

DRAGOON Magazine

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Inside this issue:

Commander comments	4
Command Sergeant Major comments	5
1/205 Security Force Assistance Team	6
Manchu	8
Afghan engineers build up CP for sister kandak	10
2-1 cav story	11
Rosser	12
Chaos Company strikes back with Operation Viper Strike	14
Tomahawk	16
Tomahawks compete for top spot	18
Viking	20
Blackhawk	22
Forge	24
Raider named Bayonet Soldier of the Month	26
Border crossing helping to increase stability	27
Memorial Page	

On the cover:



Radio chatter

PANJWA'I DISTRICT, Afghanistan

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kimberly Hackbarth

Capt. Ralph Parlin (right), commander, Company C "Chaos", 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, Combined Task Force 4-2, relays information to his company while an Afghan Army lieutenant speaks to his unit April 10, in the Panjwa'i District of Afghanistan. The Soldiers participated in a two-day clearing mission of the Komandek Ghar area.



DRAGON 6

Col. Michael Getchell



As May begins and we enter our seventh month of this Operation Enduring Freedom deployment, I offer each of our family members, friends, community partners, and teammates a resolute welcome from our new headquarters. April was a noteworthy month for our team - one that was punctuated by the move of our brigade headquarters from beloved Masum Ghar to the big city of Kandahar Airfield. That was only one of three very important moves that played out this month, however.

Before I continue on with news from the forward element, I'd like to focus briefly on the outstanding work the other half of our team is accomplishing at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. The "Raider Ready Reserve" continues to not just support this brigade combat team's forward operations, it remains a force that the 7th Infantry Division and the installation rely upon heavily. From readying Soldiers to deploy and fill the ranks of the forward team to the execution of squad live-fire exercises conducted by the provisional Company G, 52nd Infantry Regiment, the Raider Ready Reserve has tackled every mission thrown its way. It's most recently assigned mission, and perhaps the most important one to you all, was the welcome and reintegration of our first returning formations from Afghanistan; a mission that began on April 25 when 176 Raiders landed at McChord and walked into Soldiers Field House a few

short hours later to be reunited with loved ones. Which leads us back to the other notable moves that occurred throughout April...

The return of Company C "Crazyhorse", from 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, along with 1st Platoon, Company A "Able," 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment last week represents the first of our extended sequencing of units moving back to JBLM over the next 90 days. These first two units completed their assigned missions in southern Kandahar. This was made possible by the increasing capability and independence demonstrated by our Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) partners. Both Crazyhorse and Able Companies were able to accomplish their mission because of the confidence and competency of the ANSF as they take on the responsibility of facing the threats to their nation and their people. Reports from the Ready Reserve indicated that the homecoming was quick, poignant, and a great opportunity to work out the kinks for the larger flights that return in June and July.

The last of the movements this past month didn't involve plane rides to JBLM or anyone wearing Raider patches on their uniform for that matter. It involved 25 key leaders from 2nd Cavalry Regiment from Vilseck, Germany. Their short, four-hour plane ride was an important movement to every Raider in this formation, because their visit



signified a formal reconnaissance mission in preparation for them to relieve us in place this summer. The short, three days spent with them represented the start of what will assuredly be a professional transition this July, and we look forward to the next time we track their movements into Afghanistan because our movement home follows right behind.

In closing, I thank each of you for the work you do, the support you offer, the packages you mail, and the strength you extend to keep us focused on the missions at hand. I humbly offer you this gratitude more and more with each passing month. We hope that May brings the promise of good weather, the coming end to a fruitful school year, and ever growing excitement as we move one step closer to our first steps back on Washington soil.

Dragon 6



DRAGON 7

Command Sgt. Maj. Oscar Vinson



Family and friends of the Raider Brigade,

April has been a rewarding and challenging month, we have officially hit the 90-day remaining mark; the weather is getting increasingly hot and the work load is high. The brigade is preparing our areas and Soldiers for the changes happening in Afghanistan, this has been a difficult task, but has been faced head on with great success. The days are still long, but are fortunately going by quickly.

Thousands of pieces of equipment have moved many miles across our area of operations; turning in excess while still ensuring our replacements have what they need to be successful during their operations is of the utmost importance.

Over the last month, we have had the privilege of meeting with our 2nd Cavalry Regiment counterparts who will be working in this area in only a few months time. The meetings were informative and our leaders in the Raider Brigade were able to provide them with sufficient

information to ensure a successful transition when that time arrives. Until then, we will continue to strive towards our goals, complete our missions and work toward a more secure Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Security Forces are now leading most of the operations throughout their districts. They have worked tirelessly and persist to effectively push through obstacles along the way. The Raider Brigade is standing behind them, assisting when necessary and giving guidance when requested. We couldn't be more proud of the work being done and achievements made by not only our Soldiers but the ANSF as well.

On April 25, approximately 200 Raiders returned home to their Families and friends at JBLM. This is only the beginning of the Raider Brigade's transition from theatre. We will slowly send Soldiers home throughout the next 90 days while still working through our missions



here in Afghanistan. The work ahead will be strenuous and the hours long, but Raiders always succeed.

Morale is high and the Raider Brigade stands ready for the challenges ahead.

Please continue to keep our Soldiers in your thoughts and prayers.

**To the Objective-
Dragon 7**



1/205 Security Force Assistance Team



As all Soldiers know, fitness is a key to a successful Army career. During a deployment, fitness also offers opportunities for stress relief, time outside the office, and competitive fun with your peers. Continuing in the spirit of the Fittest Dragoon Competition, the Security Force Assistance Teams started the Lion Challenge Fitness Competition. The weekly competition available to all skill levels focusing on a wide array of CrossFit exercises. It is designed to increase the fitness and combat readiness of our teams, but also maintain the morale and esprit de corps through healthy competition. The SFAT teams are having fun and becoming healthier and stronger at the same time.

The 1st Brigade, 205th Afghan National Army Corps conducted its third Logistics Terrain Walk in April to improve resupply and maintenance techniques. Each of the terrain walks have increased in complexity. The brigade planners were able to clearly articulate personnel responsibilities in logistics positions the affect of shortages, contracting requirements, maintenance status, and status of destroyed equipment the Ministry of Defense Logistics Chief and Maintenance Secretary delivered motivational speeches that included updated guidance on procedure and policy, as well as a call to action to improve logistics throughout Ministry of Defense. Officers and noncommissioned officers of SFAT 1st Kandak, 1st Bde.,

205th ANA Corps are working hand in hand with 2-3 Field Artillery and 1st Kandak to develop an aggressive campaign plan for the summer, seeking to clear Shah Wali Kot and Khakrez districts of Taliban before Coalition Forces' withdrawal. The SFAT advisers have accompanied several battalion-level partnered operations, which have clearly demonstrated the effects of the rigorous training program 1st Kandak underwent this winter under the SFAT's guidance. Northern Kandahar province is in excellent hands, as the men of 1st Kandak are well-trained, professional, and confident in their ability to lead the fight against the Taliban.

The 2nd Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps SFAT continues to make strides with our counterparts. After completing a recent operation, 2nd Kandak, presented all advisors with Certificates of Appreciation. With the continued support of the Manchu family, 2nd Kandak SFAAT will continue to work "Shoulder by Shoulder" with 2nd Kandak to reach their goal of becoming independent. Nowruz, the Afghan New Year was a quiet event for SFAT 3rd Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps in the Arghandab River Valley. The traditional celebrations were dampened by days of rain storms and one freak hail storm. However, the sun and Afghans flooded the area with the nearby Baba-Wali Shrine safely receiving thousands of visitors. The SFAT and their counterparts in the

3rd Kandak had a great start to the New Year by advising during several operations that demonstrated Afghan readiness for independence.

SFAT 4th Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps continues to assist its counterparts to improve maintenance. What the mechanics lack in repair parts they more than make up for in skill, ingenuity and hard work. Mechanics like Staff. Sgt. Hozai, stationed in the 4th Kandak for five years, form the backbone of the kandak's maintenance program. Due to chronic spare parts shortages, the mechanics are forced to improvise, taking parts from other broken vehicles and fashioning other parts themselves. Despite the many setbacks the maintenance shop faces, the Soldier's attitude remains positive. The mechanics of 4th Kandak are confident that they will be able to maintain the Kandak's fleet after the departure of the Americans from Afghanistan.

April 6-8, Soldiers from 5th Kandak and SFAT 5th Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps conducted a medical mission to three villages, treating 140 Afghans. The operation helped the populace see the ANA as a force for good in the region. Villagers were happy, excited, and enthusiastic to see the ANA providing a tangible service. The Afghan army doctor, Dr. Abdullah, treated everything from elderly patients with body aches and ear infections, children with rashes and warts, to women with various aches



and infections. He set up a simple system to keep the flow of exams smooth and addressed the cultural difficulties with treating women by seeing the women in groups. The mission was highly successful and the villagers were pleased with the professionalism and diligence of the Afghan Soldiers.

SFAT 6th Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps, working with the 6th Kandak, continues to run the Light Fighters Course. The 2nd Tolay completed two weeks of soldier, team, squad, and platoon training exercises. Each platoon of 2nd Tolay, with the SFAT's assistance, planned and conducted combat operations as culminating events. The

2nd Tolay successfully planned and executed platoon and company level operations and successfully provided security for the local villages. Throughout the operations, Afghan NCOs showed their competency and knowledge. Before the end of 2nd Tolay's training, its NCOs had taken over the course instruction. Soldiers from each company of the 6th Kandak also attended a train the trainer course, allowing them to serve as instructors for the Light Fighters Course after the SFATs departure. 6th Kandak is now capable of leading its own training, with SFAT 6th Kandak, 1st Bde., 205th ANA Corps only providing mentorship and logistical support. We

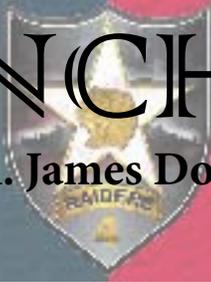
continue to coach, teach, and mentor the Kandak staff, making small gains everyday towards independence.

The 205th Corps Military Police Company continues to upgrade its capabilities. The Military Police SFAT was able to facilitate an important training event led by Task Force Paladin. The Military Police Company conducted a two week advanced site and exploitation class. Soldiers learned advanced techniques for vehicle and personnel searches, photography, crime scene analysis, and site exploitation. Twenty-four military policemen graduated, with 25 more Soldiers scheduled for the class next month.



MANCHU 6

Lt. Col. James Doohan



Our Manchu Family,

In what seems like a blink of an eye (only by taking a short break reflecting on the events over the past month), another month has passed as we close April 2013 and as we reach the six month mark for Combined Task Force (CTF) 4-9's "Manchus" deployment to the Horn of Panjwa'i. The cold weather seems to be nothing more than a faint memory as the entire valley within Panjwa'i blooms with fields of wheat and colorful flowers. The desert rain clouds rush to deliver the occasional sprinkle over the land we conduct combat operations and rest in; however, the mountainous terrain surrounding Southern Afghanistan fails to release the downpour we are accustomed to in Washington. The desert basin's heat and humidity is upon us and some of the landscape has been shared by companies on their Facebook pages and couple of the reporters who have covered some of the experiences of our Manchu Soldiers. As we progress and complete our primary mission to develop the capabilities of our Afghan Kandak (battalion) partners, fruits of our labor are as frequent as the incoming growing season.

Between my last newsletter and now, much has changed. The joint operations that were previously executed by United States Forces and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) across the Horn of Panjwa'i are now being executed as Afghan independent operations with minimal

support from us outside of technical capabilities, various overwatch support, and tactical advice to the ANA staff. Our Manchus have excelled in delivering the best in basic Soldier skills training to our partners, resulting in the accelerated development by our ANSF partners through the positive leadership and role model demonstrated by our young leaders.

Company A "Able" continues to partner at the company level with its ANSF partners and the preparation of their command outpost (COP) for transfer to their ANA partners. Further, 1st Platoon of A Co. is leading the curtailment "reconnaissance." Through their redeployment, they are conducting careful analysis of any friction points to alleviate future issues with the rest of the Manchus. This is a critical task necessary for the safe return of your Soldiers. B Co. "Blowtorch" exemplified the battalion with a successful command circulation visit by Brig. Gen. Robert White, 3rd Infantry Division Deputy Commanding General – Support. In addition to an operation and intelligence brief, conversation focused on redeployment and the eventual transfer of their tactical infrastructure (TI) to ANSF partners. C Co, "Comanche" led the battalion in ANSF partnership operations; resulting in the establishment of an ANA-built checkpoint in a critical area. Headquarters and Headquarters Company "Havoc" surged and positioned leadership at the Field Trans Command Post (FTCP) on Kandahar Airfield and established the critical staging

point and procedures for the future redeployment of the Manchus. Our SFAAT continued to provide daily advice and mentorship (from the shadows) to 2nd (ANA) Kandak, which has dramatically increased their confidence and has resulted in the Afghan Army battalion executing so many "first ever" missions and activities since their arrival to the Horn of Panjwa'i six and a half years ago. The 472nd Signal Company and our "Ligers" carry on with the high operations tempo as much of the brigade is shifting personnel to different locations, but despite the daily adjustments, they have continued to provide essential sustainment support and communications capabilities to the formation.

Even as we maintained the incredible operational tempo, we celebrated Easter across the battalion and our cooks delivered an incredible Easter meal. Combined with exceptional support from our Manchu Religious Support Team (RST) and our Catholic Priest guest (support), every Soldier was afforded the opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices everyone reading this letter has made and further kindled the spirit of gratitude. Please continue to your support for our Soldiers maintain contact with the battalion through Facebook and the Family Readiness Group. I ask for your continued patience as we retain close hold specifics of our redeployment and to just gratefully receive any of our Manchus who are able to return before or originally planned





Afghan engineers build up CP for sister Kandak

Story by Sgt. Kimberly Hackbarth
CTF 4-2 Public Affairs Office

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ZANGABAD, Afghanistan – Afghan National Army soldiers from 4th Kandak, 205th ANA Corps helped refine a checkpoint for their sister unit, 2nd Kandak, April 16 and 17 in the village of Gerandai in the Panjwa’i district of Afghanistan.

According to Afghan Lt. Abdul Mwgod, an engineer platoon leader with 4th Kandak, building the checkpoint was the first time the two Kandaks worked together in that area.

“We are all in one army, we wear the same uniform,” said Mwgod. “It’s important to be unified so we can give security.”

Mwgod said he thinks highly of his fellow Kandak.

“Second Kandak is the best Kandak in Kandahar,” Mwgod said. “They can bring security in Afghanistan because they always try to help.”

So when 2nd Kandak needed 4th Kandak’s help building their checkpoint, Mwgod and his soldiers rose to the occasion.

“I want to make this checkpoint so we don’t allow for (the Taliban) to come in to disturb our people and make more soldiers in danger,” explained Mwgod.

Soldiers of 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, Combined Task Force 4-2 (4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division) assisted 2nd Kandak in providing security for the engineers.

Two weeks prior, United States engineers with 38th Engineer Com-



Capt. Gregory Black (left) commander, 38th Engineer Company, Combined Task Force 4-2 (4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division) speaks with his Afghan National Army counterpart, Afghan Lt. Abdul Mwgod (far right) as Afghan engineers build up a security checkpoint in the village of Gerandi in the Panjwa’i District of Afghanistan April 16.

pany, CTF 4-2, added an initial row of Hesco barriers around the checkpoint, which used to be a school, as their engineer partners looked on, said Capt. Gregory Black, the commander of 38th Engineer Company.

“Two weeks later, we’re coming out here and (the ANA are) doing everything and they’re moving much quicker than we could’ve ever anticipated,” said Black.

The original row of Hesco barriers provided more safety for ANA soldiers, but not enough, said Mwgod.

The Afghan engineers added a second layer of Hesco barriers on top of the first row that the U.S. engineers had set up.

The second layer of barriers added additional height and protection from small-arms fire, said Mwgod.

The ANA used heavy machinery to fill the barriers with sand from around the compound.

For Black, it was his first time working with Mwgod.

“Their platoon leader is one of the most knowledgeable engineers I’ve ever met,” said Black. “He knows exactly what to do. He was out there operating the equipment himself (and) showing his soldiers how to use it.”

Black said his confidence in Mwgod’s abilities is a reflection of what he and other U.S. soldiers have accomplished with their partners.

“I think for us, it just shows all of our guys how far we’ve come since we’ve been here that they’re out here seeing this and it’s their show, they’re running everything,” said Black. “For (the ANA) soldiers, I think it’s good to see all the U.S. soldiers standing back and just watching, almost in amazement, of how quickly they’re operating and how far they’ve come.”



BLACKHAWK TALON



Soldiers of 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment conducted a joint operation in the Zabul Province with 4th Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 205th Afghan National Army Corps to target Taliban facilitation areas and disrupt homemade explosives (HME) production for the fighting season. The operation began with two platoons from B Troop “Blackjack” air assaulting into the objective. Soldiers from A Trp. “Arrow” and the 4th Kandak’s reconnaissance company provided blocking positions along Highway 1. The squadron’s attached infantry company, Company A “Aztec,” 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, conducted several clearing operations recovering numerous bomb-making materials as well as HME.



ROSSIER (6)

Lt. Col. Chad Sundem



To all the Rock Family and Friends,

Task Force Rosser continues to earn praise for their diligent work and commendable progress made here in eastern Panjwa'i. With much opportunity remaining ahead in the months to come, we are excited about the possibilities given the committed focus and courageous efforts our Afghan Security Force partners deliver every day.

Together we are seeing tangible progress, and a genuine belief from everyone that tomorrow will be better than it ever has been. Our partnership is unbreakable and we are even more encouraged with the relationship developed between the Afghanistan army and police forces.

While select members of the staff begin initial coordination and planning for redeployment, please be mindful that nothing with respect to our timeline has changed and we remain laser focused on the task at hand. We will offer no seam or display complacency that can impede our progress to greatness.

Again, we humbly acknowledge the difficult challenge a deployment brings and the unwavering commitment of you all at home serves as our strength. Together, we are making history every day.

Today, we stand humble and proud as the Rock of the Marne.
Tomorrow, Let 'Em Come!

**Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bartlett
and Lt. Col. Chad Sundem**





Chaos Company strikes back with Operation Viper Strike

Story by Sgt. Kimberly Hackbarth
CTF 4-2 Public Affairs Office

COMBAT OUTPOST KHEN-JAKAK, Afghanistan – Approximately three United States Army platoons from Company C “Chaos”, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, Combined Task Force 4-2, and three platoons from 1st Company, 6th Kandak, 205th Afghan National Army participated in a two-day clearing mission of the Komandek Ghar area in the Panjwa’i District of Afghanistan, April 10-11.

The purpose of the mission, titled “Operation Viper Strike”, was to identify and exploit explosives caches and put pressure on the Taliban’s distribution system, said Capt. Ralph Parlin, C. Co.’s commander.

It covered approximately 9 to 12 miles of desert in an isolated area that is difficult to get to by Afghan National Security Forces and International Security Assistance Forces due to being isolated by the Tarnak River.

A week before Operation Viper Strike, C Co. interdicted a vehicle travelling toward Komandek Ghar, a key terrain feature in the area, from the south. The vehicle was transporting 2,100 pounds of processed hashish worth an estimated \$440,748 and a net worth of \$10 million, said Parlin.

They also caught several key high value individuals in the Taliban drug distribution system.

The area the vehicle was headed is populated by nomadic people known as Kuchi tribes who live in “Kuchi camps.”

The structures they live in vary from mud huts to tarps strewn over sticks.

These people travel to find grasslands for their animals, but return to the camps, said Parlin.

Early the morning of April 10, U.S. scouts assaulted on top of the mountain that oversees the Kuchi camps and set up an observation point (OP) overlooking the villages that the platoons would be searching.

Meanwhile, the Soldiers of 3rd Platoon and 2nd Platoon mounted up in their Stryker vehicles and met up with their ANA partners.

Soldiers of 3rd Platoon met their first challenge of crossing the Tarnak River.

Earlier in the day, the depth of the river was estimated at shin-high, but due to recent rainstorms, it had risen to waist high and continued to rise.

Third Platoon and their Afghan partners had to quickly cross and could only take the most mission essential items with them, to include food, water, radios, and batteries.

Once the U.S. and Afghan Soldiers moved their equipment to the other side of the river, they reevaluated their plan and began a daylong clearing process.

The ANA led the way into the camps and interacted with the locals who lived there.

First Lt. Francis Igo, the platoon leader of 3rd Platoon, and his Soldiers followed behind.

“As our partners, it’s their country; they’re the face of the people,” said Igo. “People are more willing to talk to them and give information.”

Igo said his ANA counterparts are effective and efficient at searching structures for possible caches.

“They know what belongs and what doesn’t belong because it’s their culture,” Igo said.

U.S. Soldiers asked the villagers if any outside people had come through the area and found that numerous tractors and other vehicles had been seen passing through.

After searching several camps, 3rd platoon and the scouts set up a hasty patrol base in the Registan Desert.

Early the next morning, they set out again and cleared the south side of the mountain.

Meanwhile, 2nd Platoon continued to clear the north side.

When 3rd Platoon and the ANA made it back to the Tarnak River, the water was chest high.

Like a scene out of Vietnam, the men crossed the river holding their weapons over their heads and fighting against the current.

As the mission came to an end, even though they didn’t find caches, they learned valuable information about the system of distribution of non-malicious material and also how the Taliban is exploiting and taking advantage of the existing Kuchi distribution system, said Parlin.

Parlin added that the U.S. and ANA presence in the remote region would have big impacts on the rest of the enemy’s efforts moving things into the area.

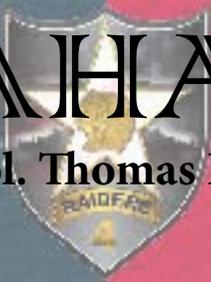
“It will present obstacles for the enemy’s x-fill of opium and hashish in support of next year’s fighting season,” said Parlin.





TOMAHAWK 6

Lt. Col. Thomas Feltey



Greetings Tomahawk families and friends!

It has been a busy month since our last update to you, and we wanted to fill you in on what we've been up to. There has been a lot going on in Combined Task Force 2-23, particularly as Company C "Crazyhorse" began their journey home. With their mission at Lakaray complete, we are all excited to see Tomahawk Soldiers begin to return home to their families. Their new mission is to reintegrate with families, the Raider Ready Reserve and the 7th Infantry Division. We look forward to leveraging all their key insights to make our subsequent redeployments even better. In the meantime, our mission in Spin Boldak and Tah-

and provide for future security, was a demonstration of success. Our Afghan National Security Force partners are becoming very independent and demonstrating significant initiative, taking the lead in most of our security efforts. As we get closer to transition, this will be critical to maintaining the gains we have made here. Although we are not finished yet, there is proof that we are making enduring progress.

On the homefront, the Tomahawk Ready Reserve and the Family Readiness Group are working tirelessly in support of the battalion's deployed personnel. Their work is more vital than ever, as they pre-

our task force will continue its efforts to transition more and more of security operations to the Afghans. Additionally, we have met our new best friends and they happen to be from the unit that is replacing us from Fort Knox, Ky. The unit has completed its recon and we are in daily contact so that our relief-in-place is seamless. It's the point in a deployment that we all look forward to and everyone will be working hard to ensure that everything is perfect for when they arrive.

Your Soldiers continue to impress me every single day and you should be very proud of them. I know we are!

“Although we are not finished yet, there is proof that we are making enduring progress.”

**-Lt. Col. Thomas Feltey
2nd Bn., 23rd Inf. Regt. commander**

ktepól continues; Operation Southern Fist III was completed early this month, and overall has been a huge success. In particular, seeing the local populace pitch in and assist with building a new checkpoint, which will help retain gains made

pared to receive Crazyhorse Company as they returned to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. Reintegration will become our most vital effort on the homefront in the near future.

As we look ahead to next month,

**Tomahawks Win!!
Tomahawk 6 and 7**





Tomahawks compete for top spot

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Shane Hamann
102nd MPAD





FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPIN BOLDAK, Afghanistan – Soldiers with Combined Task Force 2-23 (2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment) contended in the Top Tomahawk competition that began March 29 here.

The competition vetted 3-man teams against each other to test their physical stamina, marksmanship skills, and technical and tactical proficiency.

“(The competition) was geared toward the environment we deal with as infantry,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Lewis. “It (included) tasks the Soldiers could benefit from and at the same time tested their physical, technical and tactical skills.”

To simulate a battlefield environment the contestants were in “full battle-rattle,” or full combat gear with weapons and ammunition that weighs approximately 65 pounds.

The tasks were also set up to simulate combat and entailed changing a 200-pound Stryker armored vehicle tire, bore-sighting a 50 caliber remote weapons system, loading radio frequencies and map overlays into

the Stryker computer system, evaluating and safely moving casualties, and target shooting under stressful conditions.

“The pace was frenetic and a whole lot of stress from being physically tired, mentally drained,” said Pfc. Brian J. Ure, from Longbeach, Calif. “I thought the tasks were very appropriate for our job.”

It was physically, mentally and technically challenging, said Sgt. David J. Reilly, a team leader from Redding, Calif.

In spite of all the challenges the competition was meant to instill teamwork and boost morale.

“It was to kind of breakup the monotony of the deployment,” said Sgt. 1st Class Michael L. Randolph, the battalion operations noncommissioned officer. “Its an esprit de corps thing.”

“We wanted to boost morale now that we are halfway through the deployment,” said Lewis.

After completing the physical and technical activities the teams faced a mystery event that they were surprised to discover was a written history exam consisting of general

knowledge and unit history questions.

“It was the total Soldier concept,” said Lewis. “We wanted the Soldiers to open their minds and know that what you expect is not always the case.”

The total Soldier concept continued on day two with a tomahawk throw and a board interview.

The interview questions were intentionally different from typical board questions and incorporated sports, U.S. presidents and military history, allowing the younger Soldiers to participate without having the knowledge and experience expected of the team leaders and also taught the team leaders to think outside of the box, said Lewis.

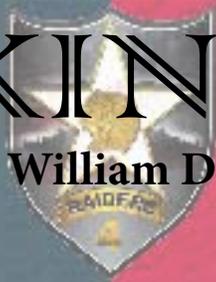
The teams will have to wait until a later date to find out the winners because the task force is planning a large awards ceremony to coincide with other awards but the intent of the event, teambuilding in good natured competition, was met.

“It’s good for bragging rights,” said Reilly. “To keep up to date on who the best team in the battalion is.”



VIKING (6)

Lt. Col. William Downing



To the Soldiers, families, and friends of Task Force Viking,

Ninety days out...has a nice ring to it. While, for some, that may seem like a long time, I think we all can agree the last five and a half months have gone by fairly quickly. Summer is upon us now. The wheat, grapes, and pomegranates are in full swing here in Kandahar province, and so are the Soldiers and leaders of Anger Nation. It has been a pleasure to watch young, first-time deploying Soldiers transform into seasoned combat veterans; to watch our officers and noncommissioned officers walk the line, set the example, and show these young Soldiers how to be the warriors they have become. They are firing on all cylinders now and have developed reflexive competence in their assigned duties and instincts unique only to the combat Soldier. It is now, more than ever, that we must not become complacent, cut corners, or get distracted; we must stay focused on the tasks at hand, stay "Angry" in our daily approach to life until the mission is complete.

The rough men of Task Force Viking continue to conduct combined operations with Afghan Uniformed Police in order to neutralize insurgent threats in the area of operations and have seen a marked increase in AUP's ability to execute very effective operations independently. This will be critical during the upcoming year as United States presence in theater continues to draw down and Afghan army and police have to step up and assume responsibility for the security of their country. An essential part

of our drawdown is the Task Force's ability to secure Kandahar Airfield (KAF) from external threats as U.S. forces retrograde back to the base in preparations for redeployment. This mission calls for a relentless operational tempo and your Viking Soldiers have proven that they are more than up to the task, patrolling day and night, rain (hail) or shine, mounted and dismounted, to deny the enemy the ability to initiate effective attacks on KAF. The Anger of the Task Force is not confined to Kandahar Province alone with Soldiers from Battery B "Beast" continuing to provide security for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Farah Province and Soldiers from Battery C "Chosen" training Afghan National Army Soldiers on the fundamentals of artillery in Zabul Province. Vikings from Chosen and Hammer Batteries continue their traditional field artillery mission in Panjwa'i District providing lethal, angry, indirect fires in support of the entire brigade, along with radar coverage from the Hammer Q53 radar. None of our operations would be possible without the Hammer and Chosen Logistical Support Team Soldiers that spend countless hours every day, securing, maintaining, and managing Forward Operating Base Lindsey to ensure the Task Force HQs and staff, along with our company, battery, and troop command posts, are able to effectively command and control the fight and sustain the force.

This Task Force started out as a group of units unfamiliar with one another

but has become a team built on trust, loyalty and pride – one inch at a time. The inches we need to keep our team strong are everywhere around us – in Afghanistan and at home, on every patrol, during every fire mission, in every phone call or email home. As a team, we fight for those inches every day because we know they will make the difference between success and failure, between a strong household and a broken one, between living and dying in some cases. Every day, I look into the eyes of a different Angry Viking and see a Soldier who is willing to go that "inch" for the team. I see a Soldier who would sacrifice himself for the team, if need be, because he knows when it comes down to it, his teammates would do the same for him. That's a team. It's powerful, it's Angry, and it's an amazing thing to be part of.

I'm sure the time may still be dragging for some, but we've come a long way and only have a short while to go before the team is reunited again. Take comfort knowing the price you pay every day by being away from your Soldiers will add up to that one incredible moment when you are together again. That is a moment you can't buy with money – you can only pay for it with sleepless nights, countless emails, letters, phone calls, Facetime and Skype sessions, and the loneliness of being apart for so long. It is a moment unique to only the military family. Stay focused on that "inch."

May God bless Task Force Viking, its families, and the United States of America.





BLACKHAWK 6

Lt. Col. Charles Lombardo



Greetings Blackhawk nation,

It looks like the rain has finally stopped and the sun is heating up here in Zabul. During the month of April, the squadron shifted its primary focus from retrograding our equipment from Forward Operating Base Sweeney and transitioning its ownership to the 1st Kandak to

cerns of the citizens in remote areas that they protect and serve. We have conducted multiple very successful operations removing contraband from the battlefield and emboldening the Afghans. I am extremely pleased with the performance of your troopers. Every day they make

family and friends of the Blackhawk Nation for your enduring support of the squadron and its mission. As scouts, we are taught from an early age, the importance of holding the “screen line.” The screen line is a place where we as scouts observe the battlefield and protect the flanks of our sister battalions as they move towards the objective. As the squadron’s return home approaches,

“We have conducted multiple very successful operations removing contraband from the battlefield and emboldening the Afghans.”

**-Lt. Col. Charles Lombardo
2nd Sqdn., 1st Cav. Regt. commander**

developing and executing an extensive combined arms live fire exercise (CALFEX) with our Afghan National Army (ANA) partners. I look forward to highlighting the successes of the CALFEX in next month’s newsletter.

Over the last few weeks your troopers, through their example and hard work, have helped our ANA partners reach areas of their battle space they had not travelled to in a long time. This is important because it allows the ANA opportunities to learn about and address the con-

a name for themselves in the “Raider” Brigade and in Zabul Province. We are still on track to return home as scheduled. During the next few weeks our “advon” Soldiers will begin filtering back to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. in order to assist the Blackhawk Ready Reserve in receiving the Squadron upon its return. The Blackhawk Ready Reserve led by Capt. Drew Watts and Sgt. 1st Class Sanchez has done an outstanding job preparing for the return of the squadron. As always, I would like to personally thank the

I ask the family and friends of the Blackhawk Nation continue to hold the “screen line.” The Blackhawks will be home soon.

Blackhawks! Animo Et Fide.

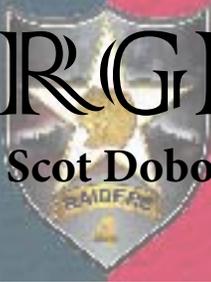
**Lt. Col. Charles T. Lombardo
“Blackhawk 6”**





FORGE 6

Lt. Col. Scot Doboszenski



To the Soldiers, Families, and Friends of the Forge Battalion,

The Forge Battalion has not missed a beat completing every task and mission we are given. We continue to support retrograde operations, transfer operating bases, and conduct sustainment operations. Here is just a snapshot of the battalion's accomplishments thus far in the deployment. Company A, "Arsenal" delivered 1.298 million rounds of ammunition battalion, conducted 71 sustainment missions, drove 6,948 miles while escorting 634 vehicles and retrograding 611 flat racks of equipment. This does not include the coordination of 318 air cargo and 745 personnel missions, 571 subsistence trucks, 794,333 liters of water, 229 cases of ice, and 3.865 million gallons of fuel. B co., "Bruisers" completed 2,505 maintenance job orders, while C Co., "Cold Steel Crusaders" have conducted 1,347 patient contacts and coordinated the retrograde of \$500,000 in medical supplies. To date, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, "Honor" has overseen and served 1.59 million meals to the Dragoons, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, Department of Defense (DOD) civilians, and contractors. The command sergeant major and I could not be more proud of our Forge Soldiers accomplishments. The month of April was eventful for the battalion. HHC conducted a change of command ceremony be-

tween, Capt. Shea Keech, outgoing commander, and Capt. Eric Hallgren, incoming commander. The transition went extremely smooth between these quality leaders and the Soldiers did a remarkable job during this complex task. We reenlisted 22 Soldiers and promoted 12 since the last newsletter, bringing our total to 91 and 97 respectively, during the deployment. In an effort to transform the lifestyles of Forge Soldiers, the command sergeant major started the Forge Fitness Challenge. Through a friendly competition and education process, Soldiers are encouraged to improve their nutritional habits and physical training to improve their quality of life while striving to become the fittest Forge Soldier.

In preparation for our replacement unit that will have approximately 30% fewer Soldiers, we started our battalion transition from a four company set into a two company. With this phased drawdown, you will see our first two flights of Soldiers (torch and advanced parties) redeploy back to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. in May.

As we continue to transfer operating bases, it is good to see our Forge Soldiers coming back into the battalion footprint from the units they were working diligently to support on location. It is a sign of progress and signifies us getting closer to

our return to you, our families. Although we are quickly approaching our return with much anticipation, we continue to maintain focus on proficiency and situational awareness training to protect our formation. As we have thus far, and we will continue to, challenge the formation to ensure continued vigilance.

We truly appreciate your unwavering support to your deployed Soldiers – it makes a difference, just as our efforts here make a difference for the people of Afghanistan. We will continue to make you proud with our actions and deeds. The command sergeant major and I are grateful for the opportunity to serve such a great formation of quality Soldiers. We know the Forge Soldiers are the best in the U.S. Army!

Forge 6 and Forge 7

**"Mend the Broken
Sword"**





Raider named Bayonet Soldier of the Month

Story by Pfc. Reese Von Rogatz
4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. – Spc. Jacqueline Walker, a Raider Ready Reserve training room noncommissioned officer in charge with 472nd Signal Company, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, was named Bayonet Soldier of the Month at an award ceremony held in the brigade command area April 9.

Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, 7th Inf. Div. commanding general, and Command Sgt. Maj. Delbert D. Byers, 7th Inf. Div. command sergeant major, presented Walker with a plaque and “Bayonet” Division coin for her life-saving action of administering CPR to a woman exhibiting signs of diabetic shock.

According to Walker, she was at the off-post residence of a fellow soldier a few days before Thanksgiving, preparing to step out for the evening. When the door was opened in answer to a knock, it revealed a frantic man trying to say that his friend was unconscious in the apartment across the hall.

“He couldn’t really explain what was going on,” said Walker, describing him as clearly overwhelmed.

While her friend helped make the call to 911, Walker investigated. In the tiny apartment, a woman lay unconscious on the floor, her skin colored purple, with another female

trying to re-start her breathing.

“I tried explaining to her how to do it correctly, but she wasn’t ‘getting it,’” said Walker. “She was doing it too fast, so I took over at that point.”

The comatose woman woke up a few minutes before the medics arrived on the scene.



Spc. Jacqueline Walker, a Raider Ready Reserve training room noncommissioned officer in charge with 472nd Signal Company, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, receives the Bayonet Soldier of the Month plaque and “Bayonet” Division coin from Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza (left), 7th Infantry Division commanding general, and Command Sgt. Maj. Delbert D. Byers, 7th ID command sergeant major, at an award ceremony held in the brigade command area April 9.

Breathing on her own, her first words were, “What happened?”

“(Walker) represents the best of the division and is the epitome of a Bayonet soldier,” said Lanza.

For her actions in applying combat life-saving skills and demonstrating that the “Raiders” – Ready, Accountable, Informed, Disciplined,

Experts, Resilient, Soldiers of the brigade – are “Ready” both on and off duty, Walker also received a brigade coin from the R3 command team.

Born in Waterbury, Conn., and raised in New York City, Walker graduated from St. Francis Preparatory School in Queens and initially pursued a degree in psychology at St. Francis College, where she had received a full-ride basketball scholarship. After an injury ended her collegiate career and athletic scholarship after one year, she enlisted in the Army in 2009.

“I wanted to do something productive with my life. My brother was already in the military and he was so proud to serve his country. I wanted to follow that,” Walker said.

Trained as a radio operator/maintainer, Walker aims to re-class to health care specialist. In the future, she plans to finish her degree and become a registered nurse.

The 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. is currently deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Raider Ready Reserve is organized, equipped and trained to execute rear detachment operations focused on maintaining Soldier, family, training and equipment readiness that instill confidence in forward deployed commanders.



Border crossing helping to increase stability

Story by Staff Sgt. Shane Hamann
102nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPIN BOLDAK, Afghanistan – Surrounded by desolate landscapes and beaten by a harsh climate, the village of Wesh sits along Highway 4 on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Wesh is home to the “Friendship Gate” which signifies the village’s importance as a passageway into Afghanistan. The border crossing point located in the village is a major pedestrian and commercial vehicle crossing point. All this traffic means more business for local vendors and more tax revenue for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The International Security Assistance Force and GIRoA have been working together to improve the border crossing point by building a new customs facility that will increase traffic flow, generate more revenue and help stabilize the region by boosting the economy.

“It will be one of the most important custom entry points in the country,” said Ifram Sakrak, a Turkish contractor who is the project manager for the new customs facility.” This will certainly affect the economy of Spin Boldak and Wesh

areas.”

“This project at the Wesh border is absolutely critical to Afghanistan,” said Maj. George D. Hurd, the commander of Security Force Assistance Team Liberty, Texas Army National Guard. “There’s approximately 25,000 pedestrians a day that travel in and travel out. In the course of a year that’s millions of people. Its tens of thousands of

commercial vehicles all bringing in revenue for Kandahar province and GIRoA.”

The SFAT works closely with the Wesh border crossing Afghan Border Police and has helped them establish working relationships with other agencies involved in the project. The SFAT also assist the ABP by conducting checkpoint assessments on nearby border checkpoints and advising on security matters to help with the improvements.

The border crossing improvements are already having a positive affect on the area by hiring local laborers. Hotels, gas stations, food and drink vendors, banks and car sales lots have been constructed along Highway 4 leading into Spin Boldak and Wesh, and are playing a part in expanding the local economy.

“It’s already started to show its effects,” said Sakrak. “People are starting to build concrete buildings instead of clay. On the roadside



we are seeing more petrol stations more modern than previous ones.”

“Whenever the customs yard starts, the capacity will be higher,” said Sakrak. “Higher capacity means more customers for the local vendors.”

The new customs yard will also help bring more stability and security to this area because the customs and border police will be able to track what is coming in more easily. It will also be completely operated by Afghans, which will demonstrate increased confidence in GIRoA.

“The country will know whatever enters,” said Sakrak. “Control will be much easier than before.”

“I really think this project is one of the top opportunities for the Afghans to step forward, take the lead and manage their country,” said Hurd. “This facility is also going to provide a great opportunity to showcase what the Afghans can do.”



OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM 2012-2013

IN LOVING MEMORY



*Staff Sgt. Rayvon Battle, Jr.
Nov. 13, 2012
38th Eng. Co.*



*Staff Sgt. Wesley Williams
Dec. 10, 2012
B Co., 1-38 IN*



*Pfc. Markie Sims
Dec. 29, 2012
38th Eng. Co.*



*Sgt. David Chambers
Jan. 16, 2013
B Co., 1-38 IN*