

ON POINT!



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COVER

Soldiers of Battle Company, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, Task Force 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment pull security as they patrol a small village in Shinkai District, southern Afghanistan, May 2012. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough, Combined Task Force Arrowhead Public Affairs)

BACK COVER

(Photos by Capt. Marius Dinita, Staff Sgt. Joshua S. Brandenburg and Sgt. Christopher McCullough, Combined Task Force Arrowhead Public Affairs) (Illustration by Spc. Mark Neace)

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Personnel Shop Keeps Administration on Point

Story and photos by Sgt. Matt Young
117th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The personnel shop, better known as S1, is a jack-of-all-trades. Pay, awards, promotions, personnel status, casualty operations, anything and everything there is to keep a Soldier mission ready at all times whether in garrison or deployed.

“We are here to provide support and services to all of our Soldier’s within Combined Task Force Arrowhead,” said Major Shaun Ibe, personnel officer in charge, with the 3rd Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division. “One of the biggest things here in Afghanistan is making sure Soldiers are receiving the correct pay, whether hazardous duty pay, hazardous fire pay, or family separation pay.”

The S1 shop makes sure the Soldiers downrange are able to get to their money by coordinating finance visits to their forward operating bases and conducting what is called a finance rodeo. This event allows Soldiers to collect cash or put money on their Eagle Cash cards, so they may purchase much needed items from the base stores such as soap, toothpaste, socks, and the occasional snacks.

“We are here to ensure that the Soldiers don’t have to worry about pay, promotions, and awards. That’s our job on a day-to-day basis to make sure we are taking care of them because they are the ones out there in combat, so if they are worrying about that, it can reduce their focus and hinder the mission,” said Sgt. Jaron Green

a human resource specialist with the 3rd Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division.

Although finances are always high on a Soldiers priority list, the shop has many other equally high responsibilities.

“Another big piece while being deployed is casualty operations, being able to support the families, Soldiers, loved ones and the chain of command for processing those types of actions,” Ibe said.

The personnel office processes casualty operations reports, records, and accounts for casualties promptly and efficiently while also being able to provide support where and to whom it is needed.

The S1 shop also receives recommendations for decorations and awards with written statements. They then process those recommendations and forward them to higher headquarters.

“Since November we have consistently awarded the combat

infantry badge, combat action badge and combat medic badges, we are well over 500 badges and would anticipate to be somewhere near 3,000 by the time we go home,” said Ibe.

We try to maintain a close working relationship with the Soldiers on the other forward operating bases to see if there is anything we can help with and make sure there are not any problems, explained Green.

Keeping track of the Soldiers and their duty status serves as the foundation for the necessary and critical battlefield decisions that are being made daily here in Afghanistan.

Major Ibe and Sgt. Green both agree that their S1 shop is able to provide the best customer support in the world to the best customers in the world.

“Being here in theatre and being this close to the Soldiers allows us to provide that customer service and personal touch to service the Soldiers as we need to throughout the battle space,” said Ibe.



Soldiers of the Third Stryker Brigade Combat Team, Second Infantry Division S1 shop pose for a quick picture on Forward Operating Base Masum Ghar, May 23, 2012.

Healing the wounded: how a combat medic team contributes to OEF

Story and Photos by Sgt. Marc Loi
319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Come to the tiny, crowded first-aid station here and you will see Soldiers from the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment getting treated for the scrapes and bruises they have sustained. You will also see them being greeted with a smile courtesy of a small team of Joint Base Lewis McChord Soldiers deployed here in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In the infantry, where injuries are sometimes hidden and concealed based on bravado and a desire to continue the fight, two medics are making it easier for the injured and wounded to seek the care they need, partly because of their friendly nature as well as their commitment to the job.

Spc. Heidi Olson is on her first deployment as a combat medic. As one of the two junior enlisted Soldiers currently working to help her fellow Soldiers get better, her days are a mixture of long hours and, at times, tedium. Still, Olson says being a medic in a combat zone is one of her dreams – something she embraces with gusto because of what the job means.

“It’s been a thrill,” said Olson. “It’s my lifeblood.”

Olson said she has always loved the human body – the anatomy, how each body part works and how to heal the body. She majored in history and minored in political science at George Fox University, which is located in Oregon, where academia helped her develop a love and interest for the military. Coupled with her already-growing interest in the human anatomy and the limited selection for combat roles available to women, becoming a combat medic made sense, she said.

“I would have joined the infantry if I could,” said Olson, who ultimately chose to be a combat medic over being a military policewoman. “As a combat medic, I get to return fire and when anyone gets injured, I also get to treat them.”

For Spc. Charles Dean, Olson’s fellow medic and

mentor, being a medic holds an especially important meaning in a combat zone because it means he gets a chance to help his fellow Soldiers get back to being healthy.

“My personal love for this job is dealing with the Soldiers, helping them when they’re sick or injured – just knowing that I can help them so they can go home and be safe and normal and go back to their families,” said Dean, currently on his fourth deployment.

Despite this love for taking care of fellow Soldiers and treating the wounded and the fact that “downtime” can be monotonous, the Soldiers said they cherish this time the most because it means Soldiers aren’t getting hurt and no one needs to be treated for injuries.

“Chilling at the aid station with nothing to do – that’s my idea of a perfect day,” Olson said in between answering phone calls and sending out mission-essential emails. “It’s not that I don’t want to do my job – it’s just that we’re proficient in a skill we hope to God we never have to use.”

This especially hit home for Olson when she was on a combat mission with infantry Soldiers. Although she lives for those types of missions, Olson said, during the entire ordeal, she hoped that there did not come a time when she had to treat the injured.

“When we go on missions, you just hope you don’t hear a ‘boom,’ because it means someone just stepped on an IED,” Olson said. “You hear gunfire and wonder if you’re needed.”

Dean shares the same sentiments, citing that although quiet days tend to drag out, they are often the best days, as he knows none of the Soldiers he lives and works with are injured.

“I hate boredom, yet at the same time, I also love it,” he said. “I learned very quickly [from my previous deployments] that slow days are good – I am fine with slow days because it means everyone is coming

home safe.”

Everyone coming home safely not only depends on how slow the day goes, but also the competence of the medics. Understanding that fully, the Soldiers not only depend on each other for technical support – constantly training and re-training for real-world situations, but also rely on each other for emotional support when they need it, Olson said.

“Being a medic, you’ve got to have mental toughness,” Dean said. “As a medic, you sometimes get attached to the guys you treat – but when something happens and you need to treat them, you’ve also got to be able to disassociate yourself from the person or you’re not going to be able to do your job.”

To help with the mental resilience, especially after the day is finished, the medics say they rely on each other – often having “family dinners” at the dining facility here. “Physical fitness training is also a time in which to decompress and catch up with one another, checking to make sure each is able to cope with the harsh reality of the job,” Olson said.

“We spend a lot of spare time with each other and know we’ve got each other’s back,” she said. “It’s a very understanding situation that we’re there for each other, and luckily, Dean has a lot more experience than I do, so he walks me through it.”

“Just like the other day, he had to treat a casualty, and afterward, it was me checking to see how he’s doing, if he’s doing okay.”

The reason for this, Olson said, is that a medic’s job is often not understood, and it often takes a fellow medic to understand the challenges a medic Soldier is going through.

“Only a medic understands other medics,” she said. “You feel a sense of responsibility – I am a baby medic, so I haven’t been through a lot, but I know that when I lose my first [patient], it’s going to be tough – I am going to nitpick and go over what I did right and what I did wrong. It’s going to be a hard pill to swallow.”

More seasoned and with more combat deployments under his belt, Dean said while he understands the attachment medics feel for their patients, he’s also found ways to cope with the possibility of losing a patient – or worse, treating a Soldier back to health only to see that Soldier get injured or killed the next day in combat.

“You just got to hope that you do the best job and patch them up and send them out -- do the best you can at every moment, and really hope that you can take care of them so they don’t have to come back again,” he said.



Deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Spc. Charles Dean and Spc. Heidi Olson, currently assigned to 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., are just two of the hundreds of medics currently serving in clinics and battlefields to ensure their fellow Soldiers are given the medical care they need. Along with being a medic, Olson also serves as a member of the female engagement team.

Red Lions prepared to train ANA partners on D30 howitzers

Story by Sgt. Chris McCullough
CTF Arrowhead Public Affairs

It hasn't been a full month yet, but already the Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., are preparing themselves for what promises to be a busy nine month deployment.

The 'Red Lions' of 1-37 FA deployed to Afghanistan last month after their brigade headquarters needed their skills as expert artillerymen to train the Afghan National Army in southern Afghanistan, notably the 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 205th Corps. The 1-205 recently completed basic indirect fire training with an artillery mobile training team.

"What they've been trained on somewhat, prior to this MTT, was how to use their D30s in (what is called) direct fire mode," said 1-37 FA's Commander, Lt. Col. Rory Crooks. "(In that mode) it's like a big recoilless rifle, except it has recoil."

In view of that, the Red Lions expect to train their ANA partners on advanced indirect fire techniques which will enable the ANA to provide lethal and accurate indirect fire support. The ability of the ANA to use their D30 howitzers is one of the keys to transitioning security responsibility over to the Afghans.

"We're going to...train them as a battery how to employ their systems indirectly," said Crooks. "The goal is that we get them firing indirect (fire) safely in support of their ANA elements."

Training the Afghans to operate their D30 howitzers in indirect fire mode will be no easy task, as their guns are different from what U.S. forces use. However, Maj. Matthew Dennis, 1-37 FA's executive officer, explains that basic howitzer skills are the same no matter what the gun system may be. To that effect, the Red Lions have spent ample time training with their M777 howitzer in degraded mode which has prepared them to train the ANA on the D30 howitzers. In degraded mode, the mechanics of the M777 howitzer are slightly different, Dennis said, however the fundamentals are virtually identical.

"There are some changes in how a breach operates or where particular levers are located, but the actual fundamentals of howitzer crew drill and gunnery are the same," said Dennis. "So as far as transferring our core competencies from us to the Afghans, it should not be much of a challenge beyond the language barrier."

The Red Lions prepared themselves to deal with this challenge by instructing their Soldiers how to train their ANA partners through interpreters.

"Most of our guys have not done that before...(but) we're going to get them prepared for that mission the best we can and we'll work through it," Dennis stated.

Crooks spoke optimistically about their mission and the challenges it presents to his Soldiers.

"I really think that our Soldiers that do that mission of training (the ANA) on the D30s, they'll come out much better themselves professionally in their fundamental understanding of...any indirect fire howitzer weapon system," said Crooks. "I think it will just ground them that much better and set them up for their future careers to be able to accomplish this task. We're pretty excited about it."

A Stroke of Genius

Story and photos by Sgt. Matt Young
117th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Here at Forward Operating Base Masum Ghar, like most of the other FOBs in Afghanistan there are two primary colors we Soldiers see on a daily basis, brown and gray. Brown from the desert and mountainous terrain as well as the dust filled air and gray from the numerous amounts of barrier walls put up to protect and fortify the bases.



Spc. Butkos stands by her work. She spent a few days here at FOB Masum Ghar, Afghanistan painting murals on some of the walls, May 20, 2012.

Army Specialist Cassandra Butkos, chaplain assistant for 296th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division has painted many of the barrier walls on Kandahar, and now here at FOB Masum Ghar the Soldiers have a bit of color in their day-to-day lives as well thanks to Spc. Butkos and her talent. She painted unit crests and patches on some of the first walls you see when you land on the FOB. She has also painted the patch and crest on the entrance to the Tactical Operations Center as well as above the doorway to the

chapel.

"On a regular day I'm going out visiting Soldiers with the chaplain and or doing administrative work for him," said Butkos.

Once word got out she knew how to paint, her day-to-day routine became a little more colorful. Butkos was flown out here on a mission from the Brigade Chaplain (Maj.) Edward Choi to come help spruce up the FOB by adding a little color. As soon as she landed, she hit the ground running. She would only stop once the sun

went down and it was too dark to paint. After three days of painting her work here was complete.

"I really love painting; you never think that coming to Afghanistan, you're going to get to do something that you love to do," said Butkos.

She says it usually takes her a couple hours a day for a few days to finish a mural. Butkos says it also depends on the materials she has to work with, and if it is oil or water based paints to determine how many coats she must apply and what type of brushes she has to use.

So if you happen to be walking around Kandahar Airfield or Masum Ghar and see one of the many murals painted on the walls there's a good chance that those were the strokes of Spc. Butkos, Soldier, chaplain assistant and painter.

"It's a good hobby and I'm glad it has followed me everywhere," Butkos said.



Spc. Butkos paints the Indian head on the Combined Task Force Arrowhead crest outside of the base Tactical Operations Center, Forward Operating Base Masum Ghar, Afghanistan, May 20, 2012.

Fueled by history, passion for service, Huntington Beach fights in OEF

Story and Photos by Sgt. Marc Loi
319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sitting in a makeshift wooden living area on a dusty military base in southern Afghanistan, 2nd Lt. Darius Chen begins rattling off things for which he is thankful.

There is the blanket with the imprints of California's landmarks sitting on the twin-size bed in which he sleeps. There is the university education he received from the University of San Francisco and the experiences with classmates Chen said helped him become the person he is today. Then, there are the historical perspectives few other United States Army officers can claim they are thankful for; Chen is a first-generation Asian-American whose parents and grandparents uprooted their homes in China to move to Taiwan during the Communists' takeover, and then again to America in search of a better life.

These experiences, along with being part of one of the smallest demographics of people serving in the U.S. military – Asian-Americans comprise about 2.5 percent of the military's population – make Chen, a medical platoon leader with the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., not only thankful for the life he now has, but also a story worthy to highlight as the United States military get ready to celebrate Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May.

"My grandparents left China during the Communist takeover," Chen said. "My parents were first-generation Taiwanese – I am first-generation American. Through their stories of uprooting generations of their families because they did not have a home, I am extremely grateful for the beautiful upbringing I had."

That upbringing, along with his parents' commitment to teach him to be thankful for America, eventually brought the Huntington Beach, Calif., native to the University of San Francisco, where he ultimately decided to join the ROTC program to become a United States Army medical officer.



Deployed to southern Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, 22-year-old 2nd Lt. Darius Chen currently serves as a medical officer with 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

"My parents raised me to love this country – they taught me a sense of pride and ownership of America," Chen said. "Joining the Army seemed to be the most practical and beneficial [choice] when I went to college."

Along with these experiences, another reason that propelled the 22-year-old to become the first person in his immediate family to join the Army was one that came about not as a young child when he often dreamed of being a soldier, but later in life, on the sprawling campus of UCSF, where he often saw fellow students speak about the military with disdain – an action Chen said he did not understand.

"It certainly wasn't the conventional college experience, but it helped me experience every perspective on hand – and that's what college should be about," he said. "I was in ROTC, going to school with a bunch of young college hippies – and back in 2007 and 2008, there was a lot of skepticism and ridicule about the military – being in the military was taboo."

"I remember thinking that it wasn't right to be ridiculing people who were representing our country," he added. "That's one of the other reasons

I joined." Yet another reason – one deeply tied with his experiences as the son of immigrants, is the realization that comforts and luxuries Americans are afforded aren't automatic, and that at times, have to be fought for.

"The world is a chaotic place," Chen said. "The comfort that we enjoy in the first world isn't necessarily something everyone else in the world enjoys – it has to be fought for."

For this reason, Chen believes service – whether to country or community, as part of an organization or as an individual, is the crux of the human experience – both as a way to better oneself and the world at the same time.

"The beauty is we don't have to if we don't want to," Chen said. "It doesn't have to be military service – but some kind of service – adding to the pot. It not only builds character, but also exposes one to a different way of life."

In southern Afghanistan, Chen's service consists of ensuring the team of medics he oversees is ready to provide care for injured Soldiers and civilians – those from NATO countries and local to Afghanistan – each time they are injured. For Chen, a young college graduate just ten months into his military enlistment, this service is especially meaningful because it helps positively affect the lives of others, something Chen said he strives to do. It's also a type of service that always works better when it is approached from a personal perspective.

"My medics are the guys doing the work, I just have the privilege of taking charge of the platoon," he said. "I am the one who plans the medical concept of support and each time, regardless of who they are, I always picture the person on the ground, I always picture the person carrying their buddy to the helicopter landing zone."

Such service might bring one prestige back in the states. However, in Afghanistan, where each Soldier wears the same uniform and operates under anonymity, Chen works seven days a week and his

reward is a tiny, wooden living quarters that seems to shake each time the wind blows. Despite this Spartan life, Chen said he is thankful for his living conditions and stays focused on the mission – partly because of what he learned from the military.

"The military taught me to be grateful for things that truly matter," he said. "I've been out here two months – I started out sleeping on a cot – now I have a mattress to sleep on, a place and food to eat – I can work all day."

"Work and a sense of gratefulness," said Chen, "has been a source of pride for his parents" – who reacted begrudgingly upon news of his becoming a Soldier, but have since relented and now support his career ambitions.

"My mom holds her head high knowing that I am doing meaningful, relevant work," Chen said. "She has no doubts of my reasons for being here."

Another reason, according to Chen, he and his mom are proud of the career he now has is because as one of few Asian-Americans in the military, he also serves as a role model for other youths of Asian-American descent to look up to.

"A lot of people will ridicule the Army, but here's the bottom line: if you don't get involved, nothing will change. If you don't join, you'll just stand back and ridicule a system you are too afraid to be a part of."

"I am proud to be an Asian-American serving in the military," he added. "As a leader, I stop sexism and racism where I see it – I am not one to stand back and ridicule a system."

While he has enjoyed his military service and deployment to Afghanistan, Chen also misses California – and particularly Orange County – the melting pot just south of Los Angeles where he grew up and occasionally returns.

"Orange County is an interesting place," he said. "You don't fully appreciate it until you're away from it. Every time I return, it's like I am on vacation."



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matt Young



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough



ROU Army photo by Capt. Marius Dinita



ROU Army photo by Capt. Marius Dinita



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matt Young



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matt Young

Cavalry Regiment, ANP work side-by-side to build trust among the local population

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Nazly Confesor
319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

By showing presence within the community, the Afghan National Police (ANP) is building an effective bond of trust and cooperation.

The ANP went on a recent foot patrol with members of the 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., to continue building trust and security with their neighbors.

“We go out with the ANP to do joint patrols so that we can provide mentorship, try to integrate the

ANP with the local population and give legitimacy to the ANP,” said U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Steven J. Haley, a platoon leader in Alpha Troop, 1-14th CAV, based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

For the past four months, the 1-14th CAV has been mentoring and providing support for five ANP checkpoints within the Darafshan Valley.

Haley said the 1-14th Cavalry’s primary focus is to push out the ANP into the villages to foster trust and reach out to the locals.

“We want the locals to trust and count on the ANP when they need help,” said U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class

Jason D. Hasby, a platoon sergeant in Alpha Troop, 1-14th CAV.

During the village patrol assessment, Lt. Haley and the patrol commander, Abdul Ghafor, spoke with the locals of insurgent activities, the upcoming harvest and their relationship with the ANP. Haley emphasized to the locals that they could depend on the ANP.

Haley and Ghafor also handed out crayons and high-fives to the local children.

“We are seeing progress as we realize the importance of interacting with ANP and the locals,” said Hasby.

According to Hasby, mutual respect between the ANP and the U.S. forces has been a major component to developing cohesiveness. He stressed the importance of mutual respect among the Soldiers mentoring the ANP.

“We tell our Soldiers to treat the ANP as they would like to be treated. When the ANP see us now, they get excited and wave to us. That means we’ve made an impact,” said Hasby. “Hopefully, the way they treat us is the way

the Afghan people will in turn treat ANP. It’s all about trust and respect,” he said.

In addition to outreaching and establishing trust, the 1-14th CAV have trained the ANP on basic policing tactics.

The overall mission of 1-14th CAV is to guide ANP into becoming an independent entity through mentorship.

The ANP have been trained on first aid, sustainment, tactics, search and seizure, and other

basic skills from the 1-14th CAV. “We have seen them produce a lot of the skills we’ve taught them such as tactical patience, tactical formations, sustainment and logistics, first aid and policing,” said Haley. “As we patrol, they have started working on those skills,” he said.

Haley indicated that many of the checkpoints do joint patrols, which emphasized the confidence of the ANP conducting their own patrols.

The 1-14th CAV will continue to

work with the five checkpoints within the valley and extend their mentoring efforts throughout their deployment.

“The difference I’ve seen within the last four months we have been here has been extraordinary. Having great commanders on these checkpoints makes all the difference,” said Haley.

By emphasizing trust between ANP and local nationals, the ANP can emerge as a structured, proficient, independent force.



Members of Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, conduct a joint foot patrol with their Afghan National Police partners. For the past four months, the 1-14th CAV has been mentoring and providing support for five ANP checkpoints within the Darafshan Valley.



Army 2nd Lt. Steven J. Haley, a platoon leader in Alpha Troop, 1-14th CAV, sits and enjoys a cup of chai with a local Afghan family during a village assessment patrol. The goal of the patrol was to push out the ANP into the village to foster trust and reach out to the locals.

Walking the “lonely walk.” Who is EOD?

Story and photos by
Sgt. Chris McCullough
CTF Arrowhead Public Affairs

Part 3 of 3 - Approach an IED. Just the thought of doing as much is enough to send shivers down even the bravest Soldier's spine, but sometimes that is just what the Soldiers of 787 EOD have to do.

“If my team member can't get the robot down there, or the robot breaks down, or it goes off a cliff into the water or something, I have to put that bomb suit on and go down there,” says Conard. “It's what they call the ‘lonely walk.’ There's no one else out there. It's just you.”

The “lonely walk”

The Hollywood movie the “Hurt Locker” glamorized the walk, but

I wanted to know, what is it really like?

“I get a little jittery sometimes, but you just have to go,” Conard explains. “Many times I've low-crawled up to something like that, looked over the berm and there was a 155 (mm artillery round) staring me in the face. You pucker up and then your training just takes over. You get in there, you do immediate action drills on it, you take care of it, and then when you're done...you do it again.”

The scenario Conard describes was done in an 80 lb., oversized, Kevlar bomb suit with ballistic plates that is confining and, in summertime, very hot to wear.

“In the summertime, when it's 120°F, I'll come out of (the suit) soaked from head to toe with my

own sweat,” says Conard. “There's no airflow in it. You have some airflow going through your mask to keep it from fogging up, but (for) the rest of your body, there's no airflow in it.”

Given Conard's description of the bomb suit, I had to wonder, how does an EOD technician disarm an IED with such a bulky, confining suit on?

“That's what we're trained to do,” Conard said. “Sometimes if you're out there for hours and hours, you take a 5 (minute break). You get in the truck, take off your helmet, get some air, put the helmet back on (and get back to the job).”

“You just do it”

Ask any EOD specialist where their confidence comes from, almost every one of them would attribute it to the training they do. It is what EOD specialists do when they are not disabling IEDs or unexploded ordnance. That is because when the time comes to put on the suit and walk the “lonely walk,” as Conard describes, he or she doesn't have time to think.

“You just do it,” said Conard. “It's instantaneous. (An insurgent) could be dialing the code to detonate it (the IED) on you, or has the command wire and is ready to hook a battery to it. You don't have time to think; you just have to react and do it.”

Disarming an IED is intrinsically

dangerous, but for an EOD tech the most dangerous part of their mission is not what they can see but rather, as Conard describes it, “not seeing what's out there; the unknown.”

The unknown variable Conard alludes to is the secondary IED. A secondary IED is often a hidden explosive attached to the primary IED and is designed to detonate whenever an EOD tech attempts to disarm the primary explosive.

“If you can't see it, that's the most hazardous part,” Conard says. “What you can see is easy, but with all the other things your mind is focused on, you can't focus on the little thing. That's where it gets the most dangerous, because they're out to kill us because we're stopping them from killing other people.”

“The Hurt Locker”

So with everything Marvin and Conard explained to me about the world of an Explosive Ordnance Technician, I had to know what they thought of the 2010 Hollywood blockbuster, “The Hurt Locker,” and whether it accurately depicted what the real EOD is like. Conard was quick to point out that their job is not at all like what was portrayed.

“I watched 5 minutes of that movie...and they completely Hollywoodized it,” Conard said. “I didn't like it. Same thing with that (TV show) ‘Bomb Patrol: Afghanistan.’ The concept is there,



Staff Sgt. Andrew Elo, 787th Ordnance Company, 3rd Ordnance Battalion, walks Russian anti-personnel mines down to a wadi for disposal by detonation at Forward Operating Base Wolverine, Feb. 26, 2012. The 787th received six Russian anti-personnel mines that were X-rayed and found to be too unstable for safe keeping.

the equipment stuff is there, but a lot of it is make-believe. If my guys ran that way, I'd be digging in their backside on a continuous basis. That's not how we operate. But people in the states will see that and be like ‘that's how it is over there?’ No, that's not how it is.”

Conard goes on to clarify that if anyone wants a history of what EOD is really like, that they should watch the BBC production “Danger: UXB.” According to Conard, it is a series on British EOD that he describes as “the best show that I've seen on EOD in the past.” He notes, however, that the IED world is “a whole different thing.”

The US and its allies have been in Afghanistan over a decade during which time the IEDs have proliferated, putting coalition

and Afghan forces alike at risk of injury or death. But with so many IEDs throughout the country, I had to wonder whether EOD is really making a difference here in Afghanistan, which Marvin immediately seized upon.

“We are making a difference with every IED or explosive we dispose of or render safe, because that one IED could have killed an American, an Afghan civilian, a NATO partner,” said Marvin. “I believe our partnership (with the Afghan National Army) is making a difference. The more that we can empower our ANA EOD teams, the better they'll be able to handle the situation when we leave, because we are leaving eventually. The best thing that we can do is to train them up to do the job with confidence and competence.”



Staff Sgt. Andrew Elo, 787th Ordnance Company, 3rd Ordnance Battalion, prepares a detonator for use at Forward Operating Base Wolverine, Feb. 26, 2012. The detonator will be used to destroy six Russian anti-personnel mines that were X-rayed and found to be too unstable for safe keeping.



ROU Army photo by Capt. Marius Dinita



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Mark Jachlewski



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough



ROU Army photo by Capt. Marius Dinita



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua S. Brandenburg



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua S. Brandenburg



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Mark Jachlewski



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher McCullough

Afghan National Security Forces, American Soldiers, help flush out Taliban

Story and Photos by Sgt. Marc Loi
319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Locals from a small village in southern Afghanistan will see more opportunities and Afghan National Security Forces and less improvised explosive devices and Taliban thanks to a joint operation recently conducted by members of the Afghan National Civil Order Police and Soldiers of 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment from Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

The two-day mission began in the early morning hours with more than 60 ANSOP officers and American Soldiers conducting foot patrols in the village of Didar and ended two days later. In those two days, the Soldiers flushed the area of Taliban as well as cleared the mostly-rural village of improvised explosive devices. The operation ended with a shura, an Afghan-led and inspired meeting with village elders, and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Dubbed Operation Eagle Mountain V, the operation's purpose was to clear the area of Taliban members and bring stability to the town that the commander of Bronco Troop, the unit largely responsible for Didar, said had gone too long without the presence of ANSF and coalition forces.

"Didar is an area that has been mostly untouched by International Security Assistance Force and the ANSF for the last two years," said B Troop's commander Capt. Michael Figer. "It's a seam between two of our battalion's areas of

operation, and the Taliban had gradually flowed into that area. It's important to not allow [them] to have these security pockets."

In doing so, the Soldiers not only cleared the area of IEDs, but also established a relationship with villagers that will prove beneficial in the long run, Figer said.

Such establishments of a presence and taking the fight to Taliban fighters are important not only from a tactical perspective because it renders the town safer to navigate, but also from an operational perspective in that safer roads means ANSF personnel will be better able to connect with village locals to establish the policies the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan sets forth, Figer added.

One of the ways to establish

such a relationship, Figer said, is through the Afghan-led efforts of listening to the needs and concerns of villagers through shuras. Traditionally held by Afghan leaders to gauge the needs and concerns of locals, the shura held was comprised of more than 100 villagers, including prominent elders who advertised the event in advance.

"It's a model we've been striving for," Figer said. "The local mullah announced the shura from his mosque's loud speaker while [ANSF personnel] conducted local patrols to invite people to it.

"This was a situation of Afghans leading Afghans," he added. Such Afghan-led efforts are particularly salient in the building of a stronger Afghanistan because the voices and concerns of villages often went unheard under



Soldiers from B Troop, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., patrol a poppy field during Operation Eagle Mountain in Didar, southern Afghanistan, recently. The operation's purpose was to clear the town of improvised explosive devices and bring U.S. and Afghan presence in the town, thereby providing local Afghans with security.

the Taliban, one villager said.

A self-proclaimed community organizer 23-year-old Gulah Ahmad Allah came to the shura to deliver messages for elders who were too ill to attend and those who couldn't make it because of other commitments. Although he was only 13 when the Taliban fell, Ahmad Allah said he remembers a time when the concerns of Afghans went unnoticed. In fact, speaking up might have rendered one a target for punishment, he said.

The new Afghan government, with a concerted effort to listen to Afghans' concerns, is taking a step in the right direction, Ahmad Allah added.

"The government is now listening to the people," he said. "These [shuras] are good for my country and my people, because it helps them understand what we need and what we want."

By listening to villagers' concerns, ANSF and coalition forces not only gain trust, but also forge an alliance that will, in the end, ensure they win over Afghans – something Figer said was evident in that the operation took place without major incidents, other than a few gunshots heard and IEDs found.

"It shows that the people who actually live in Didar are not truly Taliban. They may be threatened or influenced by Taliban, but they

are not Taliban themselves," Figer said. "This is a promising sign for future projects within Didar.

"It gives ANSF the breathing room they need so they can bring services and security to Didar," he continued. "It allows us to focus on projects like schools, clinics, water ways and roads, as opposed to fighting."

The operation was the fifth for the battalion since its arrival in Afghanistan late December.



Soldiers from Task Force 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., look on as children walk past them toward a well to fetch water for the evening meal during the Soldiers' participation in Operation Eagle Mountain in Didar, southern Afghanistan, recently. The operation's purpose was to clear the town of improvised explosive devices and bring U.S. and Afghan presence in the town, thereby providing local Afghans with security.

Wolfpack keeps Regional Command (South) supplies rolling

Story and photos by Spc. Ashley Curtis
117th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Before the sun begins to break over the horizon, they are dressed in full battle gear, checking their equipment and practicing tactical procedures. They call themselves the “Wolfpack” and work with the precision of a highly choreographed team.

The Soldiers of 2nd Squad, Bravo Company, 296th Brigade Support Battalion are about to go out on a routine supply mission to provide vital supplies to the Regional Command (South) area, May 11.

After completing a laundry list of pre-mission checks, the Soldiers make their way throughout RC(S) to deliver supplies to several forward operating bases. The days can be long, but the Soldiers of the 296th BSB understand why they are important.

“Supplies run low. You’re going to have to refill them somehow,” said

Pfc. Joseph Clements, Arizona native and gunner for one of the convoy’s armored security vehicles. “It’s time consuming but someone has to do it.”

Sgt. Jesse Webber, Montana native and assistant convoy commander and squad leader of Clements and his fellow Soldiers, carries a heavy amount of responsibility during these missions.

“I’m in charge of emplacing security in certain situations, I’m also in charge of making sure the [distribution] trucks are properly loaded prior to roll-out, along with making sure that all of my Soldiers are taken care of and are doing their jobs properly. So that way, we can assure that everybody gets home safely,” said Webber.

Safety is clearly a priority as he and his Soldiers maintain constant vigilance throughout the mission.



Spc. Dustin Downing, a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle driver for Bravo Company, 296th Brigade Support Battalion, loads the gunner’s crew-served machine gun before a resupply mission in Kandahar, May 11, 2012.

“We’ve spent so much time training and preparing for this that everybody within the team is ready, so even if there is a potential threat out there, we will be able to take the appropriate actions to assure the safety of everybody within the convoy, added Webber. “I feel very good about my team. I think they’re the best team that we’ve got out here.”

The 296th BSB has only been here a couple months, but these Soldiers are already working together seamlessly to deal with unexpected logistical issues threats, such as clearing a possible improvised explosive device.

At the end of the mission, nudging closer and closer towards the 24-hour mark, the weary but ever-watchful Wolfpack Soldiers return to Kandahar with supplies delivered, Soldiers safe and mission complete.



A Soldier from Bravo Company, 296th Brigade Support Battalion and an Afghan maintenance worker help unload a supply truck at Forward Operating Base Lagman during a resupply mission, May 11, 2012.

Chaplain's Corner



One of my favorite quotes is by Eleanor Roosevelt, she said, “I could not at any age be content to take my place in a corner by the fireside and simply look on. Life was meant to be lived. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

Let me ask you a question: if you could have one incredible year, packed full of recognition and awards, or a lifetime filled with good, solid, consistent performances, what would you choose? How you answer that question reveals just how you’re wired. Are you the type of person who looks for the next big opportunity, or someone who digs in right where you are and accomplishes what needs to be done?

In today’s world, authors jump from publisher to publisher, singing stars change recording companies, and fathers leave their families to pursue younger women. The grass always looks greener on the other side of the

fence, doesn’t it? Just remember you still have to cut the grass. Many of us are quick to pursue the next big, great opportunity.

The life of a Soldier has its ups and downs and there are times when we are recognized with awards and appreciation from the chain of command or from the people of America. However, most of the time it’s about going about our business and doing work that most people do not understand or have any idea about the things we do on a daily basis. We just “Dig in” and get the job done!

Many people say they want to be used by God, but they never take time to develop relationships or to dig into the powerful community of believers that God wants to give them. Instead, they switch jobs, cities, and schools before they even ask God, “Is there something you want me to be doing right here?”

We all have our own personal agendas, and sometimes we

let those take over, rather than listening to the still voice of God. We rush to make a move, to change the current dynamic. But God is looking for a few good men, women, and children who will dig in where they’re planted and be consistent. He wants the faithful, not the flashy. He wants someone who is sold out, not a sell-out. He wants someone who is persistent, not prosperous. Patient, not popular.

It’s amazing how God can use you if you commit to staying put. Consistency is extremely important. You’ll grow where God plants you...if you give it time. That kind of consistency is important to reaping the harvest. So here’s my challenge to you: Commit for the long haul. Don’t bail. Be faithful. Be consistent. Dig in and make a difference. Then get ready for God’s surprises.

- Chaplain (Maj.) Edward I. Choi, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division

Arrowhead Remembers



Sgt. Nicholas Dickhut

Sgt. Nicholas M. Dickhut was born on 31 December 1988 and raised in Rochester, Minnesota.

After joining the Army on 23 September 2008, SGT Dickhut attended Basic Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Following AIT, SGT Dickhut was assigned to 5th Battalion 20th Infantry Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington and served in 2nd Platoon, Able Company as a Fire Support Sergeant.

SGT Dickhut's military awards

include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Army Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal, and Combat Action Badge.

SGT Dickhut died on 30 April 2012 at Siah Choy in the Zharay District.

SGT Dickhut is survived by his mother Jacqueline Carson and Step-Father Randal Carson.



2nd Lt. Travis A. Morgado

2LT Travis A. Morgado was born on 27 March 1987.

After joining the Army on 23 September 2008, 2LT Morgado attended Infantry Basic Officer's Leaders Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. Following IN BOLC, 2LT Morgado was assigned to 5th Battalion 20th Infantry Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington and served in 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company as a Platoon Leader.

2LT Morgado's military awards include the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart Medal, National Defense Ser-

vice Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal, Ranger Tab, Parachutist Badge and Combat Infantryman Badge.

2LT Morgado died on 23 May 2012 in the village of Haji Rhamuddin in Zharay District from wounds suffered by an improvised explosive device while engaging enemy forces.

2LT Morgado is survived by his father Jose Morgado and mother Andrea Kessler.





ARROWHEAD

On Point!