



181st Infantry Regiment

# Around the Powder Horn

"Keep Your Powder Dry"



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Volume 9

## 1/181's diligence builds trust, spreads smiles and provides hope

By Capt. John Quinn

CAMP PHOENIX, Afghanistan — For the most part, it's uncommon to see an infantryman wielding a stuffed unicorn, but members of the 1/181 have learned it takes more than bullets to win a war.

On Jan. 3, about 30 members of Headquarters Company brought donated clothes, blankets and toys to a settlement of Kuchis, members of a nomadic tribe, living a kilometer away from the base to provide humanitarian assistance and to be good neighbors.

The mission was conducted in conjunction with Operation Outreach Afghanistan, a non-profit organization based at the camp which helps empower Afghans by collecting donations from families and friends of Soldiers in the U.S.

Sgt. Aaron Cole, who works as an administrator in HHC, helped bring the supplies for about 50 men, women and children in an armored convoy, said the living conditions are tough.

He was amazed how the Kuchis strive to get by with what they have, even if it means living in cloth tents, wearing flip flops or walking around bare foot. The people were surprised and grateful for the assistance, Cole said.

"It was fun especially when the kids got the toys," Cole said. "That made it all worthwhile."

Sgt. Ryan Fairbanks, of HHC's 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, said everyone in the village was very excited. He recalled a little girl who was bursting with pride as she showed off the stuffed whale she was given to play with.

"The need was great," Fairbanks said, adding luckily, the operation was very well organized.

While most of the unit contributed to the effort, Staff Sgt. William Munsell, who's led numerous dismounted patrols to the Kuchi settlement, said the rapport he's built with Kokan, the village elder, paved the way to a successful mission that day.

"He has a lot of trust in 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad since we've developed a relationship in the past two months," Munsell said.

During their second visit to the village, Munsell presented Kokan with a small plaque inscribed with "Friendship is Forever," which still hangs in a place of honor in the elder's home.

Munsell said Kokan told him that the Kuchis hope to establish a permanent settlement. As a result, they spoke for hours about how to ensure the Kuchis could provide for themselves, rather than rely on hand outs, he added.

Munsell said they agreed the village has to become more self sufficient since U.S. and coalition forces would eventually leave Afghanistan.

Sgt. Steven Grasso said when the 1/181 first arrived, they heard



*Photos by Sgt. Michael Keough*  
Members of the 1/181 who visited the Kuchi camp Jan. 3 found it very gratifying to see how excited and grateful the Afghan children were to receive donated toys, especially soccer balls and stuffed animals.



*Photo by Sgt. Michael Keough*

From right, Sgt. Aaron Cole, Pvt. 1st Class Matthew Amador, Pvt. Jason Vongratsamy, all members of HHC 1/181, and a linguist distribute blankets, clothes and toys to Kuchis, a nomadic tribe in Afghanistan, who live near Camp Phoenix during a humanitarian mission Jan. 3.

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## Kudos!



Photo courtesy of Uruzgan PRT

On Dec. 23, Cmdr. Drew Koelsch, right, commander of Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) pins the Navy-Marine Corps Achievement Medal on Spec. Kenney Ramos, a medic from A Co. 1/181, for his actions following an explosion in Chora. Ramos, who was the most junior medic present, saved the life of an Afghan injured



Photo courtesy of Laghman PRT

Staff Sgt. Michael Richardson, of B Co. 1/181, poses with a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) while interacting with an Afghan Police Officer, left, and an Afghan Soldier, right, at the governor's compound in Laghman Province Nov. 30.

Right, a young Afghan girl looks on from the doorway at the Department of Women's Affairs as members of Zabul PRT can be seen in the reflection talking with villagers in downtown Qalat Dec. 29. Female team members visited the DOWA to talk with Afghan women about women's issues within the community.

Photo by Sgt. Steven Jones



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Matthew Lohr  
An Afghan girl in Tere Zayi District waits to be seen by a medical team, including a Navy Corpsman from Khowst PRT during a visit to a local village Dec. 12.



Photo courtesy Paktya PRT

Spec. Brian Parent, C Co. 1/181, keeps close watch from the turret as he provides security for fellow members of Paktya PRT with a .50 caliber machine gun.

## A stroll around "the Gush"



Photo courtesy of Nuristan PRT

Spec. Jabdiel Fuentes, of B Co. 1/181, prepares to head out on a mission from FOB Kalagush with fellow members of Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team.





Photo by 1st Lt Nick Mercurio

From right, Staff Sgt. Jay Tooley, Senior Airman Adam Grant, Spec. Anthony Hurtado, Spec. Phillip Fletcher, Spec. Brian Cross and Sgt. Phillip Leab, all members of Kunar PRT, pose for a photo at the governor's compound Dec. 10. Grant is in the U.S. Air Force while the others are from A Co. 1/181.

## TEAMWORK

Photo by Tech Sgt. Matthew Lohr

Staff Sgt. Christopher Collins, of C Co. 1/181, secures his sector as fellow members of Khowst PRT visit a school in the Shembowat valley within the Nadar Shah Kot district the week of Dec. 19.



# Driving in Kabul doesn't drive them crazy

By Capt. John Quinn

CAMP PHOENIX, Afghanistan – Veterans of notorious roads like the Mass. Pike and Southeast Expressway back home find new challenges overseas by driving around the city of Kabul.

Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Justin Ouellette and Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Andre Biggs, of HHC's 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, both drive vehicles assigned to the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), which is tasked to be ready to bolster security around the camp, assist coalition forces and react to emergencies around the area.

As a result, the QRF has to navigate main thoroughfares such as Jalalabad Highway, a busy four-lane road which runs along the front of Camp Phoenix, to the various narrow side streets which are like a spider web around the city.

"It's definitely worse than Massachusetts," Biggs said, adding people commonly drive on the wrong side of the road in both places, but there are no traffic laws in Afghanistan.

While the armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) provides greater protection than the average car, it is also larger and heavier than other vehicles. Some of the more



Photos by Capt. John Quinn

prevalent ones include a variety of white Toyotas, armored SUVs, green pick-ups favored by Afghan police and ostentatious Jingle trucks, flatbed vehicles which are adorned with bells, chains and brightly colored murals and designs.

Ouellette said driving in Kabul is just as crazy as Kelly Square, a busy intersection in downtown Worcester, Mass.

"Rotaries – traffic circles – are pretty much gas and go," Ouellette said, adding Soldiers must balance safety and be considerate to travelers, local drivers and residents.

Since taking over, the members of the 1/181 have been driving to local hospitals, the airport and other sites around the Kabul Base Cluster, which includes Phoenix, the Alamo and Julian-Dubbs, to know the area within the city of four million residents.

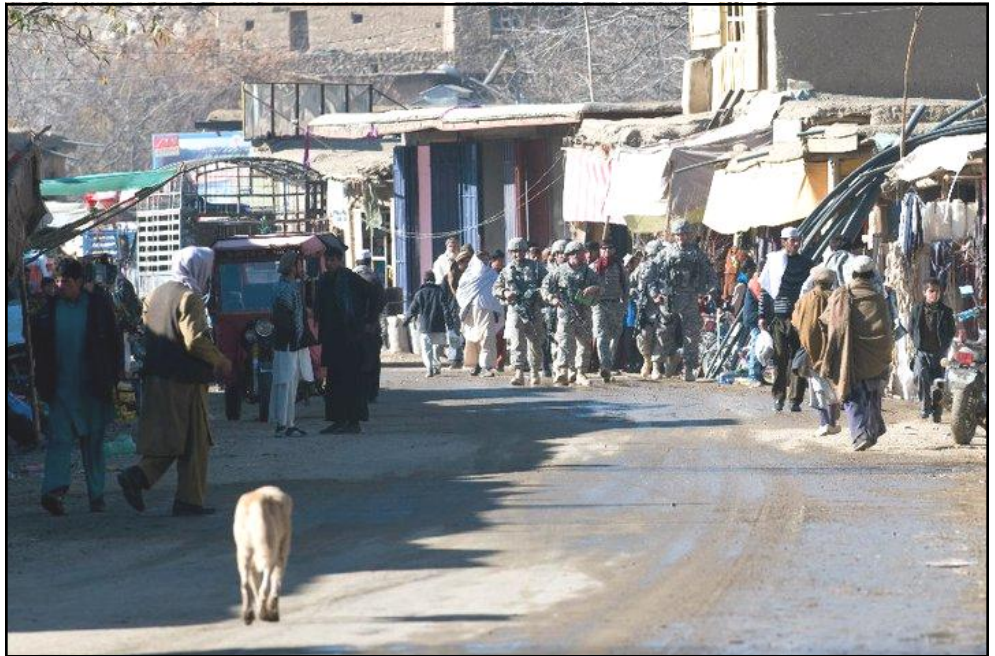


The Quick Reaction Force, top right, slowly winds their way through Camp Phoenix for a mission Jan. 4. The QRF must be prepared to navigate all kinds of roads, sometimes both narrow and steep in Kabul, as seen bottom left.





*Photo by Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier*  
Spec. Paul Grant, of Kapisa PRT, pulls security during a quality control inspection at the Bolaghain High School during a meeting Dec. 8. The PRT has been working with Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for 18 months to ensure the area has a facility to educate the children.



*Photo by Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier*  
Members of A Co. 1/181 with Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) conduct a dismounted patrol through the Nijrab bazaar Dec. 13. The PRT patrolled the bazaar to collect local feedback regarding recently completed development projects and their impact on the Nijrab population.



*Photo courtesy of Uruzgan PRT*  
Sgt. Benjamin Longvall, left, of A Co. 1/181, tests his medical skills as Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) conducts a mass casualty exercise with Australian Soldiers Dec. 28.

***Remember to always be safe at home,  
while on mission and everywhere  
in between. Accidents have no holidays.***



*Photo courtesy Nangarhar PRT*  
From left, Spec. John Matar, Pvt, 1st Class Jonathan Williams and Pvt, 1st Class Keith Perks, all of B Co. 1/181, place sand bags during Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team's bunker build up in the fall.



# Making a difference, seeing the impact

*HOPE continued from Page 1*

the Kuchis were neutral at best or even anti-American, but by bringing candy and providing basic medical attention, members of the squad earned the trust of the villagers.

"It kind of came naturally; they're just people," Grasso said, adding the biggest challenge was overcoming the language barrier to gain their trust.

"At first, they were scared to come up to us," Grasso said, recalling things began to change after the squad's medic, Pvt. Joshua Dextraze helped a young boy who had a large cut on his head.

Pvt. Jason Vongratsamy, who worked with Dextraze, said the medical attention encouraged others to be more open during subsequent visits. He added the biggest surprise was when they provided aid to

an elderly woman with a fever and girls with cuts.

Under the supervision of Kokan, Dextraze carefully helped them in a country where there is a clear separation between men and women, especially around outsiders, Vongratsamy said.

"It definitely taught us a lot about ourselves," Vongratsamy said, adding as a result, they are now openly greeted by the villagers – men, women and children.

The experience will serve as a foundation for the future for coalition forces and Afghans alike, Grasso said.

"It gave us the satisfaction that we were doing something good here," Grasso said, adding the Kuchis were not seeking help, but gradually accepted assistance.



*Photo by Sgt. Michael Keough*

Staff Sgt. William Munsell, of HHC 1/181, shares pictures of his family with the Kuchis, which is a sign of trust and friendship. Family bonds are very important to Afghans.

For more information about Operation Outreach Afghanistan, visit:

<http://opoutreach.org>



*Photo by Sgt. Michael Keough*

Members of HHC 1/181 worked together at Camp Phoenix Jan. 2 to organize the clothes, blankets and toys into bundles to make it easier to distribute the donations.

*Photo by Sgt. Michael Keough*

Below, 1st Lt. Alan Molin, executive officer for HHC 1/181, makes fast friends with the children as he distributes donations in the Kuchi village Jan. 3.



## Make the most of donations: blankets and books instead of a ball

Capt. Quentin Carmichael, who oversees civil-military operations for 1/181, said while all children want to play, it's more important to keep them warm.

"Kids love the toys, but they loved the blankets just as much and they're more useful," Carmichael said, adding a warm jacket, hat and pair of gloves will ensure the children have an easier time during the winter.

Carmichael said there is also a tremendous need for school supplies of all kinds to encourage students to learn.



# Spiritual Resolutions

The New Year is typically a time for new beginnings, new resolve. We resolve to cut back or start a new habit, a new exercise or diet regimen. We continue for a while and our zeal wanes. We also have spiritual resolutions and goals which we strive to keep. In the Christian Bible, there is a particular parable or story where someone resolved to do something (in the gospel of Luke chapter 16:1-6). A manager wasted his boss's money and was going to lose his job. He resolves to make amends and do his best to recover his boss's investment. As a result his boss praises him and even though he cost his master, he is given grace and another chance. We should emulate this steward when it comes to our relationship with God. We fail in our resolve, fail God and others every day. But we should still resolve to stick with our intent to do what is right. God will not fail, according to this text, to give us the second chance or third or fourth that we need. Amazingly this steward, this manager, was blessed even though he failed, because he set out to do what was right and did not give up. We too may see that blessing in our lives.

— Chaplain (1LT) Michael Moody



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson  
Sgt. Albert Smith, of D Co. 1/181 crosses a river during a dismounted mission to Khwazi village Dec. 14. Members of Zabul PRT visited the village to survey a site for a future well project.

## Leader's Corner

The Command Sergeant Major and I have been traveling throughout the Afghanistan Combined Theater of Operations to visit the 1/181 Soldiers who are part of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). The Soldiers are very busy. The quality of life varies with each location, but overall morale is high and the Soldiers are enjoying their experiences. Missions are conducted daily and the time is going by fairly quickly. The Headquarters Company platoons and staff at Camp Phoenix are also engaged and any spare time is taken by other activities at the base. Everyone was very thankful for all the Holiday cards, boxes of food and sundry items as well as wishes for a safe and meaningful tour. The generosity of family and friends back home is incredible. Many Soldiers were able to share items with others, which really brought about the Holiday spirit of giving.

At this point of the deployment we are almost at the half-way mark. We have begun the process to coordinate re-deployment activities and will be home before you know it. Elements of the Battalion are maintaining vigilance and focus in a variety of ways, including aspects of rotating locations, roles and responsibilities to ensure we do not become complacent in our efforts. Additionally, the opportunity to take rest and recuperation leave is upon us. Although leave is a benefit, the short period may bring additional stress to both Soldiers and family members. The adjustment to being together again is a process, and two weeks will go by extremely fast. Communicate and respect the fact that living apart for the past six months has created a new sense of normalcy for everyone of the family. Try to manage your expectations, take things slowly and do things in moderation. Remember safety and to conduct an internal risk assessment with all activities. Above all, make the best of short time together and enjoy being with family and friends.

Keep Your Powder Dry!

— Lt. Col. Tony Couture (Powder Horn 6)

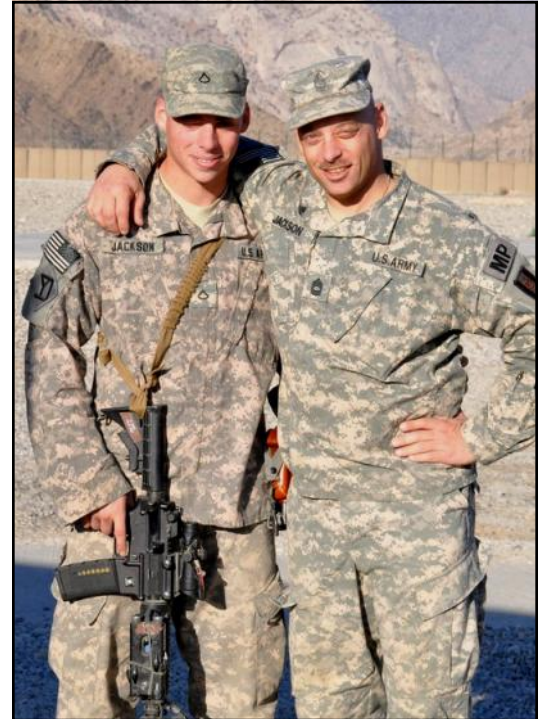


Photo by Chief Master Sgt. Richard Simonsen  
Pvt. 1st Class William Jackson, left, of B Co. 1/181, and his father Master Sgt. Brian Jackson, from the 94th MP Co., also from Massachusetts, pose for a photo at Forward Operating Base Kalagush Dec. 18. Jackson traveled to Nuristan PRT to surprise his son during the holidays.



The 1/181 earned the Ardennes-Alsace streamer for action during the Battle of the Bulge, where allied forces held their ground from Dec. 16, 1944-Jan. 25, 1945 following a surprise counter-attack by the Germans. The frigid offensive, which occurred in Belgium, was a milestone during World War II.

