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NEWS

Combat Engineers support Special Operations Task Force West

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Anthony Ward Jr



MIRMANDAB, Afghanistan – The sound of bullets sliced through the air, enemy grenades and mortars pelted the ground near the Marines. Through it all, the Marines of Alpha Company, 9th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group (Forward), continued to press on and complete the mission. “This mission was engineer operations in direct support of Special Operations Task Force West,” said Capt. Ryan T. Heider, commanding officer of Alpha Company. “What we did was bridge a few gaps that couldn’t be crossed by conventional means. We also built a patrol base and a village support platform in order to allow SOTF-West to push further north.” [\(Read](#)

[the STORY\)](#)

Afghan Border Police establish presence, strengthen security in Khan Neshin

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan – Establishing a strong relationship with the local population is critical to any successful counterinsurgency operation. Until recently Afghan National Security Forces have been unable to reach the people in the southern areas of Khan Neshin, Helmand province’s southernmost district. Following Operation Highland Thunder, where Marines and sailors of 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Regiment, cleared previously unoccupied areas of Khan Neshin, Afghan Border Policemen have been able to engage with the population, ensuring their security and safety from insurgents operating in the area. Afghan policemen with 2nd Tolai, 1st ABP Kandak, have partnered with Marines of Alpha Company, 1st LAR, to police and patrol through villages where ANSF presence was previously non-existent. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Afghan Security Forces, coalition forces Spearhead insurgent cash flow

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. James Mercure



URMUZ, Afghanistan - Afghan National Security Forces executed a town clearing of Urmuz during Operation Spearhead, March 25 through 30. Located in the southern part of the Now Zad district of Helmand province, Urmuz has been a narcotics haven for insurgents. Historically, a limited presence by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has allowed insurgents to traffic drugs throughout the region without reprisal. Coalition forces supported the ANSF during the 5-day mission. "This operation set the conditions to allow the ANSF to gain a foothold and move into the area," said Lt. Col. Kevin Trimble, from Louisville, Ky., battalion commander, 1st Battalion, 8th

Marine Regiment. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Afghan forces step up, Marines step back in Helmand province

Story and photos by Lance Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

FORWARD OPERATING BASE JACKSON, Afghanistan – As coalition forces draw down from Afghanistan and more Marines return home each month, increasing responsibility is falling on to Afghan forces. The Afghan soldiers with 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps are ready to answer the call. Recently, Brig. Gen. Abdul Wasea, commanding general, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, Afghan National Army, visited the area to talk with different Afghan National Security Forces leaders and address the soldiers. Wasea attended a March 29 ANSF medic course graduation and checked on the Afghan soldiers. The graduation demonstrates the kandak's increasing independence and preparedness for when responsibility in the area falls solely on their shoulders. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Blue Knights give 2/6 a lift

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Lisa Tourtelot



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The rotor blades are spinning and low chatter is drifting in over the internal communication system. The flight crews of the two MV-22B Ospreys awaiting takeoff – again – have been flying since before 5 a.m., March 28. It's late morning now and their day is far from over. Before the day is done, the crews from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 365, known as the "Blue Knights," will have picked up nearly 40 Marines, sailors and Afghan National Army soldiers from a remote patrol base and dropped them off even deeper into Helmand province, Afghanistan. "When getting ready for an [operation], I'm thinking about prepping the aircraft and making sure our weapons are clean and ready," said Sgt. Kyle Harrison, a crew chief with VMM-365 and San Diego native. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

For Marines on the battlefield, urgent care is just a call away

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Isaac Lamberth

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - A four-vehicle convoy travels along the barren desert when the first vehicle is suddenly struck by an improvised explosive device. A Marine in the first vehicle is hit in the face by shrapnel. A Navy corpsman riding in the third vehicle jumps out and pulls the injured Marine from the vehicle and rushes to assess his injuries. The convoy commander immediately radios for a medical evacuation. "It's not like time stops; it's not like in the movies where everything is going slow," said Hospital Corpsman First Class David Eldridge, an ambulance dispatcher for 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward). "That patient that you're with, you build a brotherhood. You do everything in your capability to keep them alive." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Carving a pathway to enduring partnership: Seabees and Afghan soldiers combine skills on joint road project

Story and photos by Seaman Marlene Hounbedji



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Seabees and Afghan National Army personnel embarked on their sixth consecutive day of work on a joint road improvement project. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 11 launched the next phase of its CENTCOM deployment with an early Tuesday morning brief inside FOB Dwyer. Several daily briefs later, Seabees and Afghan National Army personnel embarked on their sixth consecutive day of work on a joint road improvement project. Seabees assigned to NMCB-11's DET Dwyer were introduced to their ANA counterparts amid recent reports of tensions between Allied and Afghan troops. Undeterred by

what could have become a considerable obstacle to cooperation, the crew welcomed the opportunity to help increase Afghan forces' self-reliance [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Afghan officers take charge

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Monique LaRouche

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – As the coalition forces of Regional Command Southwest prepare to transition more and more areas to Afghan control, Marines are training the trainers to develop sustainable leadership skills. Along with the many discussions of U.S. troops pulling out of Afghanistan, the Joint Sustainment Academy Southwest, Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, is busy training the Afghan Army with all the skills necessary to provide safety for the citizens of their country. One of the longest and most intensive trainings is the Joint Officers Tactical Leaders course. The nine-week course trains Afghan Army officers to have all the leadership qualities they will need to train their troops and stay in the fight. "We train Afghan officers basic infantry and tactical skills", said 1st Lt. Duong Dam, officer in charge for the JOTLC. "We guide them to do the right thing." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Dog handlers train canines, save Marine lives in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Michael Cifuentes



FORWARD OPERATING BASE GERONIMO, Afghanistan – The Improved Detection Dog Program has spent years training Labrador retrievers to detect IEDs. Dog handlers with 2nd Marine Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, conducted training with yellow and black retrievers at Forward Operating Base Geronimo, March 24. "Dogs are trained on a variety of explosive training aides to increase proficiency during combat patrols," said George Barrow, field service representative, 2nd Bn., 6th Marines, RCT-5. Barrow has spent the last three decades working with canines and now works with the handlers of 2nd Bn., 6th Marines to train their dogs. Each handler went through a five-week course with their dog prior to deploying. The pair also spent six weeks working together during Enhanced Mojave Viper at Marine Air-Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif. Once arriving in Afghanistan, the handlers trained another two weeks with their dogs before going out on patrols. . **(Read**

the STORY)

Marine police advisors celebrate Afghan New Year with Afghan Uniformed Police

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Michael Cifuentes

COMBAT OUTPOST CASTLE, Afghanistan – U.S. Marines serving with the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion Police Advisor Team rang in 1391, the Afghan New Year, with the Afghan Uniformed Police here March 22. The celebration involved a cookout where the police prepared a traditional Afghan meal of lamb, rice, fresh vegetables and tea. Gunnery Sgt. Brian Stirrat, the senior enlisted advisor for the PAT, said the celebration is one of the many perks of being an mentor to his Afghan allies, "and best way to be good police advisors is to be with them 24/7." To the Marines, being with the Afghan police around the clock means building good rapport and new friendships. "To truly make an impact you have to embed yourself with Afghans," said Stirrat, a native of Wichita, Kan. "To do that you have to live amongst them. It's a proven technique that really helps out. It really takes a lot of rapport building. They have to trust you before they accept you and do things with you." **(Read the STORY)**



Afghan soldiers learn counter-improvised explosive device tactics

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Kenneth Jasik



FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Afghanistan – Afghan National Army soldiers with 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps graduated a course designed to combat the threat of insurgent-placed improvised explosive devices, April 5. The ANA soldiers also learned how to train their fellow service members how to face the IED threat. "The purpose of this class is to teach them the components, types of IEDs and IED training types," said Benny Solis, a counter-IED instructor. IED awareness training is important because they are one of the biggest threats to both Afghan and coalition forces in Afghanistan. This is knowledge these students will take back to their units. **(Read the STORY)**

Dogs of War: Friends and Saviors of Marines in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Reece Lodder

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan — Without the Marine's watchful eyes and his dog's trained nose, the round metal container packed with 40 pounds of homemade explosives could have wreaked destruction on their patrol. The Feb. 8 security patrol through the Loya Darvishan region of southern Helmand province was no different than the hundreds of others conducted by Lance Cpl. Jarrett Hatley, his improvised explosive device detection dog Blue and fellow Marines with 3rd Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment. While passing through the tiny farming village of Daywala, their Afghan National Army partners stopped to search a suspicious compound. Upon finding several mortar casings, the patrol moved to search the surrounding compounds. They avoided the roads due to the threat of IEDs, opting to cross into an adjacent field through an arid, three-foot canal. **(Read the STORY)**



Navy chiefs in Afghanistan celebrate 119 years of heritage, rededicate chiefs' mess

Story and photos by Chief Petty Officer Leslie Shively



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Navy chiefs and servicemembers from across the spectrum of coalition forces aboard Camp Leatherneck, celebrated the 119th birthday of the Navy chief petty officer, with an April 1 ceremony and rededication of the chiefs' mess. Special guests at the celebration included Maj. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus commanding general, Regional Command Southwest; U.K. Army Brig. Stuart Skeates deputy commanding general, RC(SW); Maj. Gen. David H. Berger, commanding general, Task Force Leatherneck; Brig. Gen. Gregg A. Sturdevant, commanding general, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward); and Brig. Gen. John J. Broadmeadow, commanding general,

1st Marine Logistics Group (Fwd). **(Read the STORY)**

Support Marines, sailors help EOD Company accomplish the mission

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. John Jackson

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Operational tempo in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, continues at a high pace. Service members continue to conduct foot patrols, mounted patrols, resupply convoys and construction projects on a daily basis. Throughout these missions, the number one hostile threat to coalition forces continues to be improvised explosive devices. Because of the insurgents' use of these homemade explosives throughout the battle space, explosive ordnance disposal technicians with 2nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company, 9th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group (Forward) are actively engaged each day working to neutralize and eliminate these threats. The EOD Co. is made up of more than 100 Marines and sailors. While the majority of these service members are EOD technicians spread throughout Helmand Province, 16 service members are attached to the company to perform a supporting role. **(Read the STORY)**



HEROES

Royal Gibraltar soldiers receive Afghanistan medals

U.K. Defence News



Members of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment have received Operational Service Medals for Afghanistan at a ceremony on the Rock on Tuesday, 3 April 2012. At the ceremony, held in the Convent, the five soldiers: Major David King, Captain Jamie Allan; Lieutenant John Pitto; Warrant Officer Class 2 Grant Smith and Sergeant Keith Dellipiani were accompanied by their families as they were each presented with a medal by the Governor of Gibraltar, Sir Adrian Johns. Sir Adrian said: "It is a great privilege and pleasure to award these medals today. They recognise your contribution, and it is our chance in Gibraltar to thank you and welcome you home safely." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

VIGNETTES

Shaping Afghanistan's future rewarding for assistant chief of staff

Story and photos by Chief Petty Officer Leslie Shively

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Oscillating between keeping the commanding general informed, shaping the future fight and fighting the current fight, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans Col. Norman Cooling, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), said his job kept him busy, but also put him in a position where he was privileged to watch the Afghan National Security Forces, and the country's leadership, grow and begin to take the reins of their country. "It's very rewarding because you see things on the positive side, like [Helmand Provincial] Gov. Gulab Mangal taking charge of a shura without any reliance on coalition forces," said Cooling. "I could see elements of governance actually start to root and take effect." Many of the tribal animosities between the diverse Afghan organizations dissolved, as those in charge realized they will have to rely on one another, because the coalition forces are already starting to leave, he said. Mechanisms like operational control centers at the regional and provincial levels were put in place to smooth transition. During shuras at the centers, information is conveyed up and down the chain of command among the military and various Afghan security forces, so commanders can make decisions at all levels of their system. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Afghans learn financial responsibility from comptroller

Story and photos by Chief Petty Officer Leslie Shively



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Although the Colonies declared sovereignty from British rule, the colonists did not achieve freedom or recognition as the United States of America immediately. Internal and external conflicts continued for decades. Comptroller for II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) Col. Michael Cordero said he sees similarities between the early struggles for freedom in the United States and the current fight against the insurgency in Afghanistan. "People have to remember that even though we declared our independence in America in 1776, there were a few more years of fighting the British," said Cordero. The colonel said the fight for self-determination in Afghanistan may continue into the future, but the country has potential through their leadership. The colonel recalls a speech he heard by Helmand Provincial Governor Gulab Mangal to a graduating class of Joint Sustainment Academy Southwest students early during his deployment. "He has a vision," said Cordero, adding that Mangal reminded him of George Washington and his mission fighting the British. **(Read the STORY)**

Philadelphia Marine takes pride in service to country, Corps

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Michele Watson

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GERONIMO, Afghanistan - "Not everybody gets to say they fought for their country during a time of war, and I take a lot of pride in what I do." Cpl. Jerry Golden, the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the fuel farm at Forward Operating Base Geronimo, works alongside two other bulk fuel Marines with Headquarters and Service Company, 9th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group (Forward). "Fuel is a big necessity in Afghanistan," said Golden, 22, a native of Philadelphia. "I realize how essential we are out here, and I have experienced the impact of my job." As one of three Marines in charge of fuel at the FOB, Golden supports between 40 and 50 trucks and dispenses an average of 6,000 gallons of fuel each day. "Without the flow, the proud don't go," Golden said as he recited one of the bulk fuel mottos. Golden said his experience at his FOB has lived up to his expectations of the Marine Corps. **(Read the STORY)**



Russian orphan finds home, brotherhood in Marine Corps

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. James Mercure



FORWARD OPERATING BASE WHITEHOUSE, Afghanistan - Growing up in Russia, Lance Cpl. Sergey Huber had a rough childhood and knew he had to run away from his abusive father. As a ten-year-old child, Huber and his brother ran to a Russian military base. They lived there, under the care of the soldiers until the base commander had them taken to Dietski Dome Two, a Russian orphanage where they lived for several years. "When we were first taken to the orphanage, we were put into an isolation room with bars on the windows that we bent enough to slide out and run for it later that night," said Huber, a squad automatic weapon gunner with 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment. "I was caught several hours later, and it took them days to catch my brother. Over the years, we kept trying to escape, but after a while we realized we had nowhere to go, so we just lived our life at the orphanage." After a few years had passed, the orphanage director told

Huber he would be going to the United States to live with a family who wanted to adopt him. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Two Marines feed a battalion, fuel the mission

Story and photos by Lance Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

FORWARD OPERATING BASE JACKSON, Afghanistan – The tent looks like all the others around here: tan canvas, zipper doors and Velcro all around. Marines pass by without giving it a second glance, heading to work, the gym or guard duty. Inside the tent, it's hotter than the blazing Afghan sun. The strong aroma of grilled chicken and seasonings fills the room. The Marines work furiously, moving from tables to sinks to shelves and back again. It's noon, five hours before dinner, but these Marines know it takes hours of preparation to feed more than 400 hungry Marines. "In the hours before hand we are taking portion counts, and making a complete menu," said Cpl. Peter Espinoza, food service chief, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. Espinoza, from Chicago, said it's especially important for Marines to get a balanced meal while in a deployed environment. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



VIDEOS

Combat Engineers Support Special Operations Task Force West

Video by Marine Cpl. Anthony Ward Jr



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Weapons Company

Video by Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz

Corporal Glenn Stadig, a squad leader with Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, talks to a soldier from Weapons Tolai, 3rd Kandak, 215th Corps, at a temporary vehicle checkpoint in Marjah, March 22, 2012. The Marines provided support and security for the Afghan National Army soldiers as they searched vehicles and pedestrians passing through the checkpoint. "Last year the Marines taught them," Stadig said. "This year the ANA are doing their own thing. They're making their own briefs, leading their own squads and setting up their own operations. On patrols they're more vigilant. I'm impressed with the ANA this year." Stadig said the self-sufficiency of the ANA soldiers has made it much easier for Marines to collaborate with them. He said it was the reason the vehicle checkpoint operation went so well. Afghan National Army soldiers searched vehicles for weapons, drugs and items that could be used to manufacture improvised explosive devices. **(Watch the VIDEO)**



Fox Company Project

Video by Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz



MARJAH, Afghanistan - Soldiers of Weapons Tolai, 3rd Kandak, 215th Corps worked with the Marines of the Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, to set up a vehicle check point in Marjah, March 22. The Afghan National Army soldiers took charge, searching vehicles and pedestrians while Marines provided support and security. In the past, the Marines were leading operations, teaching the ANA soldiers by example. Today, the soldiers conduct their own operations. Cpl. Glenn D. Stadig, a squad leader with Weapons Company, said working with the ANA has changed since his previous deployment to Afghanistan in 2010. "Last year the Marines

taught them," Stadig said. "This year the ANA are doing their own thing. They're making their own briefs, leading their own squads and setting up their own operations. On patrols they're more vigilant. I'm impressed with the ANA this year." **(Watch the VIDEO)**

National Interdiction Unit

Video by Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan- The members of the National Interdiction Unit, a group of Afghan special forces, stand side-by-side with Marines of 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment as they prepare for their next mission during rehearsals, March 13. Their target is a building they suspect is being used to traffic opium. The NIU are a part of Central Narcotics Police Afghanistan, and their goal is to stop the illegal drug trade in their country. The raid they are preparing for is one of many the NIU team has conducted during their time in Helmand province. "I wanted to do something to help my people and my country," said Capt. Farouk, the NIU team commanding officer. "Narcotics are a big problem for Afghanistan. Our main goal is to get rid of any narcotics in our country and punish the smugglers." The mission is one of many Afghan-led operations intended to crack down on illegal drug trafficking in Afghanistan. **(Watch the VIDEO)**



Marines Celebrate Afghan New Year

Video by Marine Cpl. Kenneth Jasik



COMBAT OUTPOST CASTLE, Afghanistan – U.S. Marines serving with the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion Police Advisor Team rang in 1391, the Afghan New Year, with the Afghan Uniformed Police here March 22. The celebration involved a cookout where the police prepared a traditional Afghan meal of lamb, rice, fresh vegetables and tea. Gunnery Sgt. Brian Stirrat, the senior enlisted advisor for the PAT, said the celebration is one of the many perks of being a mentor to his Afghan allies, “and best way to be good police advisors is to be with them 24/7.” To the Marines, being with the Afghan police around the clock

means building good rapport and new friendships. “To truly make an impact you have to embed yourself with Afghans,” said Stirrat, a native of Wichita, Kan. “To do that you have to live amongst them. It’s a proven technique that really helps out. It really takes a lot of rapport building. They have to trust you before they accept you and do things with you.” **(Watch the VIDEO)**

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Frontline photos Military Times featured photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder based on story from, “Don’t Tread On Me: Afghan forces, Marines disrupt insurgent activity ahead of fighting season

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