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----- Feb. 26, 2012 -----

NEWS

Marines sweep uncharted areas of Khan-Neshin during Operation Highland Thunder

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez



SRE KALA, Helmand province, Afghanistan – A large plot of austere terrain in the southern portion of Khan-Neshin district is home to local farmers who make a living growing crops far from the more developed districts of southern Helmand province. The villages of Sre Kala and Paygel can be found among this austere terrain, along with evidence of an insurgency whose members have moved from northern districts to escape the growing reach of Afghan National Security Forces. Until recently, the hundreds of kilometers of desert and marshland terrain in this area of Helmand's southernmost district were previously untouched by Afghan or coalition forces. Marines and sailors of 1st Light Armored

Reconnaissance Battalion and India Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, swept through 324 square kilometers of southern Khan-Neshin during Operation Highland Thunder. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Walking point, avoiding IEDs in Sangin

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Jacob Harrer

PATROL BASE WISHTAN, Afghanistan – The pointman of a patrol spotted something sticking out of the ground. He immediately identified it as an improvised explosive device, the number one killer of coalition forces in Afghanistan. Lance Cpl. Andrew J. Rodriguez, the lead man in the patrol, had to clear a safe path for the explosive ordinance disposal team to respond to the device. Using his metal detector, he swept the area until he heard the beep – a signal that confirmed there was metal buried in the dirt. When the EOD team arrived, they confirmed a second IED on the spot. "It was pretty nerve-racking," said Rodriguez, a mortarman by trade with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. "I'm usually very relaxed, but I was definitely nervous standing right on top of an IED." He said the pointman has one of the most dangerous jobs in the platoon. His job is to select a safe path for the patrol, visually inspecting every step he takes while still on the lookout for the enemy. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



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British and Afghan forces target insurgency in Nahr-e Saraj

U.K. Defence News



Soldiers from 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 RIFLES) have joined Afghan security forces in an operation to clear a key insurgent 'safe haven' in Helmand province, Afghanistan. Around one hundred British troops from 5 RIFLES teamed up with 200 warriors from the 2nd Kandak of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and patrolmen from the Afghan National Police (ANP) to drive the insurgency from Kopak, in the Nahr-e Saraj district. The district is one of three in Helmand where British troops are deployed, and the last where Task Force Helmand retains the lead for security after the successful transition of Nad 'Ali and Lashkar Gah to Afghan

control. Operation KAPCHA ZHRANDAGARAY targeted a 16-square-kilometre area that has seen little influence from the Afghan authorities so far. The clearance operation saw Afghan bomb disposal experts discover and destroy 10 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and allowed engineers to build five new checkpoints for Afghan police to hold the territory. **(Read the STORY)**

Afghan Soldiers run Patrol Base, secure local area

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Jacob Harrer

HANJAR YAK, Afghanistan - When Sgt. Zachary T. Harding and his squad of Marines arrived at the patrol base several weeks ago, they thought they would be training a squad of Afghan National Army soldiers. However, the Marines discovered a highly proficient and hospitable group of ANA soldiers who were able to function independently, explained Harding, a squad leader with 2nd Platoon, India Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. In the following weeks, the Marines built a close relationship with the ANA soldiers here, added Harding. On Feb. 8, the Marines transferred authority of Hanjar Yak to the ANA's 3rd Tolai, 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps. Since then, the ANA soldiers formally took responsibility for every daily task, including guarding the facility, running independent patrols, resupplying and cooking, said 2nd Lt. Brian Darcy, 1st Platoon commander, India Co. When Darcy, a 25-year-old native of Petaluma, Calif., arrived here, the ANA soldiers were already equipped with all of the skills necessary for security operations, including patrolling, navigating and communicating. **(Read the STORY)**



Afghan police, Marines maintain security gains at Pinjadoo precinct

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Johnny Merkle



PINJADOO, Helmand province, Afghanistan – As coalition forces continue their shift to an advisory role in Nawa and Afghan National Security Forces take the lead in counterinsurgency operations, some areas within the district are more than ready for the changeover to begin. The Pinjadoo precinct is one of the safest areas in Nawa district and has been for many months. As Marines with 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment still maintain a reduced presence in the area, Afghan police forces stationed at the precinct believe the time has come for them to take responsibility for the security of their homeland. "We are more than ready to operate by ourselves and take on new responsibilities," said Mohammad Dawood, the Afghan

Uniformed Police executive officer at the Pinjadoo precinct. "The police here have a really good relationship with the local people in the area which is a key element of success for Pinjadoo." **(Read the STORY)**

Afghan soldiers develop into machine gun leaders under the guidance of ‘America’s Battalion’

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Reece Lodder

SHAMSHAD RANGE, Helmand province, Afghanistan — Standing tall over a line of prone Afghan soldiers shouldering machine guns, a bulky U.S. Marine instructor screams for them to prepare to fire their weapons. Their shared vocabulary spans only a handful of words and phrases, but the prone gunners respond by loudly repeating the commands in heavily accented English. Their shouts disappear into a staccato symphony as the deafening strings of machine gun fire pepper targets hundreds of meters away. Afghan National Army soldiers with 2nd Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, fired machine guns under the guidance of Marines with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment’s



Embedded Training Team in the final event of a machine gun operators course here, Feb. 21. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

1st MLG takes over logistics operations in Afghanistan

Story by Marine 2nd Lt. Tyler Morrison and photos by Marine Sgt. Justin Shemanski



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – After a successful deployment providing logistical support to combat operations, 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) relinquished their responsibilities in Regional Command Southwest to 1st Marine Logistics Group (Forward) in a transfer of authority ceremony here, Feb. 15. 2nd MLG (Fwd) conducted one last symbolic action in theater as they cased their colors, fresh with a new Afghan Campaign streamer. Conversely, 1st MLG (Fwd) unfurled their colors into the stiff Afghan wind representing their assumption of the logistical support responsibilities in Helmand province. Maj. Gen. John A. Toolan, commanding general of RC(SW), was present at the

ceremony to extend his thanks and appreciation to the Marines and sailors of 2nd MLG after a job well done. “I have rarely ever seen Marines from MLG, or Marines anywhere, operate with such intensity and such purpose as I have seen with all the Marines at MLG,” said Toolan. “As a result, Helmand province has transformed before our eyes over the past year.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Army divers in Helmand River night mission

U.K. Defence News

British Army divers have conducted a night-time diving operation in the Helmand River in Afghanistan in order to help with the development of irrigation and agriculture in the region. Sappers from the Royal Engineers deployed on the complex operation under the cover of darkness, with protection provided by the Afghan Uniform Police. Soldiers from 35 Engineer Regiment planned and conducted the nine-hour operation, which involved ten divers, to measure how much water was flowing along the river to help Afghan authorities plan future irrigation projects. The first phase was to look at the profile of the river bed, and was headed up by Captain Anthony Gleave, who explained: “The overall aim of the dive was to provide the ability to know how much water is flowing down the Helmand River. This will help towards planning for future irrigation works.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Sailors earn Marine Corps combat qualification in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Brian Adam Jones



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan — The Fleet Marine Force qualification, a military badge earned by sailors assigned to U.S. Marine Corps commands, is a source of pride for many in the Navy, a testament to experience, to time spent on the Navy's "green side" – serving alongside U.S. Marines. More than 50 sailors attached to 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) in Afghanistan now proudly wear the silver device on their chest, a distinction earned during their deployment. "It means a great deal, it's an honor to be able to wear this every day," said Seaman Chase Lapradd, a corpsman attached to 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward), and a native of Drakes Branch, Va., who was presented his

qualification badge during a ceremony at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, Feb. 16. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Show me the money: Marines provide payment to local Afghan Policemen

Story and photos by Master Gunnery Sgt. Phil Mehringer

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Everybody likes payday. Walking around with bundles of cash is a dream for many but for two Marines working in the Afghan National Security Force Development Team for Regional Command Southwest -- it's just another day on the frontlines of Afghanistan. Unfortunately for Capt. Chad Lowry and Staff Sgt. Christopher Stephens, the cash they are carrying today is not from their personal bank accounts but will be used to pay new members of the Afghan Local Police. The Afghan Local Police are a part-time police force made up of civilians from local villages much like reserve law enforcement officials in the United States. They receive uniforms and on-the-job training while waiting for their formal training to begin. It takes approximately 60 days for the



Afghan government to start the automated pay process under the Ministry of Interior. Lowry and Stephens travel throughout Helmand province ensuring the new policemen are paid during the transitional period.

[\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Any clime or any place, Marines stay fit

Story and photos by Marine Staff Sgt. Robert Storm



FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Nimruz province, Afghanistan - Marines are synonymous with physical fitness and endurance. It doesn't matter that they're deployed to a combat zone, Marines like to stay fit. It's what allows them to deal with any situation quickly, cleanly and when necessary with violence. "Pain retains," said Master Sgt. Jamie Ramirez, 38, S-1 chief, Regimental Combat Team 6, from Los Angeles, Calif. "If you're not working out till it hurts, you ain't doing it right." Most Marines pride themselves on being physically fit, regardless of age, rank, gender or duty. Since all Marines must pass an annual Physical Fitness Test and an annual Combat Fitness Test, most sections or

shops will train together to build cohesion. Lifting weights, running, or doing endless repetitions of every imaginable exercise – all so Marines can maintain the reputation as elite fighting warriors. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Naturalization ceremony gives deployed MLG Marines citizenship

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Michele Watson

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Five members of 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) recited the Pledge of Allegiance during a naturalization ceremony that granted the service members their citizenship to the United States of America at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan, Feb. 10. Corporal Miguel Aliaga and Lance Cpls. Luis Luna, Erick Mayora Garcia, Maribel Mendoza, and Biancesca Rivera each raised their right hand to declare an oath to support and defend the Constitution and to denounce any allegiance to their previous citizenship. Being a citizen of the United States is the first step toward the American dream.

However, for those service members who have already sacrificed years of their lives fighting for the red, white, and blue, obtaining citizenship while deployed to a combat zone holds a deeper meaning. **(Read the STORY)**



Training clerks ensures Afghan soldiers, police get paid key to success in Helmand

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Monique LaRouche



LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan -- A one-day financial course was recently offered to Afghan financial clerks by a joint pay assessment team, consisting of U.S. Army, Marine and civilian fiscal officers from Task Force Leatherneck. “This is a basic-level introductory [class],” said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Michael Caruso, an officer for the pay assessment team, Regional Command Southwest, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), and a New Orleans, La., native. But, Caruso said the course is more than simple accounting. Topics covered included payroll processing, records keeping and auditing. “We explain their pay charts and bonuses. They can begin to understand if problem exists, and the

steps they can take to address it,” Caruso said. **(Read the STORY)**

VIGNETTES

War is hell: Danish soldier exemplifies ‘cool under fire’

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Meredith Brown

CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan – Some days it is better to be lucky than good. For Sgt. Jacob P., a Danish tank commander with Jutland Dragoon Regiment, luck was definitely on his side on two separate occasions in January. On Jan. 5, Jacob was manning the turret in his Leopard 2 tank while providing overwatch during Operation Shamali Kamarband when he came under enemy fire. Jacob was shot in his right shoulder and fell down inside his tank. He immediately came back up after looking through his optics and located the enemy, engaged him and killed him by returning fire with his machine gun. Following the firefight, the Holstebro, Denmark native had to be medically evacuated to Bastion Role 3 Hospital, adjacent to Camp Leatherneck, for treatment. **(Read the STORY)**



Brooklyn native teaches Afghans weapons systems, leadership

Story and photos by Lance Cpl. Timothy Lenzo



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand province, Afghanistan – Graduates filed in and found their seats, as the Afghanistan and American flag stood waving in the background.

Twenty-two Afghans, members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan Uniformed Police, graduated from the Joint Sustainment Academy Southwest's Afghan Small Arms Weapons Instructor Course and Literacy Course, here, Feb. 16. The academy offers a variety of different military professional courses including the ASAWIC, the Explosive Hazard Reduction Course and Tactical Leaders Course. The courses are designed to further empower the ANA and AUP to lead and instruct their soldiers and police officers. Staff

Sgt. Nigel Dickson, the staff non-commissioned officer in charge, helped oversee the ASAWIC training.

[\(Read the STORY\)](#)

New Jersey Marine supports troops in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Michele Watson

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Some Marines may remember the stately man walking tall through their high school hallways; an array of colorful medals and ribbons on his chest highlighting his successes; a white belt around his waist held by a distinctive gold buckle; a blood-red stripe down his perfectly pressed blue pants; and black shoes so shiny they could see their reflection. For Lance Cpl. Derrick A. Simms this sight was the beginning of an experience that only the few and the proud can claim. “A recruiter came up to me in the Bronx wearing his blues and I was sold,” said Simms, 22, a Neptune Township, N.J. native. Following high school, Simms attended college on a partial basketball scholarship. Without a full scholarship he looked to the military as an alternative means to gain an education, as well as an opportunity to see the world. Two and a half years after shipping off to Marine Corps Recruit Training, Simms wakes daily to the brisk cold of an Afghan winter. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Marine officer expresses himself through poetry

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Ed Galo



FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Nimruz Province, Afghanistan - Second Lieutenant Chad Grasmuck, 33, from Angels Camp, Calif., has been writing for most of his life, but while attending college through the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program he says it helped him find relief and satisfaction. Grasmuck, supply officer with Regimental Combat Team 6, found that writing poetry and stories greatly helped him deal with the stresses he has faced during his deployments. He has written a book of 47 poems and is working to have his work published. He is also writing a science fiction novel based loosely on his experiences and stories from people he has met in the

Marines. “I have been writing poetry since I was a kid,” Grasmuck said. “I was taking a class in college about poetry where my professor, who was also my mentor, really helped me get better at writing my poetry. Because of my professor, during my second year of college my writing became more structured. When my writing became more structured, things (in my writing) came out that I was unaware of, and it sometimes surprised me.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

VIDEO

Commanding General Reflects: Parts 4-6 of a 6 Part Series

Videos by Marine Maj. Bradley Gordon and Cpl. Jeff Drew



Second Marine Division (Forward) is releasing a new six-part series today entitled "Commanding general reflects on Helmand." The series of intimate interviews with the commanding general of 2nd Marine Division (Forward) highlights the challenges and successes the Marines and sailors of the division made during their tenure as the ground combat element of the Marine Air Ground Task Force and Regional Command (Southwest) during the last year.

(VIDEO: [Commanding General Reflects on Helmand Part 4 of 6](#))

(VIDEO: [Commanding General Reflects on Helmand Part 5 of 6](#))

(VIDEO: [Commanding General Reflects on Helmand Part 6 of 6](#))

MEDIA COVERAGE/Interviews

Frontline photos from [MilitaryTimes.com](#), photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Worth a Thousand Words: Foxhole Rest photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Plainfield Marine Seen in War Coverage photo by Cpl. Alfred Lopez

Frontline photos from [MilitaryTimes.com](#) photo by Cpl. Alfred Lopez

"2nd Battalion, 4th Marines charge Alekhine's Gun" republished in:

[USA Patriotism](#), [MCA-Marines.org/Leatherneck](#), [Marine-Corps-EWS.com](#)

"Working dogs are Marine's best friend" republished in:

**[Courier Post Online](#), [Soldier of Fortune Mag](#),
[MCA-Marines.org](#), [War on Terror News](#)**

Gunnery Sgt. Benjamin Jones talks to [WTKF-FM](#), Atlantic, N.C.

1st. Lt. D. Oliver David talks to [WTKF-FM](#), Atlantic, N.C.

Staff Sgt. John Lozano interview with Yuma Sun, Yuma, AZ

Sgt. Andrew Tate interview with Fox Sports Radio, National

Cpl. Erikanani Santos – Radio Lia

Staff Sgt. Ricardo Paez by Cpl Brian Adam Jones

Lance Cpl. Frank Perez by Cpl Brian Adam Jones

Lance Cpl. Bill Leach by Cpl Brian Adam Jones

SHOUTOUTS

Lance Cpl. Daniel Keller, Marine Week Cleveland

Cpl. Nicholas Diederich, Marine Week Cleveland
