first class manner.

Your spouses have done an outstanding job thus far. I have received numerous reports on their many accomplishments and we've only been here for a month. My challenge to your spouse is not starting strong, but finishing that way. So, if you hear of any reports that the Sergeant Major has lost his mind or he's one fry short of a happy meal, let me tell you the rest of the story. The men and women of Task Force Steel are well prepared to take on any mission that the Army can throw their way. That is not my concern. My concern is that they stay focused, that they do not get complacent, arrogant, or cocky. And that they remain that way until we are all reunited with our loved ones. So, if you hear of any stories of me losing my mind, it will be because of one of the things that I just told you about. I feel that I owe that to all of you.

Deployments bring unique challenges for the ones that deploy and the ones that are left taking care of the household. In my weekly meeting with the Senior NCOs in the battalion; I gave them five things to give to their Soldiers that I would like them to work on during this deployment. I challenge all of you as well to set goals for yourself personally, professionally, and as a couple. The five areas that I spoke with my NCOs about were to have their Soldiers use this



CSM Cedric B. Moore

as an opportunity to grow spiritually, to set realistic physical fitness goals, to take charge of their finances, take a college course, and read a book.

Thank you for all that you do to support and inspire us. Your labors of love are not in vain and they are deeply appreciated. I will give only one example of what I am talking about; grown men and women acting like little kids when they receive a package from home. With no embellishment whatsoever, dancing, singing, laughing fills the hallway when packages are received. So, keep them coming.

Lastly, if anyone has questions or need assistance call the FRG and Rear-D. They may not be able to provide the specific service that you may need, but they will be able to get you in contact with the correct agency to help you in whatever situation that you find yourself in. So, do not hesitate to call if you need assistance. I pray that everyone had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We are taking care of your loved ones and we've had an extremely prosperous first month. Take care and until next time, STEEL7, Out.



CSM Moore holding a Russian made PPSH-41 submachine gun

HQ & HQ BATTERY HAWKS

Steel Hawk Family,

More than 30 days have elapsed since Steel Hawk families came out in large numbers to wish warm farewells to our departing Paratroopers on the main body. As warm embraces were disappearing into the final minutes of loading the buses, teary eyes made it evident that the team was inscribing the meaning of personal sacrifice into our patriotic archives.

Families, the team cannot thank you enough for your love, patience, and continued support. Please allow me to share with you what your Paratroopers have been up to since we left JBER.

Torch and ADVON personnel left JBER a couple of weeks ahead of everyone else. Special thanks to those families. The trip was long and tiring. Upon arrival, torch and ADVON immediately began inventorying property, and executing the Relief-in Place (RIP) plan for our mission.

Effective 24 December 2011, HHB/2-377 PFAF officially relieved HHB/1-6 FA from all combat responsibilities in Afghanistan. We thank them for their service.

After days of traveling, Paratroopers were excited to finally move into their individual rooms.

Considering this is a combat environment, life is not too bad. Personnel have a choice of three dining facilities, and they enjoy friendship and brotherhood over nice meals particularly during the holidays.

Soldiers can stay in touch with families through phone and internet services. We have an education center to further learning, a nice religious center for spiritual edification, and an excellent gym for physical fitness. 1SG and his able crew (SFC Joy and , SGT Hooker) just completed the "Hawk Nest"- A morale and recreation center for the team.

Every day, our Paratroopers are making a difference in the fight for freedom here in Afghanistan. The perimeter at Salerno has never been more protected, and residents on this FOB sleep peacefully at night because of your Paratroopers hard work. Our platoons are on a high level of readiness, and morale is high at all levels.

Since we left JBER, we have promoted SGT Cook to SSG, SPC Sanders to SGT, SPC Dobkins to SGT, PFC Zamora to SPC, PV2 Thomas to PFC, and PV2 Rob-

inson to PFC.

SSG Foley had a new daughter born on 25 December, SSG Mckenzi turned 40, and the BTRY Commander got older.

Steel Hawk family, we thank you for your support and sacrifice.

Strong Families Always,

CPT Jean D. Aldoph
Hawk 6



CPT Aldoph and 1SG Phil lips outside of the BDOC



SSG Foley's daughter, Ruth, born 25 December: 6lbs 3oz, 18 1/2 inches



PV2 Robinson (left) and PV2 Thomas (right) being promoted to PFC by the HHB CDR and 1SG outside of the BDOC



SGT Dobkins taking a very important phone call



SPC Day working the day shift

Below, (L to R) 1LT Richter, SPC Brant, CPT Aldoph, PFC Thomas, SGT Cabrera, & SGT Disla pose outside of the BN HQs prior to departing for Afghanistan





(L to R) SGT Washington, SFC Addis, SFC Clay, SFC Nichols, SSG Sakis, and SSG Griffin hanging out



BDOC Guard Mount



Able Team: SFC Joy (right) and SGT Hooker evaluating their latest creation



Partnership: Teaching Afghan leaders



BDOC Leaders: (L to R) 1SG Phillips, 2LT Shawon, and SFC Andre



SSG Foley (right) and SPC Chattell battle tracking in the BDOC

A BATTERY FALCONS

As the mounted convoy of vehicles moves down the trail, the gunner fixes his sights on the ridgeline of the mountains, panning for any movement. A Kiowa helicopter flies across the sky, dropping smoke grenades to mark points of interest. The vehicles move through the cloud of smoke, they set security positions to over watch the valleys below. Later, the platoon will enter the valley, and along with their Afghan Police partners, hand out water and food to the local villagers. Among those Paratroopers is PFC Dustin Hogan.

Private First Class Dustin L. Hogan is currently serving in 3rd Platoon, Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 377 Parachute Field Artillery Regiment based out of Ft. Richardson Alaska. The unit deployed for Afghanistan on the 5th of December 2011 to FOB Salerno, in the Khost province of Afghanistan.

While deployed, Dustin has seen Christmas and the New Year come to Afghanistan. He admits it is hard to be away from his loving wife, Brittany, at such times. This is especially true this year, as he and Brittany have a child on the way. When Dustin returns to Alaska after the deployment is over, he will be greeting his new baby for the first time.

PFC Hogan and his wife were born and raised in Marshal County, Kentucky. Dustin has come a long way from the humid heat of Kentucky. As a Soldier he has trained at Ft. Sill, OK, then traveled to the frigid cold of Alaska, and now to the rocky, barren mountains of Afghanistan. Although the change in climate and terrain is drastic enough, Dustin feels that perhaps the biggest change in Afghanistan is the difference in culture. "The people here are without the modern technologies that people in America are accustomed to. Electricity in many houses is a luxury," Dustin says. "We help the government enhance their living conditions by providing them with supplies such as bottled water. We have made a lot of allies through the villages, we still get some people who are threatened by the Taliban and forced to not cooperate with us. It is in those circumstances that we, along with our ANSF partners, show our helping hands as Soldiers and let them know why we are truly here." One key outcome that Alpha Battery hopes to achieve is building support for GIRoA, (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan). By increasing the local quality of life, the local population can have more trust in their government; that they are provided for and are secure.

PFC Hogan's daily life consists of steady patrols outside the wire, maintenance on vehicles and equipment, and continuous training, both of 3rd Platoon's own Paratroopers and of their Afghan National Police partners. He is always prepared to react quickly to a changing environment.



PFC Hogan shaking hands with a small Afghan child



PFC Hogan poses with his decked-out M249 light machinegun

PFC Hogan believes that we need to continue helping these people so we can change the perspective of people of all ages. He says that, "we are trying to turn the country back over to the people, not the Taliban. Our presence in the area with our ANSF partners has given the villagers freedom to move around without fear of the Taliban. We work in partnership with the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army in order to run out the Taliban." Alpha Battery, including 3rd Platoon, also has the critical mission of securing FOB Salerno from indirect fire, and protecting Coalition Forces and local Afghans from improvised explosive devices. Says PFC Hogan, "We are here to keep everyone safe. The hard work that we put in has decreased IED attacks and indirect fire across the area. Each day, we are one day closer to completing our mission."

— written by 1LT David Groseclose

B BATTERY BLACKSHEEP

Taking Over Firing at COP Wilderness

2nd "WAR DOGS" Platoon, Bravo Btry, 2-377PFAR

Life at COP Wilderness and our Mission!

Since we last saw each other on 5 December, 2011, 2nd platoon "WAR DOGS" of Bravo "BLACKSHEEP" Battery 2-377th PFAR has changed their location, daily routine, and focus towards OEF 11-12. It took us five days to get to Combat Outpost (COP) Wilderness, and we have hit the ground running and firing with over 300 rounds fired in training and support over the last month. You can all rest easy as we are not in depraved conditions and I think SPC Martin says it best, "The living conditions are very good. Other than the spotty hot water, and the fuel guy forgetting to fill up our heater, the rooms are nice. Everything here is better than I expected to which I am very happy."

We took over fire support operations from 1-6 FA, 3 BCT, 1st ID, out of Ft Knox, KY. We have been diligent and prompt in improving our gunline and firing procedures, thus restoring the regard to which the howitzer platoon at Wilderness is held. We have gone through several phases of improvement from the basic sand bags and spray paint to the most technical data with our computers, and gun positioning using our own survey. All of this has made our howitzers more accurate and successful with our missions in support of Charlie Troop here on COP Wilderness and COP Deysie.



2nd Section during a fire mission

Picture Above: SGT Michael Hedgepeth (left) oversees PV2 Adam Kelly (right) load a 105MM high explosive (HE) round into the breach of the howitzer



Picture Above: Section Chief of gun 2, SGT Hedgepeth (second left) checks gunner's sight for correct alignment set by the gunner, SGT Matthew Hubaud (left) a second before firing. PV2 Kelly (second right) keeps clear of the rear for recoil as PFC Derick Northam (right) prepares to hand over a round to be verified and loaded

Picture Below: Chief, SGT Hedgepeth (second left) watches PV2 Kelly (second right) take a verified HE round to load into the breach, and SGT Hubaud (left) resets the gunners sight, meanwhile PFC Northam (right) has a third round ready to load



We took over and have been training hard every day trying to get our times ever faster and our skills ever sharper! Our new Paratroopers are learning their jobs as PFC Northam states, "Cross training is going very well, with increased competency of several positions above my own." Even our own veterans are getting more proficient. "It's nice to have the opportunity to cross train on every possible position, train the new Paratroopers on the positions I have already mastered, and be able to get more time shooting direct fire in support of Chaos Troop, 1-40th Cavalry." (SPC Lattimer)

Highlights!

We have had the opportunity to promote three of our great Paratroopers from Private (PV2) to Private First Class (PFC). PFC Clements, PFC Rauno, & PFC Northam all look forward to the pay increase as well as the challenges and responsibility on the gunline.

Pictured Right: in order PFC Clements, PFC Northam, & PFC Rauno shed their PV2 rank and pin on their PFC rank. Chiefs SSG Coughlan, SGT Hedgepeth, & SSG James pin their soldiers as CPT Cunningham takes their PV2 rank away

Pictured Below: New Private First Classes Clements, Northam, & Rauno choose to keep BLACKSHEEP tradition by knocking out 10 push-ups for every rank they've gained. Here they are knocking out 30 before they get too cold



The cooks here made us a great Christmas dinner, and we took the day to celebrate. Although most of us had a hard time getting in touch with you all back home, we had you all in our thoughts. On New Year's Eve we had a colorful display of non-traditional fireworks.

We are continuing construction on our back porch to keep out of the mud over the next three months as things get wet, snowy, and muddy! We are about two thirds done putting up sand bags and building the deck behind our gunline. Both will help with our mud and water issues as we get into the wet and snowy season. We ordered our internet which will help us keep in contact with everyone in Alaska. Hopefully, by the time you read this we will be a few days away from being online and chat ready with some face time for those of you with webcams!

A ceremony will be held for the new Paratroopers who do not yet have the 4th ABCT 25th ID combat patch! This patch is different from the unit identifier patch on the left sleeve. The combat patch is worn on the right sleeve below the U.S. flag and represents the dedication and sacrifice of the Paratrooper in a combat zone with his unit. Our Paratroopers gaining the combat patch are: PFC Rauno, PFC Northam, PFC Clements, PFC Braman, & PV2 Kelly, and our veterans who have not yet deployed with 4/25: SPC Mundy, SPC Johnson, SPC Brodigan, & SPC Martin.

"We are working hard here at COP Wilderness to uphold the oath we took on the day of our enlistment by sending rounds down range in support of our fellow Paratroopers going outside the wire. We of the 2/B/2-377th PFAR are proud to serve." (SPC Ward)

CPT Danny Cunningham—2nd Platoon Leader

This was the first article in a series that will come from Bravo "BLACKSHEEP" Battery in the coming months. Each month will feature a highlight from one of our four platoons. We are hoping to paint a picture of what life is like for us here in Afghanistan to our Family and Friends back home. All the Soldiers are doing well and continue to make 1SG Dudley and myself proud.

"BLACKSHEEP, SPARTAN STEEL, SPARTA LIVES"

CPT Ryan Howell— Battery Commander

C BATTERY/1-377 FAR CRUSADERS

The month of December was a period of transition for the Crusader Battery as the unit's firing platoons assumed control of separate firing points at FOB Andar, Camp Clark and FOB Salerno. Tasked with a mission of providing timely and accurate lethal and non lethal fires in support of combat operations, each platoon found themselves adapting to the unique challenges of providing fires in their different areas of operation and different supporting task forces.

For 1st Platoon at FOB Andar, December was a busy month. 1st Platoon received daily fire missions and found themselves providing a variety of fire support to 2-2 Infantry with missions involving high explosive, illumination, smoke and training rounds. In doing so, 1st Platoon gained the trust and confidence of their supported units on the ground and showed that no mission was too difficult for them to accomplish.

2nd Platoon, out of Camp Clark, spent the month of December lighting up the night sky to undermine enemy movement under the cover of darkness. In addition to shooting at night, 2nd Platoon recently shot over two

dozen rounds in a direct fire calibration. Calibrations are an important process used by Field Artillery units to determine the actual firing capability of their cannons with different projectiles and propellants versus their predicted firing capability in order to ensure accuracy when firing. It is a process that bears some resemblance to zeroing a rifle.

leaders and Soldiers from the ANA Heavy Company on a daily basis to share their knowledge and enhance the effectiveness of their own Field Artillery pieces. It has already been a fruitful relationship that has resulted in faster and more accurate fires from the ANA and increased cultural awareness for our Soldiers.

Finally 3rd Platoon sta-

ghanistan for well over three years now.

The past month has provided countless challenges and lessons learned for the Crusader Battery which continues to apply those lessons to make improvements and become an even stronger and more effective Field Artillery force. It is an ongoing process of becoming faster, more accurate and more lethal in order to instill confidence in every Soldier on the ground that no matter where they are or what situation they find themselves in, there is always Artillery standing by to support them.

— written by 2LT
Daniel White



CPT Collier explaining exactly how the M777 works to his Afghan counterparts

Although 2nd platoon conducted the largest scale calibration, both 1st and 3rd platoon have also conducted calibrations of their own in order to enhance their ability to fire accurately. 2nd Platoon also has the unique opportunity of partnering with the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) Field Artillerymen. Soldier's from 2nd meet with the

tioned at FOB Salerno trained relentlessly often 12 or more hours per day in order to ensure their proficiency in counter fire operations. 3rd platoon also spent December successfully managing the difficult challenge of maintaining firing capability at all times while conducting crucial maintenance on their howitzers which have been in Af-

The Crusader Battery Soldier of the month is SGT Michael Blanton. The newly promoted SGT Blanton displayed great initiative in the month of December training and becoming proficient in both Fire Direction Center and gun line skills and crew drills becoming an important link between the two separate but equally important entities within a Field Artillery battery. Outside of his job as Assistant Gunner for 1st Platoon 1st Section, SGT Blanton proved to be an important asset to his platoon with his prior experience in construction. SGT Blanton put that experience to good use by building upon and improving his platoon's various living and working areas at FOB Andar. In doing so, SGT Blanton helped raise the morale and improve the quality of life of all the Soldiers within his platoon and became someone that Soldiers could rely on any time they needed something fixed.

SGT Blanton initially joined the Army in 1992 and served until 2000 when he decided to pursue a career outside the military. SGT Blanton spent seven years out of the Army when he began to miss the Army lifestyle and decided to rejoin in 2007 as a 13B. This is SGT Blanton's second deployment, his first since coming to 1-377 FAR. His wife, Carrie, and his children Devon, Savannah, and Jackson have all been actively involved in the FRG since arriving in April 2010. Following redeployment, SGT Blanton plans on staying with 1-377 Field Artillery after taking a long vacation to visit family on the West Coast.



SGT Blanton in the gun pit at FOB ANDAR

Below, the crew from C BTRY/ 1-377 FAR at FOB SALERNO preparing to demonstrate a crew drill for our Afghan National Army (ANA) partners



Left, SPC Alphonse (right) and SPC Walton show their skills during the M777 crew drill demonstration at FOB SALERNO (28 DEC 11)

G COMPANY WOLFPACK

FIRST ONE “BITES THE DUST”

To all the Soldiers, families and friends of Golf Battery, our first month has come and gone. The weather has begun to turn cool (not cold), remember we are from Alaska where it is -5 degree's now, and the Soldiers are taking the deployment in stride. We continue to do great things in support of the Afghanistan people and the Global War on Terrorism. Whether it's supporting Combat Outpost (COPS) with critical maintenance support to keep the “Guns” firing, securing FOB Salerno with our Quick Reaction Force (QRF), or manning the base Entry Control Point (ECP) 24/7 all our Soldiers are doing a fantastic job and you should be proud. As we continue to hone our combat skills and partnership with our Afghan Army counterparts during this first phase of our deployment, I want to take this opportunity to thank the FRG and all those

individuals who have sent us “goodies” over the past month. The special note from Ross A. Robertson, the care packages from “Operation Gratitude”, and the special gift bags from Doug and Carolyn Miller with “Socks for Soldiers” have made a tremendous impact on the Soldier's morale as we spent our first month away from home and our loved one's especially during the Holiday season. Soldiers always enjoyed those touches from home and appreciate the contribution from everyone. Take care and have a Happy New Year.

CPT Douglas Rudd—Company Commander



Pictured above, seven of the newest Private First Classes (PFC's) in the Army getting promoted: PFCs Hughes, Love, Ellis, Heyward, Smith,



Even in a combat environment there is some beauty. Above, a calming sunset over FOB Salerno



Pictured above (L to R), SGT Marbury, SPC Martinez, SPC Porter, SPC Nelson, and PFC Willis enjoy some Christmas cheer with a Christmas stocking that was given out to all our Soldiers on Christmas day

PFC Ward has been acting as a jack of all trades since arriving in eastern Afghanistan. Each day she rotates between a number of duties including: serving as the first US face that local nationals see every morning while working at the outermost limits of the ACP, working tirelessly processing the local taskeras (identification) and issuing out their appropriate badges, or barring them not having badges she correctly processes each individual into the system of the FOB, according to the SOP. In addition, she works closely with the Garda World workers while instructing them in the fine arts of properly searching individuals and screening packages or bags. Due to her tireless efforts, people on the FOB can sleep peacefully knowing that Soldiers of her caliber are working to maintain our safety, starting at the Access Control Point. Her hard work on the FOB has not gone unnoticed, however in addition to her superb performance as a member of the guard force, her other skills are allowing her to shine and bring us to the true purpose of this article.

PFC Ward, outside of the army is quite an accomplished artist striving to become a professional artist and to own and operate a tattoo parlor; her portfolio is quite varied in scope and content. This skill set has allowed her to start and create a number of morale boosting projects at the ACP. Within days of arriving in country she found some reinforced cardboard, on which she worked to create a large stencil of the 4/25 Airborne Brigade Combat Team Insignia. This now allows the less artistically inclined to merely requisition a can of spray paint in order to decorate

their space with our brigade's symbol. Since the creation of this stencil, our brigade logo has appeared in numerous locations throughout FOB Salerno. Once creating that, she was unhappy at the quality of the logo resulting from meager spray paint, so she went forth and expounded upon it. She has since created a highly crisp and vivid detailing of the Tropic Lightning Brigade in the ACP Proper shining gloriously in the Brigade Colors. Yet she still was unhappy, as the pastel bluish grey walls of the ACP were not nearly as complementary to our brigade colors as they were to the 1st ID that we replaced. This insult of imagery demanded that the entirety of the ACP be repainted in the crisp Grey, Black, Yellow, and Reds of our Brigade. Her Efforts transformed the ACP from a mere facility processing individuals onto and off of our FOB to a striking example of the professionalism representing not only our brigade, but our battalion and company as well. But her plans to revitalize the ACP doesn't end just there; I suspect that in the next few months all of the areas that make up the Entry Control Point of the FOB and a great many individual unit areas as well will bear the marks of her talent and dedication.



Above, 1SG Betanzos and PFC Ward stand in front of the Spartan Brigade Patch at FOB SALERNO's ECP



Above, PFC French is all smiles as she prepares to pick-up the unit's mail. Driving beats walking when there is a lot of mail to carry



Left, Golf Battery pulls security for an Explosive Ordnance Detachment (EOD) while they do a controlled detonation of an IED that was discovered while on patrol

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

God Working in Our Lives



SPC Collins smiling in a helicopter in route to COP HERRERA to provide religious support

The tender mercies of the Lord are those small intimate moments when God shows His children that He is listening and watching. Those moments or tender mercies are often recognized as mere coincidence; however, those moments are God's hand working in our lives. Being in an airborne unit provides the opportunity to jump out of high performance aircraft. Many prayers are lifted to God on behalf of the jumpers prior to every jump.

There is a lot of planning that goes into airborne operations. The planners and jumpmasters take their time carefully planning each operation. These jumpmasters are specially trained to make sure everything looks right during each event. Prior to every jump, there is pre-jump training where the jumpmasters remind the jumpers of everything that should be done under normal circumstances. They also train the jumpers on what to do if there is a malfunction or emergency situation. There are usually four jumpmasters on each aircraft, two covering the left door and two covering the right door. To prevent injury or mid-air collision, the jumpmasters stagger the jumpers going out each door with one second intervals.

Several months ago, I was on one of these airborne operations. It was just like any other jump I had been on. I was assigned to be the second jumper going out the left door. Our first approach to the drop zone was scratched by the Air Force. The aircraft flew around for another

approach. The jumpmasters checked the rear of the aircraft and signaled for us to standby. Our jumpmaster gave us a go and we started to jump.

The jumpmaster on the right door was not as quick to give the signal to go. Being the second jumper, I exited the aircraft at the exact moment as the first jumper on the right door. We met under the aircraft where I went through his risers. All four of my risers were caught around one of his. I did everything I could to get out of the situation, but to no avail. This is a highly dangerous situation that could cause injury or even death if not handled appropriately. The pre-jump training I had practiced so many times began to flow through my mind. I attempted what I learned, but was unable to lower myself to the other jumper or get out of his risers. I did what I was trained to do because I trusted the jumpmasters who prepared me for the jump.

Life is filled with what we might consider to be malfunctions, trials, or emergency situations. During those moments, everyone is faced with choices that will impact



CH (CPT) McCurdy doing what Chaplains do at COP HERRERA

their lives and the future. It is also during those moments that God is working in our lives. The Apostle Paul taught what we can do to remain close to God, so that we can recognize those moments when He is working in our lives. He wrote, in Eph 6:13-18,

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil

day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

Paul taught the people to be positive and active in taking and putting on the Armor of God that they might be protected and exercise faith in the Lord. His words also teach the importance of always being watchful and prepared. There is comfort in knowing God, and all who do will be prepared to meet the present and the future. So many people suffer with various afflictions and the pains of life, es-

pecially in a persistent conflict and war. Holding strong to faith in God brings peace that can come from no other source. As we seek out our Heavenly Father, we will find a greater peace in our lives.

My life was forever changed on that day that I jumped, as I faced the challenges of rapidly falling to the ground. I was, however, at ease as I descended, because I knew if I did what the jumpmasters taught me to do that I would be safe. In the end, both the other Soldier and I landed with no injuries. In life, we are not always fortunate to land safely, but as we follow the counsel given us, we will be preserved and blessed. As we do what we are taught and prepare ourselves to receive direction from a loving God, we will experience a greater peace and a comfort in our lives. I pray that each of us take those lessons we learn into our lives and live exemplary lifestyles. I know that our Father in Heaven is with us; He blesses our lives and continually answers our prayers.



BLAST FROM THE PAST

Any junior enlisted Soldier (E-4 or below) that can identify the TF STEEL leader shown in the picture below will get a day off, courtesy of STEEL 7.

