



Combined Team Bastogne  
Combined Joint Task Force 1  
FOB Fenty, Afghanistan



24 December 2012

To the Friends and Families of the Bastogne Brigade,

On behalf of all the Soldiers of the Bastogne Brigade, we would like to wish you and your families a Happy Holidays and a Merry Christmas. For many of us in the Brigade, we are celebrating Christmas in Afghanistan, [where we have recently arrived to assume an important mission](#). It is never easy being away from loved ones at this time of year, and while we are away from our families at home, please rest assured that we are here as a Bastogne Family, caring for and watching out for one another.

The Bastogne Brigade has been selected by the Army to serve as one of the first units to perform a new and challenging mission. We will focus on improving Afghan Security Forces through our efforts in advising, assisting and enabling. Around Afghanistan, and across the Army, all are watching the critical provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar to see how this transition of responsibility occurs. In fact, when we took responsibility for this area on December 5th, we recognized that we are no longer the



Afghan National Army (ANA) Lt. Col. Omar Gul with the 2nd Kandak, 4th Brigade, 201st Corps, looks into the distance in thought after U.S. Army Capt. Nicholas Drake with Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, Security Forces Advise and Assist Team (SFAAT) asked him a question outside a temporary ANA tactical operations center in Bati Kot, Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, Dec. 13, 2012.

“battle space owners,” a title that rightfully belongs to our Afghan partners. We are now “battle space integrators” and our success is measured in the ability of our Afghan partners, in the Army and police, to secure their country. This is a [dynamic situation that is constantly challenging](#), but is exactly what we have trained so hard for during our pre-deployment training at Fort Campbell, Fort Carson and Fort Polk.

Many of us have been impressed with the [great strides made by our Afghan allies](#). Their ability to demonstrate the right mixture of skill and will to stand up to the Taliban and protect their own people increases every day. There is

much work to be done, but it is heartening to see so much progress, especially in light of the losses that our Brigade endured during our last deployment to this same region. Our Afghan partners have built upon the sacrifices of both their Soldiers and US Soldiers, and taken control of areas that were long believed lost to the insurgency. Many of our returning veterans are amazed to see the change in the quality of the

Afghan Security Forces as well as their ability to secure dangerous portions of Nangarhar and Kunar.

Another area of great Afghan development is in leadership. The raw material has been here for years, but now we see the development reaching a point where truly strong leaders are emerging which allows them to carry out difficult tasks such as operational planning and mission command. We are proud to work alongside them as they move into the forefront and secure their country.

As always, it is a tremendous honor to lead such wonderful Soldiers in combat. I would like to use this letter to recognize just a few of the great Soldiers in our Brigade.

SGT Steven Wilson serves double duty as both the Assistant Gunner and Cannoneer Number 1 on a M777 howitzer. In mid December, SGT Wilson served in both positions as his crew fired 31 rounds in support of 3 simultaneous hostile engagements between friendly and enemy forces. His relentless efforts contributed directly to the defeat of the enemy. SGT Wilson exemplifies everything that is good in a junior NCO who leads by example.

Next, I want to recognize PFC James Tinsley, 1st Battalion, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry, "Bulldog." James is an intelligence analyst who has spent countless hours reading through hundreds of documents to better understand the situation, the enemy and terrain here. His knowledge and expertly prepared pre-patrol information briefs have given Bulldog Soldiers an invaluable tool. Through his efforts, he helps prepare his fellow Bulldogs to work with their Afghan Police counterparts on patrol in the city of Jalalabad and throughout the Nangarhar Province. PFC Tinsley wants his brother and family back home to know that he misses them and wants to wish them a Happy New Year.

Finally, I want to tell a quick story about an event that greatly impressed me. A few days ago, I patrolled with a dismounted platoon that walked to the top of a small mountain that led to an observation post (OP) manned by Afghan Soldiers. These OPs ring many bases in Kunar and are used to prevent enemy attacks against our forces. When we completed our 90 minute walk to the top, we spoke with the Afghan Soldiers on duty and observed the different valleys and mountains of the surrounding area. Before we departed, SGT Joseph Boyd of [the 2-327<sup>th</sup> IN \(No](#)



SGT Joseph Boyd of the 2-327<sup>th</sup> IN (No Slack) Scout Platoon reenlists for three more years in the Army on a hilltop OP in Kunar Province.

[Slack](#)) Scout Platoon, reenlisted for an additional three years of service in the Army. I am certain that his wife, Natalie, and their children, Rainell and Davian, wished they could have been there to share in this experience, but for each and every one of us lucky enough to be there, it was deeply impressive and moving to watch a great young American leader recommit himself in service to his country. As he took that pledge, he was surrounded by fellow Soldiers who loved and respected him, and by Afghan Soldiers who admired him. I have seen many reenlistments in my 22 years in the Army, and every one of them has been special, but this is one that will remain with me forever.

The hard work of these and many other Soldiers enable our success. This December marks the [68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 101<sup>st</sup>'s heroic defense of Bastogne Belgium](#). We need only look back in our history to see how hard working and determination have been able to make the seemingly impossible possible. Talented Soldiers and strong leaders are what I see everywhere I go within the Brigade area. It is constantly inspiring to serve alongside such great Soldiers.

We want to extend a final recognition to all the [partner cities and organizations](#) that have sent numerous care-packages to us during this holiday season. Not only do the packages bring a taste of home to brighten the Soldiers day, but the practical gifts like books, magazines and toiletries are very welcome and make life a little easier. So from all of us here in Eastern Afghanistan, thank you all for the care packages.

As this deployment continues, I will maintain contact with the Bastogne family through this monthly letter, the BASTOGNE Magazine and posts to the [Brigade Facebook](#) page. Look for your Soldiers on there and post your well wishes, as I know our Soldiers value your comments.

Happy Holidays to every member of the Bastogne family and keep our deployed Soldiers in your thoughts and Prayers.

BASTOGNE,

Col. JP McGee  
Brigade Commander

CSM Tom Eppler  
Brigade Command Sergeant Major