

Official Publication of Task Force Bastogne

# BASTOGNE

MAGAZINE

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# Continue to fight and stay strong

It seems like yesterday we were stepping off the plane in Afghanistan, ready to begin our mission. The selfless service you have displayed in the face of insurgents who have unsuccessfully attempted to deter us from the mission at hand has been inspiring to myself, the Afghan people and indeed the world at large. Thanks to your efforts, the world's newest democracy is beginning to evolve. You can take great pride in what you have accomplished in your year here. I am proud to be your commander!

## Commander's Corner

You, together with our Afghan National Security Force partners, have made history during the past 10 months with operations such as Azmaray Fury, Strong Eagle, Bulldog Bite, Eagle Claw,

Northern Avalanche, and over 1,000 others.

The past two months have not been without hardship and sacrifice. We have lost Bastogne heroes. All of them answered the call to defend our freedom and assist the Afghan people as they fight for their own. We will be forever in their debt; they will not be forgotten.

We must remain persistent and aggressive as we take the fight to the insurgents, setting the security conditions that provide the Afghans the opportunity to focus on governance and development. We need to ensure we continue to dig deep and continue our counter-insurgency operations up until the day we leave, giving the enemies of Afghanistan no respite.

As we begin the final stage of our deployment, it is time to push to finish strong. We owe it to ourselves, to Task Force Bronco who will carry on from where we leave off, and the Afghan people. We cannot rest on what we have accomplished. There is no such thing as coasting to the finish. Stay focused on the fight as you prepare for your approaching homecoming with Family and friends back at Fort Campbell, Ky.

As we approach the end of the deployment, I'd like to thank the Family and friends of the Bastogne Brigade for the support and encouragement you have given us throughout our deployment. You have played a vital role in our successes here in Afghanistan. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the Bastogne Brigade Combat Team. We ask that you too remain vigilant in your efforts in supporting your Soldier spouses. We are at a point where we will need your continued efforts and support as we make our transition back home.

Thank you all for your hard work. Continue the fight and stay strong.

Bastogne! Air Assault!



Col. Andrew P. Poppas  
Task Force Bastogne Commander

# Stay vigilant and remain focused

Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen,

As this is the last TF Bastogne magazine for OEF XI I want to start by saying how deeply honored I have been to serve alongside the greatest Warriors in the history of armed conflict! Each and every one of you has inspired me throughout this difficult combat deployment. You should be rightfully proud of the mission we have accomplished, and I know the country of Afghanistan and our U.S. Citizens are thankful and inspired by what you have accomplished.

## COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR'S CORNER

Even though the Task Force Bastogne mission is coming to an end, we have not yet crossed the finish line,

and there is much left to accomplish. I ask that all stay vigilant and remain focused as our enemies would like nothing more than to take back even the smallest bit of the huge gains we have accomplished.

The conditions and terrain remain as difficult as ever, and with the upcoming relief in place comes a lot more moving pieces. Safety is paramount and has to be prioritized at every level. Do not rush to failure, continue to utilize the battle buddy system, and ensure that leadership is positioned in all the right places.

Lack of equipment accountability and lost critical items is not an option. Ensure that we take the time to properly lay out, inspect and clean all equipment. What we take back to Fort Campbell has to be at 10-20 standards, what we leave behind for the Warriors that are continuing the fight has to be even better! Our operational tempo will not slack up. Packing out at the same time, we are adjusting stay-behind equipment, and the overall battle space is a juggling act that can't be accomplished unless the entire team is focused and tuned in.

With re-deployment, comes some required individual preparations. I ask that you all lean forward and assist each other during the transition back to the States, reverse SRP and into some well-deserved leave. For those that are redeploying for the first time, the transition is uncomfortable at times. Let's all lean on each other and ensure that we are doing the right things. You have all worked and fought to damn hard to throw it all away doing dangerous or illegal activities.

Again, I could not be prouder to have served with those throughout our entire task force, and I wish the units staying behind in support of Task Force Bronco continued success and safety! We will never forget our Brothers and Sisters lost during OEF XI, and I ask that all continue to stay in contact with Gold Star Families and our Wounded Warriors spread throughout the United States.



Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin R. Benson  
Task Force Bastogne Command Sergeant Major

"Honor and Country"

CSM Kevin R. Benson





Sgt. Rickey D. Cupp, a service and recovery sergeant from Albertville, Ala., assigned to Forward Support Company G, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, Task Force Balls, ground guides a wrecker back toward a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle with a flat tire during a recent convoy in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province Feb. 28. The Soldiers travelled on what The New York Times dubbed as one of the most dangerous roads in Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, 210th MPAD, Task Force Bastogne)

FULL STORY, See Page 9

Cover photo: During a quiet moment overlooking farmers in their fields, U.S. Army Spc. Damian C. Caldino, a food service specialist from Oxnard, Calif., assigned to Forward Support Company G, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, Task Force Balls, pulls guard at Forward Operating Base Hughe in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province Feb. 24. Caldino has been in the military for more than 11 years. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, 210th MPAD, TF Bastogne)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 ANA assumes control of FOB Blessing in Pech
- 5 Bandit wraps up operations in northern Kunar
- 7 Taskmasters supply, repair, heal
- 9 Taking most dangerous road in Afghanistan: TF Balls helps realign Pech River Valley
- 12 Relatives reunite in Chowkay after 48 years
- 13 Nangarhar leaders stress importance of maintenance
- 14 Soldiers rip up, rebuild old Afghan roads
- 15 Battalion gives 'No Slack' to their enemies
- 17 PRT, ADT women help celebrate Women's Day in Kunar
- 19 TF Spartan secures, assists near AF-PAK border
- 22 Fallen Heroes

# ANA assumes control of FOB Blessing in Pech

By Capt. Jonathan J. Springer

TF Bulldog Public Affairs Representative

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The Afghan National Army took a major step toward responsibility for their country's security when it assumed control of Forward Operating Base Blessing in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province from a U.S. Army battalion March 4.

Afghan soldiers now safeguard one of Kunar Province's most volatile areas, the Pech River Valley, which lies near the border of Pakistan. Although FOB Blessing is not the first base transferred to the Afghan National Army, it is the largest transferred to date. Additionally, while not a part of the United States' overall plan for transition of security to Afghanistan by 2014, the transfer represents a significant milestone in the Regional Command-East's and Combined Joint Task Force-101's plans for increased security and flexibility in the region.

During a brief ceremony, Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, lowered the American flag while U.S. Army and Afghan National Army soldiers from the 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 201st Corps looked on. The Afghan flag remained raised throughout the ceremony. The U.S. and Afghan soldiers have lived together at FOB Blessing for the past three years.

Lt. Col. Joseph Ryan, commander, 1-327th and the commander of FOB Blessing for the last 10 months, praised the Afghan soldiers and their leadership.

"The soldiers of the

2nd Kandak are our brothers; we've fought alongside them for the last 10 months and they've proven that they are ready to assume this great responsibility," said Ryan. "On behalf of Soldiers from five U.S. Army Infantry Battalions who previously served in the Pech River Valley, and servicemen from the U.S. Marines, Navy, and Air Force, I am proud to officially transfer command of Forward Operating Base Blessing to the Afghan National Army."

Command Sgt. Maj. Mohammed Afzal, the Afghan battalion's top enlisted soldier, also expressed confidence in the ability of his soldiers to defend and hold Blessing.

"We are more than ready to take over this area," Afzal said. "I'm proud to know that we've reached this point and are taking over the security responsibilities. We have trained and fought for this day, and finally it has come."

The final U.S. flag to fly over FOB Blessing, and a marble plaque commemorating Sgt. Jay Blessing, killed in action, Nov. 14, 2003, in the Pech Valley and for whom the FOB was named, will remain with the 1-327th as they return to Fort Campbell, Ky., later this Spring.



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, take down the final American flag to fly over Forward Operating Base Blessing during a transfer of authority ceremony March 4. Afghan soldiers now safeguard one of Kunar Province's most volatile areas – the Pech River Valley – which lies near the border of Pakistan. U.S. and Afghan Soldiers have lived together at FOB Blessing for the past three years. (Photo by Capt. Jonathan J. Springer, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Bulldog)

PUBLICATION STAFF:  
Commander, 1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division..... Col. Andrew P. Poppas  
CSM, 1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division..... Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin R. Benson  
1st BCT Public Affairs Officer, Editor-in-Chief, Bastogne Magazine..... Lt. Col. Mary Constantino  
1st BCT Public Affairs Officer, Senior Editor, Bastogne Magazine..... Sgt. 1st Class Paula Taylor  
1st BCT Public Affairs Journalist, Editor, Bastogne Magazine..... Spc. Richard Daniels Jr.  
210th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment ..... Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell

UNIT PA REPRESENTATIVES  
1-327th Infantry Regiment..... Capt. Jonathan Springer  
2-327th Infantry Regiment..... Maj. Carl Purgerson  
1-32nd Cavalry Regiment..... Capt. Alex Torres  
2-320th Field Artillery Regiment..... 1st Lt. Michael Kellogg  
1st Special Troops Battalion..... Capt. Natalie Meng  
426th Brigade Support Battalion..... 1st Lt. Emily Baker  
1-61st Cavalry Regiment..... Capt. Jesse Estrada

PA OFFICERS  
Kunar Agribusiness Development Team..... Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn  
Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team..... Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio  
Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team..... 2nd Lt. Chase McFarland  
Nangarhar Agribusiness Development Team..... Capt. Marie Orlando  
Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team..... Air Force 1st Lt. Casey Osborne  
Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team..... Air Force Master Sgt. Richard Simonsen

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SUBMISSIONS: Any Soldier or civilian assigned to the 1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division, are eligible to submit stories and photos to the senior editor at: paula.k.taylor@afghan.swa.army.mil. Stories must be written in Associated Press style writing. Photos must have complete cutline information, including: full name, job title, unit, hometown and state, and a brief description of what is happening in the photo. For questions about submissions, please contact the 1st BCT Public Affairs Office.





KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Soldiers assigned to 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry regiment, Task Force Bandit, look out across a valley during combat operations in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Feb. 18. (Photo by Pfc. Cameron Boyd, Task Force Bastogne)

## Bandit wraps up operations in northern Kunar

By Capt. Alex Torres

*TF Bandit Public Affairs Representative*

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - The 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Bandit, conducted counterinsurgency operations in four districts within two remote provinces in northeastern Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom 10-11.

"We established security through numerous offensive operations and the judicious application of joint direct and indirect fires, to help improve governance by enabling local leaders," said Capt. Richard Eaton, commander, Troop A, from Chicago. "By mid-July, the squadron had made clear improvements in security, governance and development in Naray and Ghaziabad Districts by expanding local government."

As the first two months of operations came to a close for 1-32 Cav. Rgmt., the unit encountered five improvised explosive device attacks. "Troop A was given the task to establish a joint

check point called CP 2.5, with Afghan Border Police in the vicinity of the IED strikes," explained Eaton. "The CP gave the squadron continuous observation on portions of a main supply route that were previously hidden from observation points due to the rugged terrain along the route."

Due to its emplacement directly in line with a historical insurgent smuggling route, CP 2.5 quickly came under heavy machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire almost immediately after its occupation, further validating the tactical importance of the check point.

In July, insurgent forces occupied Barge Matal, an isolated, but politically significant village in a region of the squadron's area of operations that was accessible only by air.

To help rid the area of insurgent activity, the squadron began Operation Azmaray Fury July 26. TF Bandit, augmented with Soldiers from 1st and 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Rgmts., and Afghan National Security Forces elements, conducted an

air assault into the village in order to secure the population from the aggression of insurgent forces.

"We, along with our Afghan National Security Forces partners, rapidly seized the objective and conducted a follow-on mission in the Mandigal Valley," said 1st Lt. Joshua Pearson, platoon leader, from Youngstown, Ohio. "Several days later, ANSF and TF Bandit cleared the villages of Badmuk and Bachancha, decisively defeating insurgent forces. We secured the objective and neutralized about 30-40 enemy fighters in the process."

On Sept. 18, TF Bandit assisted in the parliamentary elections by defending polling sites, securing a main supply route and pursuing insurgents attempting to disrupt the electoral process.

"While we helped with indirect fires, the ANSF secured their own polling sites on election day. Troop B was set in over watch in case help was needed, but the [Afghan National Police] and [Afghan National Army] did a great job defending the polling sites themselves," said Capt. David

Jones, commander of Troop B from Tyler, Texas. "It was important for the population to see that the ANSF were capable of standing against the Taliban, and the ANP especially were much more confident after they realized what they had accomplished."

For TF Bandit, many accomplishments were measurable, and the list, said Sgt. 1st Class Jason Wenzel, the squadron battle captain, is impressive.

"By the numbers, the squadron killed an estimated 130 fighters in 327 engagements; completed 661 indirect fire missions involving more than 5,000 projectiles; and awarded over 28 Purple Hearts, 13 valor awards and 205 combat badges," said Wenzel, an Elkhart, Ind., native.

"The squadron also devoted 50 projects and \$3 million toward development, treated 135 trauma patients at its aid stations with a 100 percent survival rate, treated more than 5,000 patients, and completed 2,700 air resupply missions that involved the movement of 2 million pounds of equipment," Wenzel added.



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Sgt. Christopher Resmondo, a medic assigned to 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry regiment, Task Force Bandit, examines a young child during a clinic held for local villagers in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Feb. 17. (Photo by Pfc. Cameron Boyd, Task Force Bastogne)



# Taskmasters supply, repair, heal

By 1st Lt. Emily Baker

TF Taskmaster Public Affairs Representative

Throughout the deployment, the 426th Brigade Support Battalion, Task Force Taskmaster, was overall responsible for keeping the 1st Brigade Combat Team, TF Bastogne, supplied with food, water, equipment and ammunition, as well as ensuring the Soldiers received the proper medical care necessary to maintain good health across the battle field.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company oversaw the Base Defense Operations Center, Quick Reaction Force and guard tower Soldiers for the perimeter defense of Forward Operating Base Fenty.

The headquarters company was also responsible for providing input on the development of an integrated base defense plan that encompassed all tenant units on the FOB and oversaw \$2 million in force protection improvements, thus enhancing FOB security.

Company A was responsible for providing all classes of supply for TF Bastogne and for ensuring the brigade received vital food, water and parts across the battle field.

“Our company conducted nearly 300 sling load operations and numerous emergency resupply missions throughout the brigade’s area of operations,” said 2nd Lt. Carly Berner, platoon leader for sling load operations. “The Soldiers in my platoon worked tirelessly around the clock to make sure all our sister battalions and cavalry squadron had everything they needed to sustain the fight. We were able to deliver everything from water to heavy weapons to vehicles and ammo—whatever they needed, my Soldiers were there to make sure it got delivered as quickly and safely as possible. There was never a challenge they couldn’t overcome,” the Media, Penn., native added.

Co. A also processed over 3.3 million rounds of ammunition necessary to support the brigade’s needs and partnered with and trained Afghan National Army soldiers on basic Soldiering skills. Teaming up with 426th Battalion Headquarter’s Quick Reaction Force, Co. A participated in all of the Bastogne over watch missions by providing three crews and gun trucks to secure necessary resupply patrols.

Company B was responsible for maintenance and

recovery operations. They set the standard for TF Bastogne on inspecting host-nation fuel and cargo trucks, evaluating the reliability of these trucks as they were escorted by 426th BSB on missions.

Co. B’s service and recovery section modified bar armor to fit their wreckers, which provided the recovery teams with much-needed protection against rocket propelled grenades.

“In our section, we have completed many critical fabrications,” said Staff Sgt. Jason Lawson, B Co. service and recovery section noncommissioned officer in charge, from Maysville, Ky. Lawson said he and his

team completed enhancements on vehicles, as well as on the perimeter guard towers, by using bar armor and other materials to allow additional protection for the Soldiers.

The Soldiers assigned to Company C were responsible for patient care, FOB security, ANA training and various clinical inspections. They were comprised of the following elements: Treatment and Evacuation Team, x-ray, lab, dental, physical therapy, occupational therapy, mental health, Medical Training Team, preventive medicine, Brigade Medical Supply Office, Unit Supply and Command Post.

“During the deployment, Co. C saw nearly 4,900 walk-in patients for various care,” said 1st Lt. Natasha Geitz, executive officer for the 426th BSB medical company, a La Valle, Wis., native. “The ancillary staff was kept busy conducting almost 6,900 x-rays, more than 2,000 lab tests, more than 900 dental exams, nearly 7,000 prescriptions filled, more than 1,200 physical therapy consults/treatments, more than 200 occupational therapy treatments and nearly 2,000 behavioral health consults. We also received 572 MEDEVACs and evacuated 360 personnel out.”

To ensure all elements within the medical company and their entire area of operations were able to continue care, the medical supply office issued more than 17,000 medical supply items, preformed multiple medical repairs and services, and conducted nearly 15 Pharmacy and Medical Supply Staff-assisted Visits, while the preventive medicine staff conducted nearly 500 inspections and 240 water sample tests

that have helped to ensure proper water supply and cleanliness to all Soldiers throughout our AO.

“Our medical training team was also responsible for training the ANA Soldiers and ANP on medical procedures by conducting an eight-week course,” said Sgt. Tony MacDonald, emergency medical technician from Gowen, Mich. “Our course is a full-spectrum EMT class, based off the EMT-B course, which U.S. Army Soldiers complete before becoming medics. Our students learned everything from basic anatomy to combat trauma care and even some preventative medicine. At the completion of the course, students were able to save lives. Some of our students have actually been tested in real-world (situations). They acted without any hesitation and treated their own Soldiers, following an over watch mission where their convoy was attacked. This confirms the validation of our course; I can dare say I’m even a little proud.”



Capt. Jeremy Spruce of Fort Campbell, Ky., Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander, 1st Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Spartan shakes hands with Malik Nimat, a District Development authority, during ceremony at Forward Operating Base Fenty in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province Aug. 21. The 426th Brigade Support Battalion, Task Force Taskmaster, invited local Afghan leaders to celebrate an Iftar, a ceremony for breaking fast during Ramadan, and discuss issues. (Photo by Spc. Richard Daniels Jr., Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)



A sling load operator assigned to Company A, 426th Brigade Support Battalion, Sgt. Brett Madera, a storage section noncommissioned officer in charge, watches his supply load take off after he and his Soldier, Spc. Jeremy Wade, an aerial delivery specialist, attached pallets of supplies to a Chinook helicopter on Forward Operating Base Fenty Dec. 8, 2010. Wade, a Carrollton, Ga., native, and Madera, a Pittsburg native, conduct sling load operations for the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. During the 426th BSB's 12-month deployment, more than 300 sling loads were carried throughout the battlefield, hauling ammo, weapons, vehicles and numerous other types of supplies needed by their sister battalions in order to sustain the Soldiers of Task Force Bastogne. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Carly Berner, 426th Brigade Support Battalion)

# Taking Most Dangerous Road in Afghanistan: TF Balls Helps Realign Pech River Valley

By Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell

210th MPAD, TF Bastogne

Tortured mountains and skeletal vehicles litter the pock-marked Jalalabad-Kabul highway as it snakes its way along the Kabul Gorge between the Hindu Kush Mountains.

As the last leg of the famed Grand Trunk Highway, it is an essential route for caravans heading into Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul. Late Feb. 28, it was an essential route for Soldiers from Forward Support Company G, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, Task Force Balls, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, escorting a convoy through the shadow of the mountains.

"I had faith in our guys' ability," said Capt. Jose M. Gamboa, Co. G commander. "The whole unknown of what we were about to go through, you really couldn't describe it to somebody and have them grasp the whole magnitude of what we were facing."

The highway's hairpin turns and sharp drops contrast the natural beauty of the surrounding mountains. Dubbed the most dangerous road in Afghanistan by The New York Times, the tension mounted with the elevation as the convoy pressed on. Vehicles ignored posted speed limit signs and gravity as snow began to fall, making the roads slippery and even more unpredictable.

"The Afghan driver is a greedy type of driver with everyone jockeying for position

as if it were a horse race," added Gamboa, who is from Crestview, Fla. "That type of mentality makes it difficult to drive." After passing a burned-out vehicle, the convoy rounded the first hairpin turn and it became clear that these Soldiers were in for a long haul.

"You're talking about an operator driving an extremely heavy vehicle in extreme conditions," explained Gamboa. "Once we got to that first hairpin, we saw the lights up on the mountain, not knowing where the road was or who was up there, not knowing the tightness of the curves... It starts to hit you."

With just about seven feet to maneuver past gridlocked trucks hugging the side of the mountain, there isn't much room for error.

The cliffs dropped off into complete darkness as the vehicles slowly made their way up the mountainside. "Most of my guys have multiple deployments. For some of them, it's their first deployment," said Gamboa, "but my guys have seen a lot and experienced a lot in the past 11 months to help them navigate those tight spots."

The Co. G Soldiers' mission was to escort seven Afghan trucks carrying supplies from the realignment of the Pech River Valley bases from Jalalabad Airfield back to Bagram Airfield via Kabul. Just then, the convoy reached a dark tunnel about 300 meters long and the Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles couldn't go any further. The tunnel was packed with stalled trucks.

"It was the longest tunnel of the route," Gamboa said. "That was the decision point. Our MRAPs are wide and bulky. The jinga trucks didn't pull all the way to the side, because if they have a high load, then they'll scrape the top of the tunnel."

Taking decisive action, while always mindful of a Taliban ambush, the Soldiers dismounted their MRAPs to coax the sleeping trucks out of hibernation. "They went to the other side of the tunnel and told them to back up and hug the side of the tunnel," said Gamboa. "Then at the entrance portion, they had pushed them forward."

"A little nerve-wracking isn't it?" said 1st Lt. Todd C. Castles, a platoon leader from Greenwood, S.C. "A lot of these trucks, I don't see how they're going to make it."

With a cacophony of horns, Pashtu, Dari and English, the trucks slowly were repositioned to make room for the convoy to squeeze through.

After a precious half hour slipped by, emerging from the tunnel was a small victory. Yet, the jagged drop and crumbling infrastructure of the road up ahead didn't spell relief for the Soldiers just yet.

"It's OK to be scared but, more or less, it's how you handle it," said Castles. "You can see down the cliff and there's no end in sight... None of the other roads we've traveled are this slim."

Hulking MRAP tires squeaked over the asphalt while skirting the edge of the road.



As the snow falls, Spc. David A. Brooks, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialist from Virginia Beach, Va., assigned to Forward Support Company G, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, Task Force Balls, provides security during a recent convoy in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province Feb. 28. The convoy from Jalalabad to Bagram Airfield took more than 12 hours. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, 210th MPAD, TF Bastogne)

"Some of the turns are real tough, the terrain is real rough," explained Spc. Tommy J. Porter, a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic from Warren, Mich. "I probably had a couple of inches on either side from smashing into the Jinga trucks."

Porter, driving a heavy expanded mobility tactical truck wrecker, maneuvered one of the heaviest vehicles on the road. Squeezing between the Afghan trucks pushed against the mountain and the deadly fall of the steep cliffs, Porter had a unique perspective.

"When I'm making tight turns, our cab was going over the side of the mountain," said Porter. "Our

wrecker has its wheels behind the cab, so my wheels are actually still on the mountain while my cab is looking over the edge."

Zigzagging back and forth up to about 5,000 feet, the convoy slowly crested the mountain, leaving behind the other vehicles to fend for themselves as the fog descended.

"The weather is pretty cold, pretty crappy, there's snow everywhere," said Castles. "We're moving at 5 mph. Also, we're all pretty tired, 'cause we've been up close to 24 hours. The road sucks, it's muddy with lots of bumps."

After more than 12 hours of driving, the Soldiers finally

turned off the highway toward the security of Bagram Airfield.

"I don't even know if there's a word for how tired I am," said Castles over the drone of his MRAP. "You can't really quit, you get to the point where you want to, but you can't until we get inside the FOB. It's a weird feeling."

Safely inside Bagram Airfield, the Soldiers said goodbye to their Afghan trucks and headed for hot chow and sleep. The next day, they played cards, napped and did maintenance on their trucks preparing for the long ride back through the most dangerous road in Afghanistan.





# RELATIVES REUNITE IN CHOWKAY AFTER 48 YEARS

By Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn

734th ADT Public Affairs

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – It took 48 years and an unusual set of coincidences, but a U.S. linguist born here found her beloved sister-in-law during an animal care training seminar for Afghan women in the Chowkay District Jan. 31.

U.S. linguist Shafiqah Ansary, 54, of Union City, Calif., attended the training in her capacity as an English-Pashto interpreter. She normally works for the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team, but was detailed that day to assist the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, which conducted the animal care training.

According to Ansary, she did not know the training would take place in Chowkay until she arrived at the training site. During introductions at the beginning of the class, Ansary mentioned that her brother-in-law was from Chowkay, and that she had spent a considerable amount of time in Chowkay herself until the age of 6. Ansary then began recalling the names of family members she had spent time with in Chowkay, including her sister's husband's sister, Qadriah.

A woman attending the class told Ansary, "Qadriah still lives here! I'll go get her."

Less than a half-hour later, Qadriah arrived, and the training briefly stopped amid a flurry of hugs, kisses and tearful remembrances. Qadriah quietly attended the remainder of the training, and afterward, she and Ansary reminisced.

"When I was just a little girl, I would sit by Qadriah's tandoor (oven) for hours and she would bake me the most delicious corn bread," Ansary



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – U.S. linguist Shafiqah Ansary of Union City, Calif., reunites with Qadriah, her sister's husband's sister, after a 48-year separation, during an animal care training seminar for women conducted by the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team in the Chowkay District Jan. 31. (Photo by Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn, 734th ADT Public Affairs)

said. "I never dreamed that I would see her again.

"My family moved to Kabul when I was 6," Ansary continued. "I married when I was 18, and my husband and I lived in the U.S. for several years in the '70s while he finished his doctorate. We left Afghanistan for good when I was 23, after the revolution," she added. "When I decided to become a linguist, I had no idea I would come back to this place and find dear Qadriah."

Qadriah expressed equal astonishment at becoming reacquainted with Ansary, and she reflected on the reunion's larger personal implications.

"So many of my family were killed or became refugees during the revolution and civil war," Qadriah said. "When I look at Shafiqah, I see my entire family."

Qadriah also described the reunion with Ansary as a symbol of the positive nature of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

"If the U.S. had not come here, I would never have seen Shafiqah again," Qadriah said. "We are poor people and we need so many things that only the Americans are helping us with."

Left photo: KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – U.S. linguist Shafiqah Ansary of Union City, Calif., embraces Qadriah, her sister's husband's sister, after a 48-year separation, during an animal care training seminar for women conducted by the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team in the Chowkay District Jan. 31. (Photo by Air Force Capt. Peter Shinn, 734th ADT Public Affairs)





Nangarhar's Provincial Development Council met at the governor's compound, Feb. 23, to discuss how they can better sustain their facilities. (Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Casey Osborne, Nangarhar PRT Public Affairs)

## Nangarhar leaders stress importance of maintenance

By Air Force 1st Lt. Casey Osborne

*Nangarhar PRT Public Affairs*

The Nangarhar Provincial Development Council met at the governor's compound, Feb. 23, to discuss the importance of maintaining their structures in order to increase the government's service delivery capability.

Deputy Governor Mohammad Alam Ishaqzai appointed a special delegation consisting of representatives from the departments of economics, urban development, health and women's affairs, as well as the Provincial Council, to present a report at next month's PDC illustrating how the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan can better sustain their current facilities.

Coalition forces in Nangarhar have recently begun stressing the importance of operations and maintenance budgets to GIRoA, said Air Force Lt. Col. Michael Anderson, Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team Commander from Dallas. Today's meeting represented a positive step towards them embracing that mentality.

Ishaqzai listed a number of buildings that the government had control over that have fallen into disrepair, including roads, parks, schools, courthouses and clinics.

"There are so many things we have built, but we don't maintain them," Ishaqzai said. "We have schools with broken windows. We have clinics that cost American tax dollars that we don't use."

Ishaqzai noted that GIRoA often forgets the buildings they already have once they're constructed, preferring to

look forward to the next project rather than safeguarding the one they just completed. He said he was "ashamed" of the state some of the government's buildings were in.

"We need to start improvements ourselves," he said. "We need to take practical steps or this country will go nowhere."

The Provincial Council representative at the meeting, Lal Mohammad Durni, echoed Ishaqzai's words, asserting that the council was equally disappointed with the current state of affairs.

"The PC wants quality, we do not want quantity," said Durni. "We will only invest in quality projects in the future."

Ishaqzai stressed to the council that by not treating their facilities with respect, the government as a whole was failing the citizens of Afghanistan.



Nangarhar's deputy governor, Mohammad Alam Ishaqzai, appointed a delegation to travel the province and determine how to better sustain their buildings during the Provincial Development Council meeting, Feb. 23, at the governor's compound. (Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Casey Osborne, Nangarhar PRT Public Affairs)

## Soldiers rip up, rebuild old Afghan roads

By Spc. Richard Daniels Jr.

*Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs*

Engineers attached to 1st Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Bastogne, in cooperation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Afghan National Security Forces began rebuilding damaged roads in the Khogyani and Sherzad Districts of Nangarhar Province in early February.

The process began by tearing up the old surfaces damaged by frequent roadside bombs. The damaged roads made travel to Jalalabad city difficult for those living in the area.

The job of tearing up the old road falls to Capt. Jason Rolling of Marquette, Mich., commander of the 1430th Engineer Company. In addition to off loading equipment, his team also looks for and removes command wires or detonation cord that could be attached to old improvised explosive devices.

"That's the intent of this ripping, to get down deep enough to find these wires, to find this (detonation) cord," said Rolling. "... Rip it all up ... grade it back out ... and pack it all down."

Members of the 1430th Eng. Co., horizontal construction engineers, and the 744th Eng. Co., 54th Eng. Battalion, perform route clearance patrols and complete the road repair while Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 61st Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Panther provide security.

That cooperation and combined effort are a big part of the project, according to U.S. Army Lt. Col. William B. Johnson of Bristol, Tenn., squadron commander for TF Panther.

The approximately \$5 million effort includes six projects spanning the nearly 43 kilometers between the two districts – three asphalt and three cobblestone.

"The local people have already expressed appreciation for the work we're doing,"

said Johnson. "They are very excited about having a better road that will hold up in the rainy season, that won't wash out, that'll prevent insurgents from putting bombs in the road, so it's safer for (travellers)."

The Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army will provide security on the road with checkpoints, patrols and continued interaction with the locals.

"In addition, police in the Memla area will continue to do local patrols and provide security in the area when the roadwork is finished and continue to over watch the route while the Afghan contractors come in to do the long-term paving," he continued. "We will rely upon them to provide security for the local Afghan contractors that do the improvements to the route."

The project is scheduled to be completed mid-March.

"I'm also proud to have such motivated and dedicated Afghan forces to partner with, to take responsibility for their own security in this area and improve things for their own people," said Johnson. "They are a great team, great partners to work with, and I look forward to continuing to work with them."



The 1430th Engineer Company, horizontal construction engineers, and the 744th Engineer Company, 54th Engineer Battalion, in cooperation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Afghan National Security Forces, begin the process to tear up and rebuild the routes in eastern Afghanistan's Khogyani and Sherzad Districts after clearing the roads of roadside bombs Feb. 8. The approximately \$5 million project includes six separate projects – three asphalt and three cobblestone – spanning nearly 43 kilometers. (Photo courtesy of the Task Force Panther)





KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - After finding some cover behind an outcrop of rocks, Cpl. Justin L. Gessert, an infantry team leader from Marshfield, Wis., assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, pulls security in the Shalay Valley of eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Nov. 4. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, 210th MPAD, Task Force Bastogne)



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Sgt. James T. Schmidt, an infantry squad leader from Decatur, Ill., assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force No Slack, pulls security while on patrol in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province Nov. 4. On his right wrist, Schmidt wears a memorial bracelet for his nine fallen comrades from his previous platoon's deployment to Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark Burrell, 210th MPAD, Task Force Bastogne)

## *Battalion gives ‘No Slack’ to their enemies*

**By Maj. Carl Purgerson**

*TF No Slack Public Affairs Representative*

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Spanning 10 districts of the Kunar Province and monitoring more than 50 miles of the Pakistan border, Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, conducted more than 3,200 sustained and continuous combat operations throughout their deployment.

“[The unit’s] efforts, along all the lines of operation, governance, development and security, left a positive and enduring impact on the people of Afghanistan,” said Capt. Steven Carmichael of Lansing, Kan., commander, Company D. “Had it not been for the selfless sacrifice of [our] Soldiers, the forward progress in the Kunar Province would have failed and caused a major setback in the re-building of Afghanistan.”

Comprised of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, three rifle companies, a heavy weapons company, and a forward support company, the battalion

depended heavily on the training, abilities, and professionalism of their Soldiers to get the job done.

“The heavy weapons company was detached for the majority of the deployment, but all six of our companies contributed to the success of the battalion in the [1st BCT] area of operations,” said Maj. William Rockefeller of Virginia Beach, Va., battalion operations officer. “Combined, these six companies safely drove: more than 270 miles per week to conduct more than 3,000 patrols; more than 130 company, battalion, and brigade-level missions; and 50 recovery missions. They also issued more than 3 million gallons of fuel, moved 20 million tons of supplies, coordinated 200 host-nation truck requests, and served nearly 1.5 million meals over the course of the deployment.”

Shortly after arriving in Afghanistan, the 2-327th Inf. Bn., Task Force No Slack, was tasked with conducting Operation Strong Eagle—a two part, planned operation that tested the wills and intestinal fortitude of the Soldiers.

“The first part of the operation, which began in June, was a deliberate attack against enemy positions

in Marawara that were threatening the provincial capital of Asadabad,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Fields, the battalion’s senior enlisted leader from Ventura, Calif. “Simultaneously, Taliban forces attacked all three blocking positions on the high ground as well as opening a ferocious volume of fire on the ground assault, disabling the lead two vehicles and blocking the assault. The Recon Platoon, nearly overrun, fought off wave after wave of enemy attacks. With vehicles disabled, the assault force bravely continued the attack on foot, clearing up the valley.”

For four weeks, the battalion continued to secure the village and the blocking positions to prevent the enemy from reclaiming the town.

“Strong Eagle I was a necessary step that had to be taken for Afghan National Security Forces and coalition forces to provide a more secure environment for the citizens of Dardam,” said Staff Sgt. Matthew Sviben, battalion battle noncommissioned officer from Micco, Fla. “My job as the battle NCO was to track both coalition and Afghan forces on the ground, relay information, and assist in the coordination of assets and supplies to the units in the fight.”

In July, for Operation Strong Eagle II, the battalion air assaulted into the village of Chinari to clear and expand the reach of the provincial government, further diminishing the influence of the Taliban.

“Strong Eagle II was the final operation that set the tone for future operations in the Kunar Province,” said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Stearns, battalion battle NCO, an Alexander City, Ala., native. “It allowed ANSF to establish a foothold and secure an area that was previously a strong point for attacks by Taliban and insurgent fighters.”

“Throughout both operations, the extraordinary heroism, dogged determination, gallantry, and indomitable spirit of the No Slack Soldiers, rendered a menacing Taliban fighting force of 300 fighters ineffective,” said Maj. Eric Anderson, battalion executive officer, Aurora, Ill. “Their actions resulted in more than 150 enemy dead but at a cost of two American Soldiers dead and 31 wounded friendly casualties.”

After historic flooding in July, TF No Slack worked with local governments to reopen critical roads that the floods destroyed, which enabled critical supplies and economic activity to return to normal in the valley.

**NO SLACK**, continues on page 21



# PRT, ADT women help celebrate Women's Day in Kunar

By Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio

PRT Kunar Public Affairs

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – One after the other, women flowed into the shura hall at the Kunar Ministry of Culture and Information, their henna-dyed feet scurrying beneath shapeless blue shrouds; a sea of burqas arrayed in silent contrast to the celebration of women's rights they had come to attend.

Despite Kunar's fiercely traditional-Pashtun cultural landscape, more than 100 women gathered alongside female representatives from the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, March 8, as Afghanistan joined 79 other countries across the world in holding events supporting the centennial of International Women's Day.

However, the celebration was bittersweet for the women of Kunar, who, despite progress, still face many challenges.

"Today is a special day for women," said Nasima Sadat, Kunar Director of Women's Affairs, in an interview after the event. "To tell you the truth, it is a good day but it is also a day for concern. It is a good day because so many women were able to gather here and celebrate International Women's Day. I'm concerned because we still haven't gotten to the point where we have the rights that our religion has given to women, and as a result, we can't work outside our homes in our own society without fear.

"I think we need a lot of time to improve," Sadat continued. "Our females lack education – they can't tell what's good or bad for them – they always follow the rules laid down by men."

"Knowledge is like oxygen for a society," said Mohammad Shoaib, Kunar chief prosecutor, during his remarks at the gathering. "Allah created men and women equally, and in Afghanistan, men and women live equally under the law. It is our responsibility to educate the people on the law so that our Afghan sisters can enjoy the rights promised to them."

In what is largely viewed as an act of courage, the women of Kunar have been laboring beneath their burqas and behind

closed doors to carve out progress from the bedrock of Pashtunwali which supports the current status quo. There were, in fact, many achievements to celebrate in Kunar Province this International Women's Day.

"There are three women serving as members of the Provincial Development Council, representing the needs of the people regardless of gender, age, or tribe," said Spc. Shannon Drinken of Barron, Wis., civil affairs specialist for PRT Kunar and member of the Kunar Female Engagement Team. "Women are attending school in record numbers; more than 50 young women graduated from Fatima High School this past December with many electing to continue their education... Women in Kunar serve as doctors, nurses, teachers and government officials. Each day progress is being made."

"It's a beginning," said Sgt. 1st Class Melissa S. Brumley of Stuart, Iowa, Human Resources noncommissioned officer in charge for the 734th ADT and Kunar FET member.

Each government official who spoke today, emphasized the importance of education, she said. "It's a step forward for the women of Afghanistan," Brumley added.

"Today is a day for restoring hope," Drinken said. "[A day] to make sure that children no longer have to accept that some dreams are out of reach... [a day] for a brighter future for all Afghanistan."



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Women from the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team and Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team gather alongside Afghan women to celebrate International Women's Day, March 8, at the Ministry of Culture and Information. More than 100 Afghan women from the surrounding areas attended the event. (Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio, PRT Kunar Public Affairs)



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Nasima Sadat (far right), director of women's affairs, Kunar Province, does some last-minute coordination before the start of Kunar Province's International Women's Day celebration March 8. Afghanistan was one of 79 countries to participate in the international event. (Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio, PRT Kunar Public Affairs)



KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Spc. Shannon Drinken (left) of Barron, Wis., civil affairs specialist for Provincial Reconstruction Team Kunar, gives a speech at the Kunar International Women's Day celebration March 8. She told the women gathered at the Ministry of Culture and Information the history of International Women's Day and recounted the many success stories of women in Kunar Province. (Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. Nicholas Mercurio, PRT Kunar Public Affairs)



# TF Spartan secures, assists near AF-PAK border

By Capt. Natalie Meng

*TF Spartan Public Affairs Representative*

The 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, was responsible for securing and assisting 22 Afghan districts within Nangarhar Province during Operation Enduring Freedom 10-11.

Serving in a nontraditional role as a battle space owner, the 1st Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Spartan, expanded to 1,100-Soldiers and included two artillery platoons, two military police companies, two infantry companies, an engineer, signal, military intelligence, and Headquarters and Headquarters company.

The mission of the task force was to conduct

full spectrum counterinsurgency operations, which increased development, governance and security for the 3.3 million Afghan residents of the province. The task force also ensured freedom of movement from the critical port of entry of Torkham Gate into the rest of Afghanistan along Highway 7.

“Task Force Spartan is extremely diverse—basically it’s a scaled down BCT,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Guglielmo, the senior enlisted Soldier for Task Force Spartan, a Wilton, N.Y., native. “The task force includes every key enabler that the BCT has, with artillery, civil affairs, explosive ordnance disposal, military police, psychological operations, infantry, engineers, signal, and intelligence elements. We also have additional combat power through our partnership



Capt. Paul D. Sipe, Company A commander, 1st Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Spartan, from Clarksville, Tenn., talks with the subgovernor of Boti Kot about plans to improve the district center Jan. 16 in eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar Province. (Photo by Sgt. Ginifer Spada, Task Force Bastogne Public Affairs)

with an Afghan [National] Army Battalion, three [Afghan] Border Police Battalions, an Afghan National Civil Order Police Company and the District Police forces.

“Our Soldiers do a great job of ensuring these assets are integrated into our daily operations down to the platoon and squad level,” said Guglielmo. “Adding complexity to our role as a battle-space-owning task force, we still fulfill our doctrinal requirements with the Military Intelligence Company and the Signal Company who support the entire BCT. With these assets, [TF Spartan] has conducted over 1,500 combined patrols with our Afghan partners and 300 named operations to defeat the Afghan insurgency.”

Working with over 4,500 Afghan National Security Forces, Task Force Spartan has improved all aspects of security across the province. To coordinate the operations of these forces, the battalion expanded the role of the Nangarhar Operational Coordination Center-Provincial (OCC-P). As the single point of coordination for Nangarhar, the OCC-P completed its first operational test during the 2010 Parliamentary Elections.

“The key to any successful counterinsurgency rests on the government’s ability to provide opportunity to its people through an electoral process,” said Capt. James Powers, ANSF liaison officer, a Redondo Beach, Calif., native. “In Afghanistan, providing opportunity to the people requires security. With Nangarhar’s over three million residents in mind, the OCC-P synchronized over 6,000 security forces personnel to set in motion the timely and safe opening of the Province’s 377 polling centers on election day, a feat of strategic importance, yielding the highest concentration of votes cast in Eastern Afghanistan.”

Immediately following the successful Parliamentary Elections, Regional Command-East realigned its focus to the development of Key Terrain



Members of the Support Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Spartan, meet with a local village leader to discuss the needs of his local village Oct. 4. (Photo by Staff Sgt. William Smith, Support Platoon, HHC, 1st Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Spartan)

Districts across the region. Ten of RC-East’s KTDs are located in Nangarhar Province. During this transition to KTDs, a second maneuver task force unit into western Nangarhar Province to expand security and governance—Task Force Panther of the 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

Midway through the deployment, six of Nangarhar’s 22 districts transitioned to the control of Task Force Panther, who deployed as part of President Obama’s surge strategy and provided critical combat power to the contentious areas of western Nangarhar Province. This area was previously secured by Task Force Spartan’s engineer unit, Company A.

“Task Force Spartan was responsible for eight of forty KTD sites across Afghanistan, to include the important municipality of Jalalabad,” said Maj. Mike Bliss, task force operations officer, from Massena, N.Y. “Security, development and the sustainment of the KTDs became the task force’s main effort. Key Terrain Districts were selected based on access to key lines of communication and population centers, such as Highway 7, connecting Jalalabad to the strategically important Torkham Gate border crossing point into Pakistan.”



NO SLACK, Continued From Page 16

“I assisted with providing food, clothing, shelters and other necessities as we quickly responded to this natural disaster related to unusual weather during the floods,” said Spc. Carlos Rolon, HHC supply clerk, a New York City native. “Being prepared to help in any situation, we were able to assist the locals by providing for their basic needs, which demonstrated our commitment to the people of Afghanistan and Kunar Province.” In October, after an attack downed a U.S. CH-47 Chinook helicopter resupply of Afghan Border Police, No Slack Soldiers air assaulted four platoons to the Ghaki Pass. Landing under fire, the company secured the crash site and expanded the foot hold around the downed aircraft.

“We took about three steps off

the UH-60 [helicopter] and began taking gun fire with the bird still on the ground,” said Sgt. 1st Class John Howerton, Scout Platoon, platoon sergeant, of San Antonio. “The only cover we could reach was the downed CH-47. We saw the interpreter that had been hit by the RPG was dead inside the bird and then maneuvered near a cutout in the mountain about 50 meters from the CH-47. We began to suppress the enemy.”

After maneuvering to an Afghan Border Police complex to clear it and establishing a foothold to allow the downed-aircraft recovery team to breakdown the CH-47, Howerton said they found 22 enemy casualties, including the brother of the commander of Taliban forces in Kunar.

Throughout their deployment, the Soldiers of TF No Slack

worked around the clock to keep the local people safe and connected to their government officials, but not without a cost.

“There is no doubt that Task Force No Slack has made the difference in Kunar Province during this pivotal year in Afghanistan,” said Lt. Col. Joel “J.B” Vowell, commander, 2nd Bn., 327th Inf. Regt. “Our success in partnering with ANSF, the development of district government and the defeat of insurgent groups in their sanctuaries are all due to the heroic efforts of our Soldiers. They have sweat, bled and some have paid the ultimate sacrifice so that our mission here would succeed. I am in awe of our Soldiers here and their Families back home to continue to strive to win every day.”

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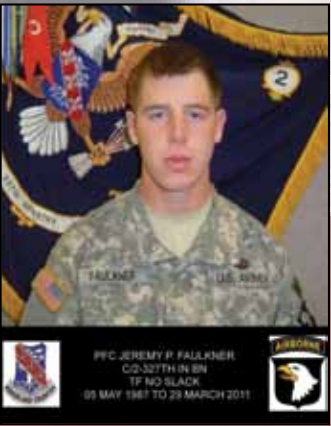


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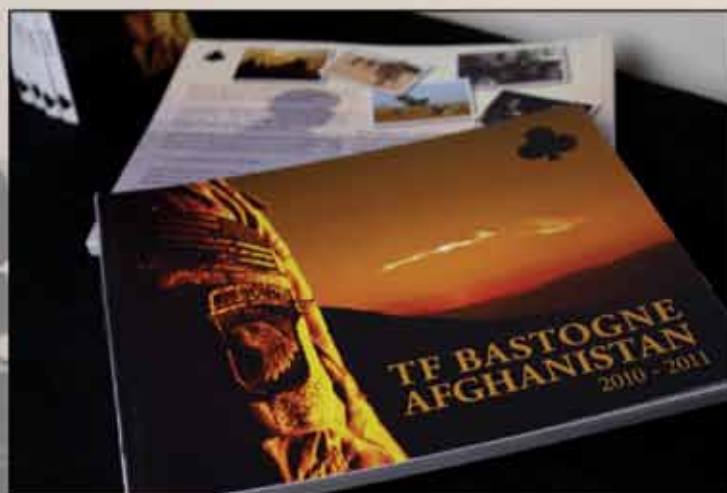


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