

HEARTBEAT

The Official Magazine of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division



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Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Lyon, a platoon sergeant with HHB, 1-320th, salutes Gen. David Petraeus, ISAF commander, during a Silver Star award ceremony held at Combat Outpost Stout, Dec. 20. Lyon was awarded the military's third highest ranking medal for his actions during the Battle of Bakersfield, July 30 – Aug. 5.



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Words from the Top



As we look back over the past year, STRIKE has done and accomplished more than any of us could have imagined, but there is still a great deal of work to be done. Even though STRIKE has started a new year, we remain focused as we continue to improve the security and quality of life for the Afghan people throughout our Area of Operations. Each day, Operation DRAGON WRATH makes a difference and the Soldiers and Leaders of STRIKE have performed superbly, meeting each challenge before them with courage, professionalism, and pride. It never ceases to amaze me when I see the great and wonderful things STRIKE is accomplishing, all made possible by the magnificent Soldiers and Leaders within this brigade.

On Christmas Day, CSM Smith and I visited STRIKE Soldiers and Leaders throughout the area not only to pass the Holiday Greet-

ings, but to personally thank everyone for their service and dedication. At each location, the Soldiers were enjoying a great Christmas meal and sharing the holiday spirit with one another while remaining vigilant. It was truly something to witness.

Combined Task Force STRIKE continues to take the fight to the insurgents daily, denying them of their safe havens and freedom of movement. The developmental projects started by CTF STRIKE to help and assist the people in our area are showing momentum.

The people are starting to realize for conditions to get better, even with our assistance, it takes their "skill and will" to get there. Each day more and more of the people are coming forward to take part in reestablishing their local leadership, villages, clinics, schools, farmland and much more.

The relationship and execution of missions with our Afghan partners of the 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps, Afghan National Army, is stronger than ever. CTF STRIKE is fortunate to have partners that truly embrace their mission and want better conditions for all the people of Afghanistan. As partners, the Soldiers and the Leaders from both brigade levels on down to squad level are consistently working on ways to get better at what we do. This is apparent

every time CSM Smith or I travel to the different Combat Out Posts and Strong Points; we see joint company checkpoints, planning operations and joint squads rehearsing actions on the objective. CTF STRIKE has come a long ways from executing solo missions to planning and executing missions with 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps.

All units within CTF STRIKE continue to perform at an exceptional level. The dedication to mission they display daily in this dangerous and treacherous environment is second to none. The attention to detail, discipline, and the will to get the job done shown by all units thus far will enable all Soldiers, Leaders and units to sustain the high levels of performance.

As each day goes by, remember there are "evil doers" out there, looking for an opportunity and will not hesitate to attack us. We must stay vigilant, switch-on, and ready to act accordingly to any threat we may face. STRIKE!



The Doctor's Orders with Lt. Col Michael Wirt

When it comes to deployment-acquired illness, malaria is one you do not want to get. As you may know, it is acquired through being bit by a female Anopheles mosquito carrying a parasite. Worldwide, there are about 280 million cases per year. Malaria illness causes a severe fever which can be fatal.

We continue to have cases of malaria involving ISAF Soldiers. The best prevention is taking

your malaria pills (Doxycycline). One tablet a day keeps malaria away!

Ok, so why do we continue to take this pill, it is 25 degrees and I have not seen a mosquito in a month? First, the bug we are going after (plasmodium falciparum) is not easy to treat and can hide out in your blood for up to 3 years! Though uncommon, this means going off the medication while in an area where we do not have all the fancy medical facilities to take care of you is not a good idea.

Yes, a free plane flight to the states may sound appealing, but not when you are suffering from severe fever, chills, headache, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting.

Doxycycline is the antibiotic used for the types of malaria that do not respond to the usual antibiotic Chloroquine. It just happens to be that Afghanistan grows a tougher

type of malaria, which requires Doxycycline. There may be a few of you out there who cannot take Doxycycline. Never fear, we have a special medication called Malarone held in reserve for you, and it is just as effective as Doxycycline.

What else can you do to reduce the risk when the foliage and warmer weather returns to Zhara? Limit the time spent outside between dusk and dawn (right, tell that one to your squad leader).

Ok, realistically in a combat zone we can do a few preventative measures. 1) Maintain the proper STRIKE uniform - sleeves down, Nomex gloves on; 2) Use uniforms impregnated with insecticide or treated with permethrin; 3) Use mosquito bed nets; 4) Use insect repellent containing DEET.

Don't let a mosquito take you out of the fight: continue taking that malaria medicine. Doctors Orders!



The Chaplain Says... by Chaplain (Maj.) David Beavers

"Then the king of Israel answered, 'Tell him: One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.'" I Kings 20:11

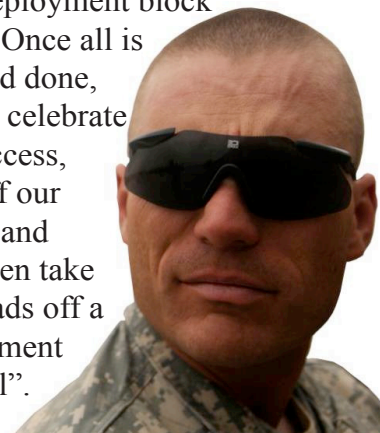
Very soon, millions of people across the world, as well as those of us tuning into AFN, will be watching the Super Bowl. Over the years, this game has brought joy and excitement for some and the bitterness of defeat to others. Interestingly, there is a particular moment in Super Bowl XXVII bearing a lesson for Soldiers and their loved ones.

Late in the 4th quarter the Buffalo Bills fumbled the football deep in their own territory. Dallas Cowboys' defensive lineman,

Leon Lett, scooped up the ball and began lumbering toward the goal line. Perhaps due to arrogance or the belief he couldn't be prevented from scoring, he began celebrating his probable touchdown about 10 yards out. It was while anticipating victory that Buffalo receiver Don Beebe ran up behind him and knocked the ball out of his hand, preventing a touchdown. The key lesson: It doesn't count until you cross the goal line.

This football example and the one from First Kings, highlights the importance of continued focus throughout our deployment. We've been here for several months and have many patterns and habits and

a temptation to fall into a mindset of thinking we are drawing to a close. However, as we continue in our deployment, it is of the utmost importance to realize things are not done and our jobs aren't complete until we return safely from post-deployment block leave. Once all is said and done, we can celebrate our success, take off our armor, and only then take our heads off a deployment "swivel".



Combat Stress Column

The stresses of the mission are just as present now as on day one. Stress can take a toll on even the strongest Soldier, reducing their performance and placing them at risk of injury, both physical and mental. Seeking help for the issues brought on by both combat and non-combat-related work is a sign of strength as it shows a desire to help one's self.

The Resiliency Team of Forward Operating Base Wilson offers counseling, classes and material to help Soldiers who may be feeling the effects of being deployed. The care is confidential unless there's a risk to anyone's physical wellbeing. Normal hours of operation are from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily. Walk-ins are welcomed and 24 hour care is available for Soldiers seeking emergency aid after-hours at any medical center.

Some things that may cause stress are both direct combat-related incidents, such as actual fighting, wounds during combat and loss of a friend or co-worker. Other non-combat related incidents may be monotonous work, long hours, fighting with loved-ones, and other issues. Every person reacts differently to each situation and being able to identify one's stressors helps situational awareness.

Some signs that indicate stress are lack of sleep or restless sleep, feelings of depression or sadness that don't go away, irritability and a change in overall demeanor or personality.

Take care of yourself. Take care of your battle buddies too. Soldiers taking care of Soldiers will help strengthen Strike Brigade.

The Mayor's Cell

As the unit gets closer to redeployment, Soldiers often send items home through the mail instead of waiting for the connex to arrive back home. Before sending anything through the mail, consider the following:

Do I need this equipment within 60 days of arriving home? If you answered "NO", put your stuff in the connex.

If you answered "Yes", attempt to place the required items in your 2x duffle bags for the return trip.

For the items that won't fit, you can use the Post Office with the following limitations:

No ACU pattern equipment or uniforms. No knives with blades is longer than a dollar bill. When utilizing the post office, do not lock your tough box or close regular boxes due to inspection by postal

personnel. The tough box cannot exceed 70lbs and you should have a list of what has been packed to help fill out the customs form. If you have valuables, we strongly recommend insuring your tough box or regular box. It takes 3-4 weeks to reach the states depending on where you live.

Reminder: Post office accepts cash only



Safety Standards with Safety Mike

During routine Safety and Fire inspections, we are finding that there is a large amount of Razor and Concertina wire being utilized that is not properly marked, or is excess and laying around. Much of it is in high traffic areas. Due to the poor lighting at some locations, and the high walking traffic in others, it is important that we take certain actions to eliminate both the potential, and the occurrence of serious injury to personnel. The following guidance should be followed:

1. Properly mark all Razor and Concertina wire using either high visibility tape, engineer tape, chem-lites.
2. If there is excess wire or is not needed, turn it in for reissue. PROPERLY DISPOSE OF IT!
3. When working with Razor or Concertina wire, always wear proper PPE to include sturdy gloves (Not N-mex gloves), long sleeves, long pants, eye-pro, and boots.



Don't be this guy!

STRIKE SOLDIER RECEIVES SILVER STAR



Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Lyon, a platoon sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), salutes Gen. David Petraeus, ISAF commander, during a Silver Star award ceremony held at Combat Outpost Stout, Arghandab district, Kandahar, Afghanistan, Dec. 20.

Late July into August, the Arghandab River Valley saw an epic five-day battle between entrenched Taliban and an artillery turned infantry unit from Combined Task Force Top Guns. At the intersection of routes Mariners and Highlife, known as Objective Bakersfield, the two forces went toe to toe with each other and days later, with the blood of the fallen still wet, the Top Gun Soldiers kicked a Taliban force out of their own backyard. One Soldier stood out from that clash, now called the Battle of Bakersfield and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions during the fierce fight.

On Dec. 20, Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Brooks Lyon, of Forsyth, Mont. and a platoon sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his heroic actions during the Battle of Bakersfield. Lyon modestly accepted the military's third highest-ranking medal.

"I don't know what to say, but I was just doing the same things everybody else was doing while out there," said Lyon. "It was just good Soldiers doing good Soldiering."

The award ceremony was held on the same bridge HHB crossed at the beginning of the fight, where they lost three of their brothers. Other Top Gun Soldiers were awarded valorous medals for their actions at Bakersfield as well and Gen. David Petraeus, the ISAF commander, pinned on their awards.

"Let me just tell you first of all, just how privileged I feel to be able to recognize these great heroes right here and to do it on what really is sacred ground," said Petraeus. "Three of our brothers from this force died here and nearly 20 were wounded in a very, very tough

fight now known as the Battle of Bakersfield. This is one of those days historians would describe, as extraordinary courage was ordinary on that day."

Lyon did not speak much about his own actions during those days in the Afghan summer, but his Soldiers who fought at his side said much on his behalf.

"It was so loud on the ground and he was calling for fire and when 1st Sgt. Brown went down from the mortars, he was there to jump in," said Staff Sgt. Raymond Reed of HHB. "We had no platoon leader and he had big shoes to fill; if Sgt. 1st Class Lyon was not there, the Battle of Bakersfield may have taken longer, may have had more casualties and may not have gone as smooth as it did."

"Soldier first" is Lyon's belief and his actions go far beyond his normal duties from his military occupational service of an Army meteorologist.

"I am a weather man by trade and that's what I am," said Lyon. "Regardless of what we joined the Army to do, at that point in time, we were riflemen, machine gunners and fighters against our enemy."

Lyon's men are proud of him and what he did characterizes him and his unit.

"I am honored that he is getting the Silver Star," said Reed, who fought with Lyon during the battle. "He led us well during the Battle of Bakersfield and he represents the platoon well, he represents the battery well and he represents the battalion well."

Shaking the hands of the day's awardees was Col. Arthur Kandarian, the 2nd BCT commander, who has a lot of respect for his Top Gun unit.

"You all know better than I do, a little piece of cloth won't take back that mental experience you had nor our casualties, but it speaks volumes for what you did that day, said Kandarian. "So on a very honorable piece of ground... I'm privileged to be here with you all."



Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Lyon, stands proudly next to Gen. David Petraeus, ISAF commander, displaying his Silver Star. Lyon was awarded the military's third highest ranking medal for his actions during the Battle of Bakersfield, July 30 – Aug. 5

STRIKE Encourages War Tested Company



Combined Task Force Strike Soldiers with Company B, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, share a laugh with Command Sgt. Major Alonzo Smith, CTFS command sergeant major, during a visit to Patrol Base Yates, Dec. 28. Company B, also known as Bulldog Company, was one of the first Strike units to deploy to Afghanistan.

Thunderous explosions, rapid machine gun fire and attack helicopters flying over head were the constant sounds heard by the Combined Task Force Strike Soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), when they first landed in Kandahar's Zharay district.

First Strike's Bulldog Company entered Afghanistan earlier than other Strike units, in the birthplace of Taliban and at the height of their fighting season. They have won hard fought battles, but at the largest cost. Fallen Soldiers like Pfc. Benjamin Jefferson, Sgt. 1st Class John Jarrell, Sgt. Leston Winters, Staff Sgt. Jaime Newman, 1st Lt. Eric Yates and Spc. Pedro Maldonado made the ultimate sacrifice to create a safer area for their brothers of Company B to operate in.

The brigade's remaining units deployed to Zharay throughout the summer and Bulldog Company moved from Combat Outposts Fitzpatrick and JFM to the north of Highway One. Recently the Soldiers of the war tested Bulldog Company received a visit from their brigade sergeant major at one of their new bases in northern Zharay.

Command Sgt. Major Alonzo

Smith, CTFS command sergeant major, visited a Bulldog platoon now operating from Patrol Base Yates, an ISAF and Afghan National Police compound, Dec. 28. Smith was impressed by his Soldier's endurance and their deployment achievements.

"For those Soldiers to endure what they did down there and stay focused and stay disciplined then to come up here and still have the desire in them, the drive to continue to improve their condition, I am really proud of these guys," said Smith. "This was one of the first units in the brigade to deploy to Afghanistan and the area they were in originally was a tough area, receiving contact daily and numerous casualties. They've seen more in the six, seven months of this deployment that I've seen collectively in my previous four deployments."

PB Yates is First Strike's northern most compound, sitting in the Mir Hazar desert at the bottom of Towrtag mountain. The Soldiers were appreciative of Smith's trip.

"It's good to see higher leadership come out and visit our Soldiers," said Staff Sgt. Hector Pineda of Dallas, Texas and a squad leader with the Bulldogs. "It shows they are concerned about what the Soldiers are going

through out here and how we live out here."

Smith also joked with his Soldiers, learned about their hometowns and reminded the Soldiers the historical significance of their actions during their deployment.

"If you haven't realized it by now, you are a part of history even up until this point," said Smith. "Some people can say they came to Afghanistan, some people can say 'I was in Zharay,' but you're able to say 'I was a part of that,' and there's a big difference between being there and I was there and saying I was a part of that."

Smith complimented their ability to stay focused throughout the deployment and provided guidance regarding complacency.

"These Soldiers have not lost focus, though this area doesn't have the tempo of that activity of their past areas, they haven't let their guard down, they stayed vigilant, they stayed focused and they continue to improve on their fighting positions," said Smith. "Never let your guard down, stay focused, stay vigilant and you'll be alright."

Smith, the former First Strike command sergeant major, was seriously wounded earlier in the deployment, sending him stateside to recover. The Bulldog Soldiers were enthused to see him walking in their base.

"I haven't seen sergeant major in a while and I heard about his incident a while ago so it made me feel pretty good to see him in person," said Pvt. Zachary Fife of Roseville, Minn. and an infantryman with the company. "He talked about going home, how good we're doing out here and the missions from the past. It's the little things that make you feel better and a lot of us felt the same way."

Bulldog Company has seen a side of war most units are unfamiliar with, as the First Strike warriors stay determined and maintain success while operating in southern Afghanistan.

Wrestling Superstars Visit Combined Task Force Strike

Celebrities from the World Wrestling Entertainment visited the Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 3.

Coordinated by the Armed Forces Entertainment, the visit included Vince McMahon, WWE chairman and wrestlers Paul Wight, known as "Big Show," Barbara Blank, known as "Kelly Kelly,"

and Eva Torres, known as "Eve." The wrestling superstars were grateful towards the Strike Soldiers during their time on the FOB.

"I just want to say thank you, this is our eighth year over here to Iraq and Afghanistan and every place we go, we talk about you guys," said McMahon. "People don't always express their appreciation for you and we're fortunate to get the liberty, so again, thank you."

About 200 hundred CTFS Soldiers met the professional wrestlers and received autographs and handshakes from the WWE superstars. The visit was a morale boost for the 101st Airborne Division Soldiers operating in Afghanistan's Kandahar province.

"Meeting Big Show and the WWE made my day," said Spc. Tony Mabey, a communications specialists with Strike's Brigade Special Troops Battalion. "The look on everybody's faces when they came out was priceless and



Vince McMahon, World Wrestling Entertainment chairman and wrestlers Paul Wight, known as "Big Show," Barbara Blank, known as "Kelly Kelly" and Eva Torres, known as "Eve," meet CTFS Soldiers during a visit to Forward Operating Base Wilson, Dec. 3. The WWE superstars signed autographs and took pictures with Strike Soldiers during their trip to the Kandahar Province.

it was a nice change of pace from what we usually see down here."

It was the first time meeting celebrities in a combat zone for some of the Soldiers and seeing the four icons on the ground was a gratifying experience.

"For them to make the long journey over here and brighten up the Soldier's spirits is very honorable and coming into a combat zone makes me respect them," said Spc. Britney

Edwards, an aviation operations specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). "It was really cool of them to come here to FOB Wilson because we don't see a lot of big name celebrities and they usually forget the smaller FOBs and Combat Outpost. I am definitely now a fan."

Before returning back to Kandahar Airfield, the WWE superstars told the CTFS Soldiers how important the visit was for them.

"I want to say from the bottom of my heart, this is the best trip that I take," said Wight. "We're on the road 290-days a year bringing the WWE experience all over the world, but for me personally, Vince, Eve and Kelly, this is the single greatest time coming over and seeing you guys, I am a fan. I've met actors, I've met musicians, but you guys are my heroes. I love you guys; I respect you guys."



CTFS Soldiers shake hands and receive autographs from the World Wrestling Entertainment superstars at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Dec. 3. The wrestlers visited the Soldiers operating in Regional Command South.



Wrestling superstar Paul Wight smiles while sitting in the gun turret of a Multipurpose All Terrain Vehicle at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Dec. 3. The event had World Wrestling Entertainment wrestlers visiting the Soldiers of CTFS.

Chairman, Comedians Commend Strike



Adm. Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pins a Bronze Star Medal with Valor Device and a Purple Heart Medal on Spc. Matthew Zaragoza of Buena Park, Ca., with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff spent time with Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike during a visit to Forward Operating Base Wilson, Kandahar province, Afghanistan, Dec. 16.

Adm. Mike Mullen pinned 16 awards which included two Bronze Star Medals with Valor Device, five Army Commendation Medals with Valor Device and nine Purple Hearts. The Soldiers were excited and honored

to receive the awards from the chairman.

"I mean, I got pinned by Adm. Mullen and it was great," said Spc. Matthew Zaragoza, a Buena Park, Ca. native with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). "It was definitely a big honor for me," said Zaragoza, who received a Bronze Star with Valor Device and a Purple Heart for his actions on Sept. 17, when he continued attacks on insurgents after receiving wounds from enemy fire.

Before the Soldier's award ceremony, Mullen told the Strike Brigade he was extremely impressed with the unit's performance.

"To do what the American people are asking you to do and do it in a way that quite frankly, is better than I've ever seen in the over four decades I've been serving," said Mullen. "We're extremely grateful for that and

we just never will forget it."

Traveling with Mullen were celebrities working with the USO. The stars included professional athlete Lance Armstrong, country music singer Kix Brooks and comedians Robin Williams, Kathleen Madigan and Lewis Black. The celebrities shook hands, posed for pictures, signed autographs and expressed their gratitude toward the CTFS Soldiers.

"It's important for me to come here and physically say thanks, I mean seriously, it's that important," said Black. "It makes me feel like I've given something back to these guys who give to us."

Many Troopers felt the same about the visitors.

"Meeting the stars really made my day," said Spc. Charles Parino, a Royalton, Il. native with Strike's Company A, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Bn. "It was cool of them to come all the way over here just to say thanks."

US Ambassador to Afghanistan meets with Zharay District Governor

The U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan visited FOB Wilson to meet with the new district governor and elders from the surrounding area to discuss progress December 6. The Ambassador received warm greetings from the Zharay people, who were pleased about the visit.

The reception from the Zharay elders was warm and welcoming towards Ambassador Karl Eikenberry as many aspects of the improvement in Zharay were addressed. The main topics surrounded improving farming, agriculture and education.

"A year ago I could not imagine I would be sitting here in Zharay looking at this young boy and discussing an education and future for him," said Eikenberry about the young son who has accompanied his father, an elder, to the meeting.

One of the elders spoke of the need for education. Having been a teacher and a headmaster he felt the problem stems from ignorance.

"Things have improved 100 percent; we have confidence and hope in our government and the district governor," said the elder. "Security is improving, the problems are all from ignorance and we want to educate the people."

Eikenberry listened intently to their ideas and made some notes on the things discussed by the shura members and told them he would look into the issues and would work with them to achieve results.

He assured them the United States, Combined Task Force Strike along with their Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police partners, would continue their assistance within the district.



Karl Eikenberry, US Ambassador to Afghanistan, embraces the Zharay District Governor, Niyaz Mohammed Sarhadi, during a visit to the Zharay District Center, Dec. 6. Eikenberry and Sarhadi discussed the progress made across the district.

Christmas in Kandahar: STRIKE Celebrates the Holidays



Command Sgt. Maj. Alonzo Smith, Combined Task Force Strike command sergeant major, looks at a Christmas decoration from a holiday care package given to Pfc. Joshua Socha of Battery A, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment.

Sept. 20, Combined Task Force Strike's 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, was attached to the Task Force Raider's 4th Infantry Division. After winning the battles against Taliban in Arghandab and connecting the local populace to Afghan government, the "Top Guns" were needed for the Raider fight. Despite its current attachment, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), continues face-to-face contact with its field artillery regiment.

Command Sgt. Major Alonzo Smith, the command sergeant major for the Strike Brigade, took his personal security detachment teams across Highway One and into the Arghandab River Valley to wish his Top Gun Soldiers a Merry Christmas, Dec. 25. The Soldiers were excited to see "Strike 7."

"To see the brigade command sergeant major

come all the way out here just to wish us a Merry Christmas makes me smile," said Spc. Andreah Anderson, a Soldier cook with the Top Gun's Company G. It shows that Strike Brigade is concerned about the Soldiers operating in Arghandab, even though they're attached to another unit, said Anderson.

Smith filled his Multi-purpose All Terrain Vehicles with boxed care packages sent to CTFS from a New Jersey mother whose Soldier son died in Iraq. Smith delivered the packages to the Soldiers based at Combat Outposts Terra Nova, Nolan, Stout, Tynes and Jelawur.

"I did not expect to get a Christmas gift from Sergeant Major Smith and that is something else," said Spc. Joshua Socha of the battalion's Battery A and operating out of COP Nolan. "The box is pretty full and even has some decorations for the day."

Since its deployment, the Top Guns have defeated Taliban in all of its engagements and connected the populace to its Afghan government. Something Arghandab hasn't seen for years. Smith felt it important to let his Top Gun Soldiers know they are appreciated.

"You guys are writing the pages of the history books and I don't know of any other field artillery regiment in the Army that has done what you've done," said Smith to the Top Guns. "I did not want to take up the Soldier's time on this day because it's a special day for every Soldier, but I just wanted to come here for a moments time and say thank you and Merry Christmas."



Command Sgt. Maj. Alonzo Smith, Combined Task Force Strike command sergeant major, brings a holiday care package to Pfc. Cory Frankum of Company G, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, at Combat Outpost Nolan, Dec. 25. Smith visited the Top Gun Soldiers operating in Arghandab during a Christmas Day battlefield circulation.



F.O.B. WILSON

December 23, 2010



Strike's Personnel Administrators Maj. Jacqueline Smith, 1st Lt. Shinane Velasquez, Staff Sgt. James Holmes and Spc. Ashley Dawson smile with Santa and his helper during a surprise visit to their office.



Combined Task Force Strike Soldiers wait in line for a Christmas meal outside of a decorated Forward Operating Base Wilson dining facility. The Soldiers were offered traditional holiday meals for the day.



Maj. Gen. James Terry, RC South commander, wishes the Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike a Merry Christmas at FOB Wilson's "Strike Cav" Dining Facility. Terry had lunch with the Strike Soldiers.



1st Lt. Michelle LaForest from 2nd BSTB's Company B, serves a Christmas meal to the Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike during the holiday at "Strike Cav" Dining Facility.



Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike listen to Maj. Gen. James Terry, RC South commander, during a holiday meal at a FOB Wilson dining facility. Terry complimented the Soldiers on their accomplishments.



RC South commander, Maj. Gen. James Terry wishes the Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike a Merry Christmas at FOB Wilson's Flight-line. Terry wore a multi-colored Santa hat during his trip to Wilson.



Combined Task Force Strike Soldiers take time to enjoy a holiday meal with each other while operating at Kandahar's Forward Operating Base Wilson. The base decorated its dining facilities for the holiday.



Lt. Col. Thomas Spenard, 526th BSB commander, serves a festive meal to his Soldiers at the "Best by Performance" Dining Facility. On the menu was turkey, ham, assorted pies and other holiday dishes.

First Strike's COBRA ACADEMY

A November Afghan morning saw 14 Afghan soldiers wearing their nation's army uniform standing in a formation on a combat outpost landing zone; each soldier standing proudly holding a piece of paper with the word "certificate" written across its top.

These 14 soldiers are the first graduating class from the Cobra Academy, an Afghan National Security Forces and ISAF training course. At the academy, Company C, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), provides advanced training to its Afghan partners from the 3rd Coy, 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps.

"The Cobra Academy is a six week course designed to meet some of the training gaps that were identified between the ANA and ISAF and because of it, we are better able to function together as one unit," said Staff Sgt. Reid Wilbraham, a trainer/men-



An Afghan National Army soldier from 3rd Coy, 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps, raises his certificate and shouts, "I serve for Afghanistan," during a Cobra Academy graduation ceremony at Combat Outpost Durkan, Nov. 29. The ANA soldier is one of the first graduates from the Company C, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, led training school designed to meet some of the training gaps between Afghan National Security Forces and ISAF.

tor for the academy and a squad leader with the "Cobra Company." "It has integrated us and now we can support ourselves better and when it's time for us to leave, a productive, effective and confident fighting force will still be here."

The idea of the academy surfaced when ANA commanders and Cobra Leaders designed an

internal training program to enhance their fighting teams.

"We had a joint training brief with the ANA commander; I briefed him on the training focus and he said what he wanted to see his Soldiers trained on," said Wilbraham. "Together we compiled the actual training plan and that turned into Cobra Academy."

Each week of the training has its own focus and even though the training days were not always consistent due to missions and operations, the academy hands on training covered many topics.

During week one, the training involved weapon functions, safety and marksmanship. The Cobra Academy cadre ensured their counterparts were fa-

miliar and comfortable with their issued weapons.

"We heard of incidents in the past dealing with negligent discharges, so we hit the weapons training pretty hard," said Pfc. Stewart Myler, a cadre member for the academy. "We took them to a firing range we set up and showed them our fundamentals when handling weapons."

The second week of training dealt with two areas new to the Afghan forces: field medical care and battlefield communications.

"The training dealt with basic first-aid, tactical care under fire, priorities of a casualty, proper field dressing techniques and they were very receptive to the medical portion of the training," said Wilbraham. Now ANSF has the training



Command Sgt. Maj. Brandon Haywood, First Strike csm, congratulates an ANA soldier during a Cobra Academy graduation ceremony held at Combat Outpost Durkan, Nov. 29.

and knowledge to adequately provide first aid at the self-aid and buddy-aid level, said Wilbraham.

The communication portion of the week's training incorporated terrain models helping the ANSF practice proper reporting procedures while on mission.

"Antenna theory was a big part, like not talking next to power lines and elevation factors," said Wilbraham. "Our partners continue to make excellent progress in this area."

The academy's third week had vehicle maintenance and driver's training, where the ANSF learned how to drive, care for and recover their Ford Rangers and HMMWVs.

"Our ANA partners have only received limited driver training in the past and our mechanics and drivers properly trained them on their two types of vehicles," said Wilbraham. "The recovery drills went well and gave us an opportunity to discuss the tenets of safe

and deliberate driving."

Week four of Cobra Academy trained the Afghan soldiers on small unit tactics. The Cobra Soldiers held classes on Battle Drills and how to react to multiple types of enemy contact.

"Small unit tactics was our focus, like moving as a squad, crossing linear danger areas, but more importantly, reacting to contact; to include sniper fire, IED, small arms fire, while dismounted and mounted," said Wilbraham. "Once they understood it, they picked up on it really quick."

Planning and preparations for a mission was the training subject for the academy's fifth week. The school used partnered missions from the past as training examples.

"The ANA did well at grasping the concept of preparation and the planning required to execute missions," said Wilbraham. "Using previous joint operations as case studies enabled the ANA to better grasp the techniques of fire control as



Two ANA soldiers celebrate after a Cobra Academy graduation. The ANA's 3rd Coy, 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps enhanced their tactical capabilities with the Academy.

they had already seen this in action."

The academy's final week had the ANSF apply what they learned from the previous training courses on an objective in sector, for the most part, without the assistance of their Cobra brothers.

"They planned a mission, went to a village with a Taliban commanding compound and all we did was watch and critique," said Wilbraham. "They did a good job and it was completely, 100 percent their planning, their execution and their mission."

Many hours, days and weeks went into creat-

ing a functioning, in-theater training school and the academy's effect has already enhanced the two-partnered fighting forces.

"Just a day before yesterday, our partners went through the escalation of force and got an IED emplacer, where as before, they'd just start shooting rounds, so we can definitely see the progression of training in what we gave them through Cobra Academy," said 1st Sgt. Paul Bailey, the company's first sergeant. "It was definitely worth all of the hard work and we definitely see out in the field what they learned at the academy."

Spread throughout four and a half months beginning July 16 to its graduation ceremony Nov. 29, the Cobra Academy has made better Afghan fighters as well as US Soldiers.

"They are absolutely a force multiplier and a force in of itself," said Wilbraham. "They're motivated, they want to learn and they love interacting with their population. I'm pretty impressed, no, actually very impressed with our Afghan partners."



Afghan National Army Soldiers from 3rd Coy, 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps, hold their graduation certificates during a Cobra Academy graduation ceremony held at Combat Outpost Durkan, Nov. 29.

Resiliency Team: Healing

Soldiers face many threats on the battlefield that can cause physical harm, but not all casualties are as evident as a bullet wound or shrapnel injury. Many Soldiers carry the scars of battle in their minds which can be as dangerous to their welfare as any physical wound. That's where the Resiliency Team of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), comes into play.

The Strike Brigade Resiliency Team offers counseling, diagnosis and treatment options to Soldiers feeling the effects of combat at Forward Operating Base Wilson during their 2010-2011 deployment to southern Afghanistan.

"Soldiers face a lot of stress while deployed," said Pfc. Jon Mills, a native of Grand Rapids, Mi. and behavioral health specialist with the 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2BCT. "This takes its toll on not just the Soldier but their unit as well."

Soldiers have faced stressful situations throughout every war in American history. World War I brought 'shell shock' with the horrors of modern weaponry. Gas attacks, mechanized armored vehicles and other new weapons of war inflicted great casualties on all sides and left many wounded. Numerous Soldiers were treated for combat stress symptoms.

World War II continued the trend. As nations rose to fight each other across the globe, Soldiers continued to face the stress of combat. Korea, Viet Nam and Desert Storm saw an increase in stress-related



A STRIKE Soldier mourns the loss of a comrade during a memorial ceremony at Forward Operating Base Wilson.

problems. Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are showing improvements to the trend of mental injury with more Soldiers returning to duty after enduring traumatic experiences.

The Resiliency Team helps treat Soldiers by offering one-on-one counseling, classes on topics such as anger management, grief process and combat stress reactions to help fight common issues during deployments, said Mills.

"We know what causes stress and that it can't be completely eliminated," said Capt. Debra Stone, a native of Portland, Maine and officer in charge of the Resiliency Team. "What we do is try to reduce the stress and make it manageable."

Constant battlefield circulation throughout Strike Brigade's area of operation gives the team a chance to interact with every Soldier in the fight, said Stone.

Visiting with the Soldiers gives stressed-out or grieving troops an opportunity to get whatever aid is needed. Learning to cope with the day-to-day problems encountered during deployment requires abilities not everyone may naturally possess. The Resiliency Team offers classes and counseling to teach Soldiers how to get through stressful situations.

"Our goal is to give Soldiers the tools they need to help themselves," said Mills. "That way they learn how to overcome combat-related stress on their own and hopefully won't need us anymore."

Not all stress is directly caused by fighting. Soldiers who are stationary in their FOBs, Combat Out-



Soldiers pay their respects to a fallen comrade during a memorial ceremony at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Oct. 14. The stress Soldiers face during a deployment, whether by the loss of friends or physical injury, can cause serious mental issues to develop and must be handled with the same concern as any physical wound

Unseen Wounds of War



Soldiers embrace during a memorial for a fallen comrade at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Sep. 1. Soldiers can find support and consultation with the Resiliency Team to help handle the pain caused by the loss of a comrade.

posts and Strong Points are under a different, but also dangerous stress. Limited sleep, monotonous work over extended periods of time and loss of friends in combat may have severe impacts on personnel. Situations with family members back home may also contribute to the overall problems faced by Soldiers.

“I believe that interpersonal relationship issues are some of the hardest challenges Soldiers face,” said Mills. “Whether experiencing the loss of a friend in combat, or fighting with a family member back home, dealing with that is difficult.”

These are some of the most common issues facing Soldiers today, said Mills.

There are several methods of stress relief the Resiliency Team recommends. Writing letters to loved ones, reading books, writing in a journal, play-

ing games with friends and other mentally stimulating activities all help Soldiers relieve stress in their downtime.

Staying in touch with home can help strengthen interpersonal relationships and improve morale, said Mills.

Despite the treatment methods offered by the Resiliency Team, many Soldiers do not seek help when they need it. These troops can become risks to themselves and those around them as stress builds up inside.

“Many people see mental healthcare as something that shows weakness,” said Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Tees, a native of Gainesville, FL and non-commissioned officer in charge with the Resiliency Team. “In truth it’s a sign of strength to recognize the need for help. If you have a cut on your arm or a broken bone you treat it before it gets worse. With the mind, you need to do the same.”

Leaders should encourage their subordinates to seek mental health care when they need it to prevent small issues from becoming large problems, said Tees. “Even if someone doesn’t want a consultation, we still have resources available for everyone,” said Stone. “Every Soldier is always welcomed here.”

The Resiliency Team stands ready to assist anyone who has suffered from the stress of combat. Their dedication to their mission of helping Soldiers strengthens the Strike Brigade daily as they serve in southern Afghanistan



Soldiers pay their respects to fallen comrades during a memorial ceremony at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Jul. 18. Memorials give Soldiers a chance to come together as a unit and grieve the loss of friends and co-workers, helping with the grief process as they come to terms with the loss.

Mechanics Keep Strike Rolling



Spc. Josh Thompkins, a mechanic with 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, replaces a gasket at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Dec. 21.

Ground movement is critical to any military operation, especially in today's modern world of mechanized warfare. Combat vehicles require regular maintenance and repair to function at their best.

The mechanics of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), service vehicles at Forward Operating Base Wilson, during their 2010-2011 deployment to Afghanistan.

"We work on pretty much every vehicle we have here," said Sgt. Anthony Ruisinger, a native of Houston, Tx., and senior mechanic with the company's motor pool. "We have guys trained to work on all the different types here on FOB Wilson."

Vehicles commonly found around the base include Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected trucks, bulldozers, excavation machines and transport trucks, said Ruisinger.

"The light-wheel mechanics work on the MRAPs and trucks," said Ruisinger. "The construction equipment mechanics repair the earthmovers, bulldozers and such."

Maintaining all the vehicles in Strike's area of operation requires the availability of many parts. New parts are required to replace old or damaged pieces and are the backbone of

the motor pool's operation.

"We order parts for all of [the 2nd] BSTB," said Spc. Glenn Belen, a native of Lehigh Acres, Fl., and logistics specialist for [the 2nd] BSTB parts room. "This keeps the mechanics running. Without the right parts they can't do their job."

Having the right part available means inoperable vehicles can be repaired and returned to duty immediately, said Belen.

Strike Brigade's MRAPs provide vital transportation and protection to Soldiers as they circulate throughout the battle zone. These trucks are subjected to extreme environments, small arms fire and some experience damage due to roadside bombs. Eventually all the trucks require some form of repair or maintenance.

"Older vehicles require more work and replacement parts," said Spc. Richard Stinson, a native of Little Rock, Ar., and light wheel mechanic with the motor pool. "The new MRAPs have minor issues that usually just require a quick fix."

The light wheel mechanics help keep convoys and patrol missions running throughout southern Afghanistan, said Stinson.

"If we weren't able to repair them, they wouldn't run," said Stinson. "Mechanics are important to the brigade and the missions."

Heavy equipment vehicles are also important to the Strike Brigade's mission. These vehicles are needed to construct and maintain bases throughout Strike's area of operation.

"There's always construction equipment to repair," said Spc. Matthew Baldwin, a native of Double Springs, Al., and construction equipment mechanic with HHC. "There's not as many electronics on these

vehicles, but there are a lot of moving parts. It's a lot more mechanical in nature than combat vehicles."

Besides working on vehicles, mechanics also work around the base on projects from welding to carpentry. With an extensive knowledge of tools, mechanics help improve conditions around FOB Wilson as it continues to develop.

Being a mechanic is like being a jack of all trades, said Stinson. "I helped work on the conference building and additional brigade offices a few days back, working with another Soldier and the [Combat Battalion] Navy engineers," Stinson said.

The work never ends for the Soldiers of the motor pool. Work orders are assigned to each Soldier at 8 a.m. and their day doesn't end until all assignments have been completed. The cycle begins again the next day as more vehicles are delivered to the motor pool.

The mechanics of the 2nd BSTB motor pool work non-stop to keep Strike Brigade's vehicles in working order.

The work these Soldiers do keeps Strike's vehicles running.



Spc. Yong Li, Cpl. Donald Hole and Spc. Josh Thompkins, mechanics with 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, repair an engine at Forward Operating Base Wilson, Dec. 20.

Secretary of Defense awards STRIKE Soldiers

The Secretary of Defense awarded medals to Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), during a visit to Forward Operating Base Howz-E-Madad, Kandahar province, Afghanistan, Dec. 8.

The Honorable Dr. Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, pinned eight Purple Hearts,

11 Army Commendation Medals with Valor and two Bronze Star Medals with Valor on Combined Action Strike Force Soldiers for exceptional meritorious and valorous actions while operating in southern Afghanistan. The Soldiers who received the awards from the Secretary of Defense were honored by the ceremony.

"It was an honor to meet the Secretary of Defense today," said Spc. Adam J. Lipski, a native of Savannah, Georgia and a combat medic with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) who was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor



Dr. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, awards Spc. Adam J. Lipski, a native of Savannah, Georgia and a combat medic with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, with a Bronze Star with Valor at Forward Operating Base Howz-E-Madad, Dec. 8. Lipski was awarded the medal for his efforts to save another Soldier in the face of enemy fire, Sept. 16.

for his efforts to save another Soldier in the face of enemy fire, Sept. 16. "You don't get to meet a man in that high of a position everyday and it was definitely intense."

Gates spoke to the Strike Soldiers about their missions and operations while in Afghanistan. "You guys

here are at

the tip of the spear of the campaign of the last seven months of which you have taken new territory, cleared it, secured and held it," said Gates. "Your time together in the battle spaces in southeastern and southwestern Afghanistan is a critical part of our strategy and the current campaign."

The day's event included the awards ceremony, a showcase of the some of today's weapons used by the Strike Brigade in the Afghan theater and a lunch and photo shoot for the Soldiers with Gates, where he shared his gratitude for the deployed men and woman.

"I just want to express my appreciation for what you are doing," said Gates. "I want to thank you for signing up and serving with the military in a time you knew you would be at war."

Gates also spoke to the Soldiers about being away from loved ones during the holiday season and to pass a message from him to the families back home.

"At this holiday time its tough to be away from your families," said Gates. "The next time when your in touch with your families I hope you let them know whether its email or a phone call, just pass along to them my personal thanks to ehm for their support to you and their patience with all of us. What they do makes your service possible and we recognize that."



Dr. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, awards a Combined Action Strike Force Soldier with 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), with a Purple Heart at Forward Operating Base Howz-E-Madad, Dec. 8.

Memories of Gander Soldiers

December is a month filled with memories for everyone. Memories of Christmas and the dawning of a new year. For Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division, it also reminds us of the ultimate sacrifice paid by its troopers when their flight went down in Gander, Newfoundland Dec. 12, 1985.

"Whenever I see the multinational symbol, I remember," said Dave Mann, a Social Scientist with the Human Terrain Team, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). "I think you can ask just about anyone who has been in the area a while and they remember too."

Mann was born and raised at Fort Campbell, Ky., his father retired from the 101st and Mann had just joined the Army when the Gander tragedy struck the Fort Campbell area. He recalls the community coming together for support during that time.

In 1979, a Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty was signed and in 1981 the Multinational Force and Observers was established



Jeff Arvin and his son walk to along the trees planted in honor of the fallen Soldiers of Arrow Air DC-8 at the Gander Memorial Service, Dec. 12 on Ft Campbell. Arvin's father, Spc. Roger Arvin, 3rd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment died in the 1985 Gander, Newfoundland crash. A tree is planted for each of the 248 Soldiers whom were on the flight returning home from a peacekeeping mission in Sinai, Egypt.

to monitor Egypt and Israel's compliance to the treaty. Due to the importance placed on the success of this treaty only the best military units were sent. In 1985, members of 3rd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, were the best.

"Some people think of members of the military as only warriors," said President Ronald Reagan in his remarks at the memorial service for those who died in the Gander crash. "But the men and women we mourn today were peacemakers. They were there to protect life and preserve a peace, to act as a force for stability and hope and trust. Their commitment was as strong as their purpose was pure. And they were proud. They had a rendezvous with destiny and a potential they never failed to meet."

As a tribute to the steadfastness of the 101st Soldiers a copse of Maple trees was planted in the heart of Fort Campbell, to commemorate the Soldiers of 3rd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, that has grown tall and strong.

"We honor these valiant and selfless servants of the greatest country in the world and we are always reminded of their sacrifice and also that they stood on the wall

of freedom and they served for those who could not or would not," said Col. Arthur Kandarian, 2nd Brigade Combat Team Commander at the Gander Memorial service in 2009. "We never forget."

Soldiers, old and new, still walk that path of dedication and selfless service that has defined what it means to belong in the 101st Airborne Division. This past year marks 25 years since the crash took so many of the 2nd Brigade family, so much has happened in the world since then, but the 101st remembers.

"The Multinational Force and Observers in the 80's was the real world mission," said Kandarian. In a time before the United States was embroiled in the Middle East, this peacekeeping mission was of greatest importance and Strike was there on the front lines.

As in generations past, the Strike Brigade stands once again on the front lines, this time in Afghanistan. Strike is building stability in a country that has endured more war and violence than prosperity. In the face of this adversity, the Soldiers are standing strong and dedicated to the mission.



A widow looks on at the names of the fallen lost in Arrow Air DC-8 flight 1285 at the Gander Memorial Ceremony in the Hopkinsville, KY, Dec. 12. The Soldiers whom died in the crash 25-years ago were returning home from a peacekeeping mission in Sinai, Egypt. Their mission was vital to the stabilization of the war torn region.

Pir Mohammed School opens its doors

For most young children, school is mandatory and the thought of attending is expected. For children in Afghanistan, school is dangerous and could even be deadly, for most families the risk is too high and the children stay home.

For the people of the Zharay district, the Pir Mohammed School was one of the premiere schools, offering classes for boys and girls. When the school became a target for violence from Taliban, Pir Mohammed was closed.

Company A, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), arrived in Senjaray in May, relieving the Command Outpost and the security detail of the city from 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Carson. The Soldiers began clearing operations in April, but the real push for security came during Combined Task Force Strike's Operation Dragon Strike.

"This area became a fighting ground for several months," said Capt. Nicholas Stout, commander for Company A. "This school stands for something, or the insurgents wouldn't have fought so hard to keep the school closed. Re-opening this school shows



Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Brigade, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), relax in the courtyard of the Pir Mohammed School before it is scheduled to open.

progress, we are trying to help give the kids here an opportunity to improve their quality of life, take away the necessity of becoming a member of the Taliban."

With the opportunity to attend school and receive an education, the younger generations of Afghans are opening up opportunities for their future.

"This is a long term plan," said Stout, "by helping them open the school, we are giving the Afghan people an option in life, another plan. By having them work on the school and in the surrounding area, gives them something to want, to work for and to protect."

A lot of work has gone into

the Pir Mohammed School to make it ready for classes to begin again. The people of Senjaray are still worried about allowing their children to attend with the threat of Taliban retaliation. To mitigate that concern, an Afghan National Police compound was constructed adjacent to the school. ANP checkpoints have also been established along Route Senjaray, the only road that leads into the school.

"Since the clearing operation during Operation Dragon Strike, the area surrounding the school has achieved a level of security," said Capt. Cullen Lind, the executive officer for Company A. "Our intention is to continue having an ANA, ANP and U.S. presence near the school to maintain that security."

Little work was needed to fix the school and prepare it for classes to begin again. With security of the area under the control of Coalition Forces, all that is missing from the school is the teachers and children.

"A lot of blood, sweat, and tears were put into building up the defense of this area so that the people weren't afraid to return to the school," said Stout. "We are almost there. A small test-run of the opening is planned for the beginning of January. We will see how that goes and plan from there."



Children from nearby town of Senjaray play in the compound at the Pir Mohammed School, Dec 28. The school will offer education to the children of the Zharay District.

FIRST STRIKE SOLDIERS MEET WITH VILLAGE ELDERS



First Strike's 1st Lt. Clayton Hammer, a mortar platoon leader with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, meets with a village elder near Combat Outpost Ashoque, Dec. 30. Hammer works with local elders to bring improvements and security to their villages.

Helping rebuild the Afghan economy takes many forms. From the national level of building governance to the local level of talking to farmers across the Kandahar Province and the Soldiers operating in eastern Zharay work daily to help connect the people to their government.

Soldiers from Combined Task Force Strike with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, met with village elders near Combat Outpost Ashoque, Dec. 30.

The Soldiers conducted a foot march accompanied with Afghan National Army soldiers from the Mortar Platoon, Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps, to the villages of Ghrakalay and Saidon.

"When we first got here, the local nationals didn't want us visiting," said 1st Lt. Clayton Hammer, a native of Shidler, OK., and a mortar platoon leader. "The overall attitude has drastically improved since June. Now they're happy we visit regularly."

The patrols help Soldiers maintain security, detain suspected individuals, assess the village's needs and help improve the local area, said Hammer.

"They have many projects going on now," said Hammer. "They didn't before and getting them to improve their area was difficult. Now, they're digging wells, working on drainage canals and other projects."

Since beginning improvements to their villages, the two towns have begun to compete against each other as they develop, said Hammer.

"They each want to become better than their neighbor," Hammer said.

This sense of competition helps by providing motivation and ideas for development to the elders of each village, said Hammer.

Shuras held between the local populace and the First Strike Soldiers help gather ideas for improvements to the villages. The number of local nationals in attendance has risen over time as the populace has gained confidence in coalition forces.

"We want them to trust us," said Hammer. "This helps bring the people together with their government. We're helping improve their lives by making it safer out here and improving their village conditions."

While Hammer spoke with the elders, other Soldiers of HHC provided security to allow the meeting to proceed in peace. These Soldiers don't take a direct role in the development, but help expedite the process by supporting Hammer with protection.

"Security is all I do when we're out here," said Sgt. Johnathan Collier, a native of Greensboro, NC. and 1st squad platoon leader. "We make sure nothing happens so Lt. Hammer can speak to the elders in peace. I like my job, it's not bad out here most of the time."

Combined, the security detail and Hammer work to complete the mission and speak openly in safe conditions with the elders. The success of the meetings helps build progress between Combined Task Force Strike and the local populace.

The Soldiers of HHC work regularly with the villages to help sustain their needs. The improvements of the region may have a lasting impact on people's lives after the Strike Brigade has left southern Afghanistan.



A 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment Soldier with HHC takes notes during a visit with a village elder, Dec. 30. Meetings such as this provide Combined Task Force Strike with direct feedback from the local populace on conditions in their area of operation.

Sergeant Major of the Army thanks Combined Task Force STRIKE



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth O. Preston, the Sergeant Major of the Army, shakes hands with Spc. Edgar Duenasslores, a CTFS Soldier with 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, during the USO's 2010 Hope and Freedom Tour at Combat Outpost Azzizulah, Dec. 22. Preston and celebrities from the USO traveled southern Afghanistan providing the CTFS Soldiers with entertainment during the holiday season.

The 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment Soldiers of Combined Task Force Strike operating in Kandahar's Maiwand district, were visited by the Sergeant Major of the Army at Combat Outpost Azzizulah, Dec. 22.

On a flat bed truck turned into a stage decorated with sandbags and camouflage netting, Command Sgt. Major Kenneth O. Preston spoke to the large "Wolf Pack" crowd and thanked them for their accomplishments during their deployment to southern Afghanistan and spoke about the holiday season.

"On behalf of the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Casey, the Secretary of the Army, Secretary McHugh and all of the senior leaders back in DC and really all of our leaders around the world, we say thanks for what you all are doing and wish you a Merry Christmas," said Preston. "This is our tenth Christmas now

that we've had Soldiers, warriors like yourselves right now, deployed into harms way. We never forget those we've lost and fallen, but we also pay tribute to our warriors out there, all of you right now, in harms way."

Traveling with Preston were celebrities from the USO's 2010 Hope and Freedom Tour, also thanking the CTFS Soldiers for their efforts. Country singers Keni Thomas, Emily West, Buddy Jewell, rock star Alana Grace, comedian Chonda Pierce, Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders Nicole Hamilton and Brandi Redmond and model, TV show host Leeann Tweeden, provided entertainment and a temporary break for the Soldiers from the Afghan combat zone.

"What our job is as ambassadors for the USO is to bring a touch of home to you guys that are far away from it," said Tweeden, who has made 14 troop visits to Afghanistan and Iraq since September 11, 2001. "My father served in Vietnam and he had a USO show with Bob Hope and Raquel Welch and he

always talked about how cool it was, for maybe an hour, forget about what you were doing. I thank you very much."

The USO celebrities played music, interacted with the crowd and put smiles on the faces of the Soldiers. The troop audience appreciated the in-theater performance.

"I liked their motivation," said Pfc. Branton Harden, 19, of Emory, Texas and a radiotelephone operator with the squadron's Headquarters and Headquarters Company. "They seemed really excited to be here and see us."

For a short time during their long deployment, the Wolf Pack Soldiers received encouraging words, enjoyed live music and were given the chance to smile, a change from their usual deployment lifestyle.

"It was like a piece of home was brought here, a change in pace," said Harden. "It was good to hear Merry Christmas from the sergeant major. It was a break, a sort of escape compared to the eat, work, sleep that I am used to."



Combined Task Force Strike Soldiers with 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, dance with The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders during the USO's 2010 Hope and Freedom Tour at Combat Outpost Azzizulah, Dec. 22. The USO celebrities were travelling with the Sergeant Major of the Army, Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth O. Preston and provided the CTFS Soldiers with entertainment during the holiday season.

The Faces of STRIKE!





Honoring Our Fallen



Sgt. James Ayube, 25, of Salem, Mass., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his dismounted patrol with a suicide improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop H, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment.



Spc. Kelly Mixon, 23, of Yule, Fla., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his dismounted patrol with a suicide improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop H, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment.



Sgt. Willie McLawhorn Jr., 23, of Conway, N.C., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.



Cpl. Jorge Villacis, 24, of Sunrise, Fla., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.



Spc. Derek Simonetta, 21, of Redwood City, Calif., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.



Cpl. Kenneth Necochea, 21, of San Diego, Calif., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.



Cpl. Patrick Deans, 22, of Orlando, Fla., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.



Sgt. Sean Collins, 25, of Ewa Beach, Wash., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit with a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment..



Pfc. Conrado Javier, 19, of Marina, Calif., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his mounted patrol with an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop I, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment.



Sgt. Michael Beckerman, 25 of St. Genevieve, Mo., died of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his dismounted patrol with an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Company A, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion.





STRIKE ZONE AFGHANISTAN



STRIKE Zone Afghanistan is the brigade's Tv show dedicated to keeping its viewers up to date with unit's events and missions during its deployment to Kandahar Afghanistan.

Learn about each company, battery and troop and be a part of their high-speed missions by checking out the STRIKE Zone Afghanistan. Look for it on the Brigade Facebook Page.


STRIKE HONORS



*A weekly look
at STRIKE's History*

The Brigade Facebook Page

The STRIKE Brigade is in the social networking world with the Brigade Facebook Page. On it are images and videos of the great missions and actions involving the 2nd Brigade Combat Team. Join to start conversations and leave comments about everything the Team is doing. Watch the Brigade's Tv show, the 'Strike Zone' with monthly updates of our time in Afghanistan, read about the illustrious history of 2nd Brigade in the weekly edition of 'Strike Honors'. The page is an awesome way to stay close your Soldiers, even while they are far away.

To be a part of the STRIKE Brigade via the internet; log onto your Facebook page, click in the search box and type 2nd Brigade Strike. When the 502nd  comes up click on it and then click 'like'. Join the already thousands of viewers keeping up with the STRIKE Brigade!

I am: Select Sex:
Birthday: Month: Day: Year: