1 Duke Dispatch

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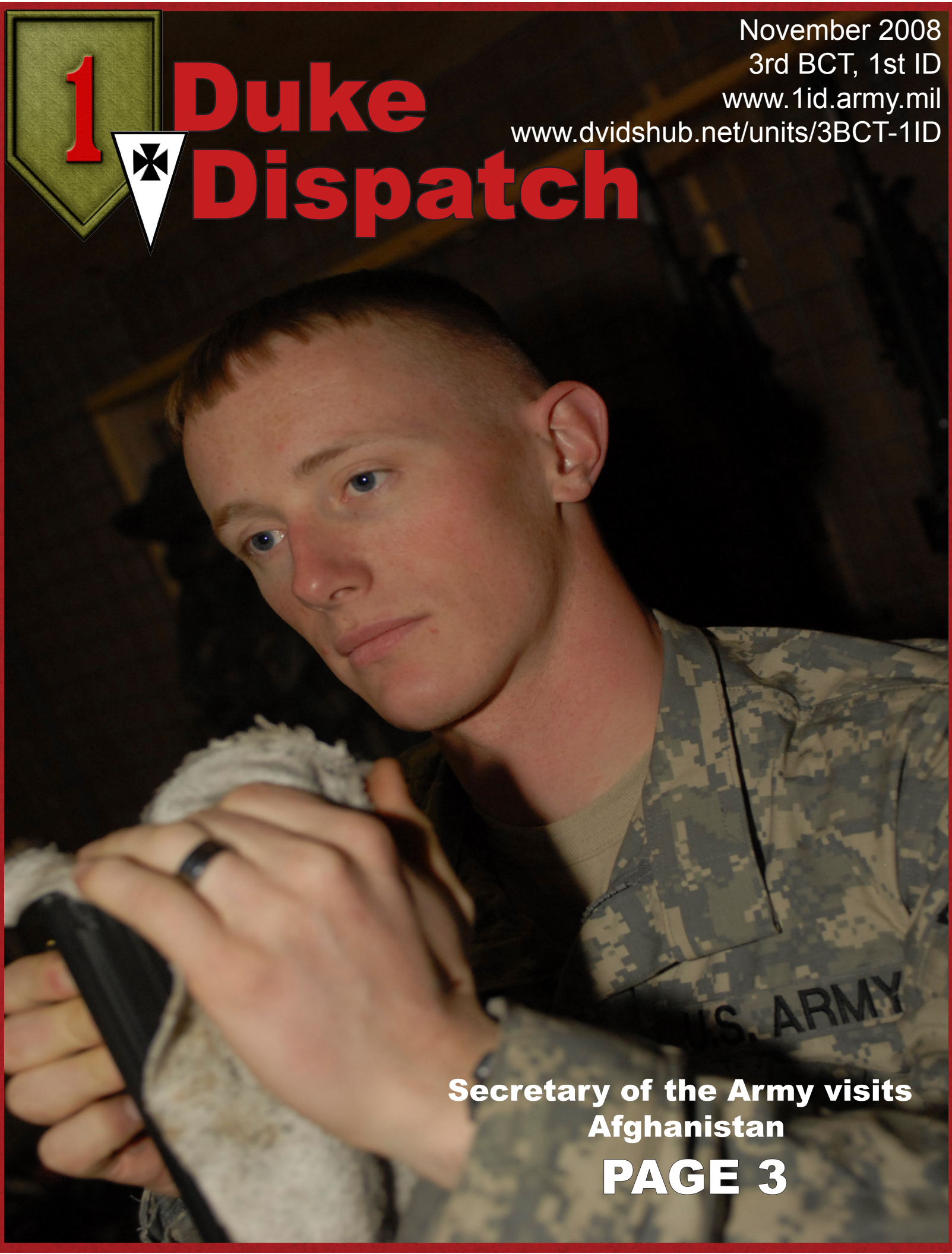

Secretary of the Army visits Afghanistan

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(Top photo)The Provincial Reconstruction Team solutes while the National Anthem plays during a Transfer of Authority Ceremony in Nuristan Province. (Photo on left) Unveiling the colors of the 178th Infantry Battalion in Laghman during a transfer of authority ceremony.

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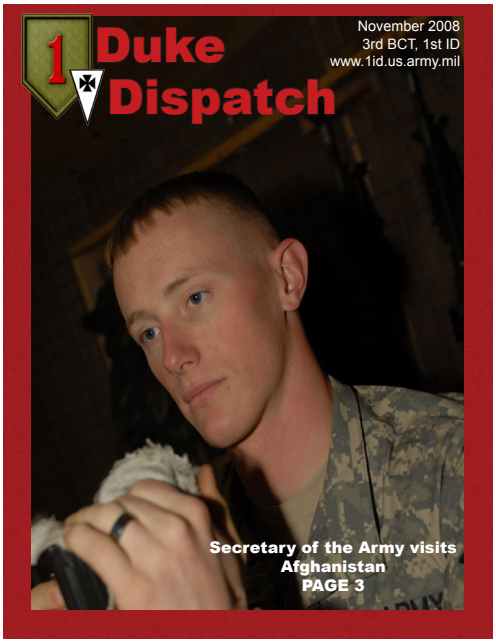

Sgt. Jeff Stauffer, Senior Armorer, 2nd Battalion, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, performs routine maintenance on a weapon in the Task Force Outfront Arms Room at a Forward Operating Base in Northeastern Afghanistan. (Photo by Pfc. Charles Wolfe)

Duke Dispatch

3rd BCT, 1st ID Magazine

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Chief of Staff of the Army visits Afghanistan

Gen. George Casey, 36th Chief of Staff of the Army, arrives at a Forward Operating Base in northeastern Afghanistan to meet with Soldiers and see the work they are doing in the area. Casey received a brief, had lunch with Soldiers and toured the Area of Operations.

Photo and Story By Staff Sgt. David Hopkins
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

The 36th Chief of Staff of the Army visited a Forward Operating Base in northeastern Afghanistan to meet with Soldiers, give encouragement and see operations of the area.

Gen. George W. Casey landed at Jalalabad Airfield with an entourage of support staff to see first-hand the work 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, is doing in northeastern Afghanistan to fight the war on terror and support the Afghan people.

"Extremely proficient," Casey said about 3-1 and International Security Assistance Forces for the work they are doing everyday. "They've been here a relatively short period of time, but they have a great command of their area and of their enemy. What I saw was committed, focused Soldiers, really taking it to the enemy."

When Casey arrived he was taken to the command conference room where he was briefed on operations in the area by some of the 3-1 senior staff members.

"We provided the Chief of Staff with an overview of task organization and the mission of 3-1, TF Duke," Maj. Skip Masterson, Civil Military Operations officer from Greenwood, S.C., said. "He seemed to be very impressed with how TF Duke forces are currently doing and how we project that we will address continued operations over the coming winter season."

Casey credits the resolve of the Army to the Soldiers and their commitment to their country and the world, in order to make it a better place.

"We are the great Army that we are because of our people," Casey said. "Last year 290,000 men and women enlisted or reenlisted in the Army, the Army Guard or the Army Reserves. Now, that's a heck of a lot of Americans that are committed to the values and ideals that make this country great."

All the newly enlisted Soldiers and reenlisted Soldiers are supporting the war on terror around the world, but the fight is not easy. Casey acknowledged the tenacity of the enemy, but expressed his faith in the American military to overcome the challenges ahead to defeat them.

"We've been at war for over seven years now. Our country was attacked by a global extremist, terrorist network, and they're not going to quit, they're not going to give up, and they're not going to go away easily. They're going to have to be beaten, and it's the men and women of the United States Army and the rest of our armed forces who will carry the fight to the enemy," Casey said.

After the briefing Casey had lunch with several Soldiers in the dining facility to discuss their questions and concerns about the current war.

"The lunch was a kind of question and answer thing," Staff Sgt. Kevin Sanders, a native of St. Lewis, Mo., and squad leader for the commander's Personal Security Detachment team, said. "We all asked him questions, some were simple questions, but some of us asked about serious issues that effect Soldiers, questions about equipment and safety. All of his answers and comments were clear and straight to the point. He seemed to be honest and cares about Soldiers."

Casey was impressed with the Soldiers he interacted with during his time in Afghanistan and compared them to those he has served with throughout his Army career.

"It's been a great visit, I got the opportunity to talk to the staff this morning…and had the opportunity to see what the men and women are doing on the forward edge of the battle area here, and I'm continually impressed with the capabilities of the American Soldier," said Casey. "As I look around the world, there is no question as I travel about, that this Army that we have today is not only the best Army that I've served in for 38 years, but it's the best army in the world. We are that way because of our people, because of our warrior ethos, and because of our values. I saw all of that on display today."

STB "Commo" Soldiers keep the brigade connected

Sgt. Jocelyn Veratio 3rd Brigade Combat Team,1st Infantry Division, Special Troop Battalion, checks to make sure a high power amplifier is working properly at Forward Operating Base Fenty Afghanistan.

Photo and Story by Spc. Brandon Sandefur
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

Communication is key to success on the battlefield. Without being able to convey messages to the appropriate commanders many essential missions would be difficult to complete.

Soldiers from the Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, make sure Task Force Duke has all the appropriate lines of communication up and running so the mission can move forward.

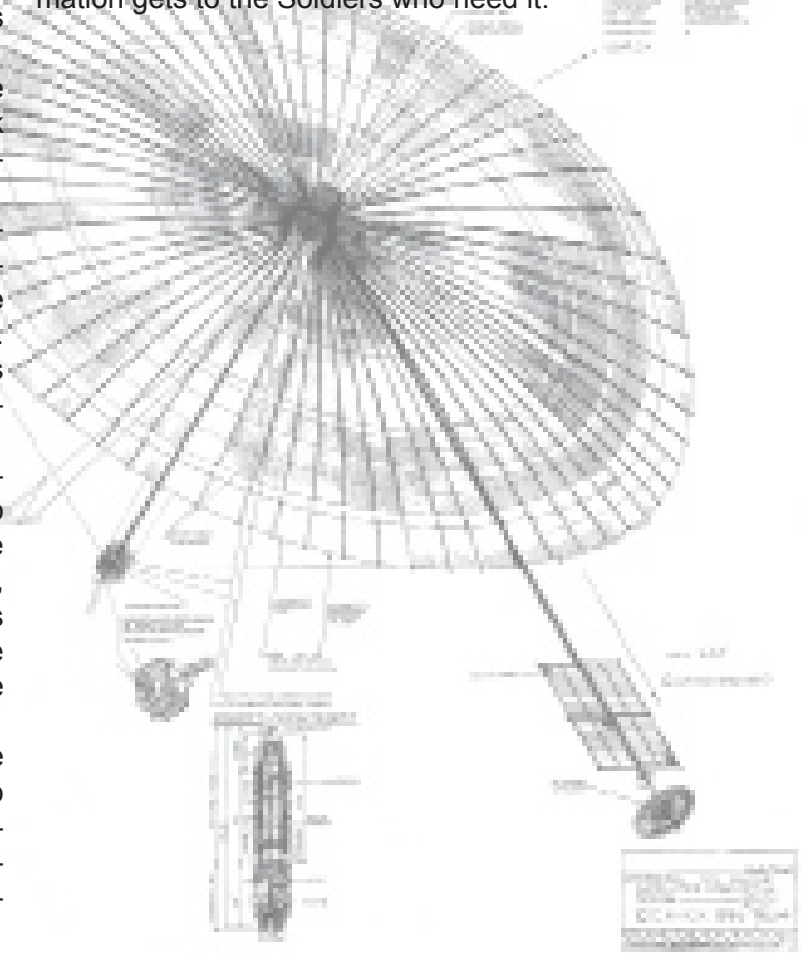
One of the main Military Occupational Specialties of Soldiers in STB is the 25 series, which is "commo," or communication, and this is what many of the Soldiers of STB are doing to support the brigade. Sgt. Alexander Englehart from Temecula, Calif., explains some of his duties as a Joint Network Operator/Maintainer for STB.

"We maintain the phone and internet connections for Jalalabad Airfield, which is the central hub for the brigade," Englehart said. We control all of the phones here in Jalalabad as far as programming them, making sure the phonebook is up-to-date and things like that. We pretty much do everything related to the phones, other than cables. That is done through the S-6 Helpdesk."

Phones and internet are not the only things the Soldiers do. Maintaining Satellites and radios are also an essential mission for the commo Soldiers. The Soldiers have the responsibility of making sure the satellite systems are installed, repaired and maintained correctly. They also make sure the satellite link is strong while constantly monitoring their "distant end", Kuwait, to make sure they both are on the same settings. Sgt. Jocelyn Veratio from Manifee, Calif., explains the importance of STB and their mission as it relates to the brigade.

"CPOF [Command Post of the Future] of the brigade relies on phones and satellites to relay messages and get information so they rely on us to communicate to the Higher Headquarters and Command Manifee said, "Radios are limited in their use here in Afghanistan because of the high mountains so phones and satellites are a better way to effectively communicate."

Soldiers of STB are also pushed out to the line units to work with them. One task they have with the line units is installing and maintaining the Line of Sight radios. They maintain traffic terminals at the company level, which means company level commanders now have a satellite dish with internet and phone capabilities so they have link-ups with HHC, which they did not have before. Soldiers in STB keep the brigade connected by providing channels to communicate so information gets to the Soldiers who need it.



Thanksgiving in a Warzone

By Col. John Spiszer
3rd BCT, 1st ID, Commander

During November we continued to conduct Counterinsurgency operations, prepared for Voter Registration in Nangarhar and Laghman, conducted the Pre-deployment Site Survey with the 1-32 Infantry Battalion; executed missions for Operations Lionheart, planned our Winter Campaign, and celebrated Thanksgiving.

After we successfully completed Voter Registration in Konar and Nuristan in October we began to look at our other two provinces.

This month we spent a good portion of time ensuring each of the sites in Nangarhar and Laghman had sufficient security to safely execute Voter Registration, which will begin in December. We also began Operation Lionheart last month, where we started conducting complimentary operations with Pakistani's Military and their Frontier Corps. The objective is to share intelligence and prevent the enemy from crossing the border, while they continue operations to defeat insurgents in the Bajour Agency of the Federally Administrated Tribal Area, or FATA, region of Pakistan. By conducting near simultaneous operations on both sides of the border we are making it difficult for the enemy to operate and are eliminating his essential safe havens. LTC Brett Jenkinson from the Blue Spaders and I also had a very successful meeting at the border with the Bajour Scouts Commander and the Afghan Border Police Zone Commander to further improve coordination and future operations.

We are also executing more aggressive combat operations throughout CJTF-101's Winter Campaign with our Afghan National Security Force partners to keep the pressure on the enemy and prevent his preparations for the next fighting season. We are continuing our operations along the border and in the capillary valleys and mountains throughout the winter to give the enemy no rest and along with ANSF further development and the arrival of elements of the 3/10 Mountain Division, we will present the enemy with a transformed environment next spring where he will be hard pressed to operate. We will soon be reinforced by 1-32 IN, the Chosin Battalion from 3/10 Mountain Division who conducted their PDSS earlier in November.

However, even in the midst of all that is going on, we did slow down a bit to give thanks and celebrate the Thanksgiving Holiday. The NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visited Nangarhar, Afghanistan on Thanksgiving to discuss border operations at the Khyber Border Coordination Center, where he met with key Afghan, Pakistani and ISAF military leaders and served and ate the Thanksgiving meal with the troops here at FOB Fenty. We also had a Missouri Congressional Delegation headed by Representative Ike Skelton to come in and celebrate with us as well at FOB Finley-Shields. In addition, the CSM and I went out to COP Restrepo in the Korengal, and helped serve turkey for the Soldiers there and then visited FOB Bostick up North, where I pinned a Bronze Star Medal for Valor and Purple Hearts on two of the Raider troops.

Last but not least, I would like to take this time to acknowledge the great bravery and professionalism of SSG Derrick E. Richardson, A/1-26 IN who served bravely here in Afghanistan but lost his life due to an unfortunate car accident while home on emergency leave. We also lost CPL Jon Stiles, 927th Engineer Co who supported Brigade in the route clearance platoon base out of FOB Fenty. He was killed when a VBIED exploded next to his vehicle. Please keep their families in your prayers. We would also like to honor the following troops who received awards for their heroism: SGT John Penich, 1-26 IN, received the Silver Star and LTC James Markert, 6-4 CAV, PFC Marc Silvestri, 6-4 CAV, PFC Kenneth Alexander, 1-26 IN, PVT Dorian Biberdorf, 1-26 IN, PFC Shawn Garlow, 1-26 IN, all received the Bronze Star Medal for Valor. These Soldiers received Army Commendation Medals (ARCOMs) for Valor: PFC Joseph Halstead, 1-26 IN, SGT James Horris, 1-26 IN, PFC Robert Roer, 1-26 IN, SPC Brent Ramsey, 6-4 CAV, and SGT Daniel Ward, 6-4 CAV.

Finally, thanks to all the Families for their support of us here in Afghanistan.

No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great. Duty First!

Photo By Staff. Sgt. David Hopkins

The Secretary General of NATO, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, has Thanksgiving dinner with Soldiers from 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, at a Forward Operating Base in Northeastern Afghanistan, Nov. 27.

Provincal Reconstruction Teams Transfer Authority in four provinces

Photo By Sgt. Charles Brice

The new commander of the Provincial Reconstruction Team speaks to the local village elders and Governor Wajhidi of Konar. He introduces the new team that will be taking care of the area aroundKonar.

Story by Sgt. Charles Brice
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

The unveiling of the Laghman, Nuristan, Nangarhar and Konar Provincial Reconstruction Teams' colors symbolized the beginning of a new command over the PRT in the northeastern region of Afghanistan. As each new command picked up where the previous left off, they plan to build upon the foundation laid by their predecessors.

With each transition of the PRTs, there will be significant tasks and challenges presented for the new teams. Such as new construction projects, establishing new relationships with the locals and keeping the standards that have been set forth by the previous teams.

"Thank you for attending today's ceremony," Lt. Col Steven E. Erickson, new commander of the Laghman PRT, said. "For our new team in place, this begins a nine month journey, a journey for us and our Afghan friends, a journey of mutual respect and collaboration."

The 3rd Battalion, 103rd Armored Regiment, 28th Infantry Division from Pennsylvania arrived in theater on Feb. 25, 2008. After a relief in place, which is a training period for the new team that will be replacing Task Force Diamondback, Task Force Pacesetter assumed authority for the area of operation on Mar. 16, 2008.

"During TF Pacesetter rotation in Operation Enduring Freedom, the task force controlled all coalition forces in Laghman Province consisted of 10 different maneuver elements and totaling over 500 Soldiers," Lt. Col. David S. Poage, United States Air force, said. "In total, these forces conducted over 2,000 patrol missions throughout the area of operation."

Now that Pacesetter has successfully completed their mission here in northeastern Afghanistan, Illinois National Guard, now known as TF Bayonet will carry the torch for the next rotation.

"The Soldier, Airman and interagency personnel assembled before you have completed months of intense training to prepare them for their mission," Erickson said.

Like Laghman, the same transitioning is happening in provincial reconstruction teams in other provinces, such as Nuristan who is teaching new techniques for goat cheese production and marketing, Nangarhar is taking on the farming community, improving slaughter facilities and seed cleaning plants. While Konar is teaching the Afghan National Police proactive policing in an environment that demands the police react to terrorist activity.

All teams have to take on the task of re-acquiring the connection with the Afghan locals in their area of operation. As new reconstruction projects begin and new relationships are being forged.

All PRTs must continue the fight in order for things to transition smoothly. The Afghan army, police and Coalition forces are taking the fight to the enemy every day, Col. John Spiszer commander, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, said.

"These teams have done and will do a great job," Spiszer said. "I would like to end by charging the PRTs, to continue their great work and make us proud of what they are doing and what they are going to accomplish over the next few years."

Photo By SPC Russell Gilchrest

A Soldier from the 1-26 Infantry stays low during contact with enemy fighters near the village of Matin, Konar Province, Afghanistan, on 20 November, 2008.

"Hells Kitchen" supplying ammo

Sgt. Kevin Parisi, ammunition specialist with the Brigade Support Battalion of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, moves a palette of ammunition at an ammo supply point at a Forward Operating Base in northeastern Afghanistan. The supply point provides ammunition and refurbished ammunition to Soldiers around the Area of Operation.

Photos and Story By Pfc. Charles Wolfe
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

Deployed throughout eastern Afghanistan, Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, occupy one of the world's most dangerous areas. Across the heated war-zone, every Soldier keeps their weapon on them in case of an attack. However, just as important as keeping the weapon ready is the ammunition in the weapon.

"One bullet just might be the one to save a Soldier's life," Staff Sgt. Iris McCollum, Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Northeastern Afghanistan Ammunition Supply Point (ASP), said. "It's very critical we do our job right and ensure the Soldiers on the gun-line get their ammo."

McCollum helps oversee "Hell's Kitchen," the nick-name given to the ASP by a previous unit, with only a handful of Soldiers.

Worked completely by the 3rd BCT, 1st ID's 201st Brigade Support Battalion, Hell's Kitchen is something of a rarity. In all of Afghanistan, there are only three operations similar to its ASP— tucked into a small corner of the Kitchen, though, is something even more unique, something without rival or copy. Managed by a lone civilian employee, the Desert Optimized Equipment, or DOE, facility is a virtual re-furbishing plant for rounds of all types.

"I'd say about 65 to 70% of all ammunition can be re-used if cared for correctly," Quality Assurance Officer, Willis Kopic, said.

Kopic's DOE system is the only one of its kind in the world. Portable and effective, the DOE incorporates a number of tools to inspect, clean, re-link and reclaim previously issued ammunition.

"It could be rust or dirt, exposure to moisture, which is something that you have to deal with out here," Kopic said. "The ammunition, when it comes in, can usually be cleaned up and re-used."

Large and small, domestic and foreign, lethal and non-lethal, the DOE shop has the ability to manage all kinds of ammunition. Made up of just two tables and three shipping containers, the system produces powerful results without an imposing size, allowing it to be deployed almost anywhere.

"In one day I recovered about $7,000 worth of ammunition," Kopic said. "Everything was done right here in this little shop."

The debut of the DOE system is something of a milestone for military science. After roughly ten years of research, planning, and design, the equipment stood up for the first time.

"Finally, technology caught up with need and produced something we can use in the field here," Kopic said.

This is important considering the kitchen refurbishes and distributes enough ammunition to supply the entire Afghan theater.

"We're responsible for all of Regional Command East. As it stands now, we have about $1.5 million worth of ammunition on the ground here," McCollum said.

Though the process seems simple, the ASP runs a very technical operation. When a unit needs ammunition, they must first submit a consumption report of their old rounds, justifying a need for more supplies. Paired with the report is a request for the munitions, specifying the amount and varieties of ammo the unit needs. After the ASP staff approves the order, the necessary materials are prepared on a pallet and organized for a smooth and efficient pick-up, which comes by air or convoy. In spite of the paperwork, the ASP's efficiency allows for a fairly quick delivery.

"From the time we get the consumption report, there's usually a three to five day turn-around time to deliver the ammo," McCollum said.

Ammunition is distrubuted throughout northeastern Afghanistan to Outpost throughout the Pesh and Korengal Valley

Photo By Sgt. Charles Brice

Upcoming Holiday Season

By Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Orosz
3rd BCT, 1st ID

The holidays are coming and this time of year can be depressing, especially for Soldiers away from loved ones. That is why it is important for every Soldier to have a battle buddy and talk about the holidays. Don't try to hide the fact that you would rather be somewhere else; talk about it with your battle buddy. Look at the holiday season as a gateway that you are passing through, which move us all closer to reuniting with our significant other back wherever you call home.

This will all be over soon and the only way to get to the end is if we all band together and concentrate on our tasks and purpose. We must not get complacent during the Winter Holiday Season. Complacency will only get you one place and one place only, and the answer is not worth writing. I think you can figure it out. Stay focused on your mission and keep an eye on your battle buddy.

Also, don't forget to communicate with family during this time of year. There are many ways to do this. We have some form of communication device at each location in our area of operations so make use of it and spend time talking or writing emails to loved ones.

I know the Duke Public Affairs Office was hard at work filming Soldiers for family members back in the states. You could send a "shout out" to a loved one on the Army's dime. Most places I've visited have computers and some have video cameras. Make a movie and save it to a CD and send it home. I've recorded myself reading two books for my kids and my wife said they loved it. Most major FOBs have video teleconference devices so coordinate with your COC to make contact during this upcoming holiday season with family or friends.

I touched on one very important point already

"We can all get through it with caring leaders and help from our fellow Soldiers. Happy Holidays!"

and if there is one thing I want you to remember from this is do not get complacent during this Holiday Season. We have a lot of work to do and keeping yourself occupied with a task and purpose will get you through this holiday season. I've spent many holidays away from family, not by choice but because of duty. When duty calls we do what we are told and I've realized over the years that there is nothing you can do about it, so why dwell on something you can't change.

Talk to your battle buddy, write home, send emails home, call home, make videos or use your own imagination for getting through this wonderful time of the year. We can all get through it with caring leaders and help from our fellow Soldiers.

Happy Holidays!

Photo By Sgt. Charles Brice

From the Left, Col. John Spiszer, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Orosz of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, carved up the holiday turkey for the Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment at Restrepo on Thanksgiving.

Training Pays Off in Real World Ambush

Story By Staff Sgt. David Hopkins
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

The mountains of the Konar Valley in Eastern Afghanistan are some of the most treacherous and contested in the world. They are also home to Task Force Raider, the 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, from Fort Hood, Texas.

The squadron began to train for the challenges of the harsh Afghan environment the instant they were notified of their deployment. This training was put to the test during a mission to interact with the local Police, check on development projects and resupply voter registration on Oct. 18.

1st Platoon, Charlie Troop, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, a supporting Civil Affairs team, a platoon from the 2nd Kandak, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade of the 201st Corps of the Afghan National Army and their supporting U.S. Marine Corps Embedded Training Team were traveling down the only improved road in the Nari district to check on development projects and resupply voter registration sites.

The movement south was uneventful until the patrol reached the Tsunel Valley.

The enemy was crouching amongst the houses on a hillside, waiting for the convoy. When the convoy came by a Rocket Propelled Grenade was fired and impacted approximately five feet in front of the lead International Security Assistance Forces truck, blowing a three-foot hole in the surface of a culvert.

"I saw an explosion to my front that opened a hole in the road, and the window cracked in front of me as bullets struck it, so I knew we were in an ambush," Spc. Brian Engel from San Antonio, Texas, said. "I drove to avoid the hole in the road and get out of the kill zone, but an RPG hit the engine of my truck."

It was an all-out firefight and several of the Soldiers dismounted the vehicles as others fired on the enemy from the vehicles' turrets.

Pfc. Leonard Kroll from Ontario, Calif., also fighting from outside the vehicle, helping Sgt. Daniel Ward from Steamboat Springs, Colo., was suppressing the enemy when he was struck just above the ankle by a bullet. As Ward continued to return fire he gave the order to Spc. Christopher Christensen from Fort Smith, Ark., and Engel to get Kroll into the truck to treat his injury.

Some of the vehicles from the convoy, despite damage, were clear from the enemy's kill zone, but not all.

"We've got to get high, Sgt. Ward's truck is still in the kill zone," Lt. Col. James Markert, 6-4 commander from Fort Hood, Texas, yelled. Sgt. Jammy Randell from Smyer, Texas, took the lead, moving his scout team up the hill to establish an attack position on the high ground.

Randall, Markert, and Pfc. Kirk Goff from Swansea, S.C., engaged the enemy's flank security position approximately 400 meters away, suppressing the RPG team that was still engaging the ETT, the ANA and Ward's truck. Sgt. 1st Class Scott Huffman from Copperas Cove, Texas, grabbed the medic and moved back down the hill to provide treatment for Ward.

Markert called for fire and the first 155 mm shell exploded on the hill above the enemy positions.

Soon after, Alpha Troop arrived as the Quick reaction Force. They suppressed the enemy as some of the more seriously wounded were medically evacuated away from the area for treatment.

"We were lucky that even though there were quite a few wounded Soldiers, very few of the wounds were serious," Cpt. Amanda Cuda, a doctor from Kailua, Hawaii, said

The shooting stopped, but the fight wasn't over. Artillery from a nearby Forward Operating Base continuted to explode on the battle scene.

"We tracked them down and engaged with an appropriate level of force," Sgt. Maj. Gregory Turner from San Antonio, Texas, said. "Although well planned, we were expecting an attack so the enemy lost the element of surprise."

The mission didn't go as planned, but the battle drills that had been practiced a hundred times did, leading to a successful battle without the loss of personnel.

"I was proud of the way my Troopers fought today," Markert said. "They demonstrated the aggressiveness and quick thinking expected in Cavalry units."

A Soldier patrols the skies over Task Force Duke

Pvt. Ryan Masterson, aviation operations specialist with 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, responds to a call from an outlying unit. Masterson tracks the airspace for all the units in the Area of Operations so they get supplies and air support when needed.

Photos and Story by Spc. Brandon Sandefur
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

There are thousands of Soldiers serving in Afghanistan in the war on terror. These Soldiers perform many different jobs, but each one is important to the overall mission. From the infantry Soldiers patrolling on the ground to the pilots dominating the sky and everything between they are all part of the same team. One of these team members is 19-year-old Pvt. Ryan Masterson from McHenry, Ill., who is an aviation operations specialist for the Air Defense and Airspace Management Cell. Masterson who has been in the Army a little more than two years details some of the daily tasks he performs for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's ADAM Cell.

"We track the airspace for our brigade's area of operations and get real time video feeds of what's going on with our airspace. It gives us a better idea of where each aircraft is and what they are doing so we can track everything a lot better," Masterson said.

Masterson further explains how he helps the infantry ground Soldiers get the air support they need if they are receiving enemy contact.

"We make sure that the infantry Soldiers have whatever they need as far as air support. We make sure they have Apaches, Kiowa warriors and we also make sure that they're getting Chinooks for their supplies, food, water and everything like that," Masterson said.

Masterson coordinates air support with the troops on the ground via radio and phone systems by coordinating through a Liaison Officer to find out what exactly the Soldiers on the ground need, whether it's air support, supplies or reconnaissance flights from unmanned aerial vehicles. Whatever the case, Masterson must be able to quickly disseminate information, look at the airspace and what is available to get the ground Soldiers whatever they need by air.

Masterson rarely has a free moment while working in the shelter or inside the tactical operations center, but he said he finds the job very rewarding. With his limited free time he likes to watch movies, go to the gym and talk to his family on the Internet.

When free-time is over, Masterson is all business and feels good about what he does.

"It's good to know that you played a role in winning a battle or helping Soldiers by getting them the air support or supplies they needed," Masterson said. "I think it's a good feeling to know that I may have helped some Soldiers and possibly save some lives by getting them what they needed as fast as I could."

Masterson plays an important roll in the majority of operations for the brigade that required air assets, which considering Afghanistan's terrain is almost every operation.

"[Masterson] is very important to the A.D.A.M. Cell and continues to improve on a daily basis. He's tactically and technically proficient at his job," Masterson's supervisor Staff Sgt. Simeon Burns, originally from Oakland, Calif., said.

Masterson wants to pursue a career in law enforcement when his military service is finished, but for now he's part of a team that controls the skies over Afghanistan.

Pvt. Ryan Masterson, aviation operations specialist with 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, monitors the airspace over the Area of Operations to make sure all is clear.

The Welfare of the People, Konar Province

Story by Sgt. Charles Brice
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

The mission in Afghanistan is counterinsurgency. One aspect of COIN is to win the hearts and minds of the locals by showing them that there are bigger and better opportunities available to them. International Security Assistants Forces Soldiers recently showed one Afghan teen something bigger and better when they gave him the gift of mobility.

The Afghan National Army, Able Main 5-3 Embedded Training Team and Able Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division wanted to help a local teenage boy who was unable to walk.

Being unable to walk, hindered the teen from doing what he wanted most, to attend school like all the other kids in his village. Having the ability to move freely is a grateful thing when someone can walk, but without that ability, they would need the help of a wheelchair.

"So we looked into the situation and contacted some people in Kuwait and they sent us a few wheelchairs to put together," Capt. James M. Marino, 3rd Marine Division, Able Main 5-3 ETT from Chicago, Ill., said. "Chairs are coming in to 1-26 IN for the locals that need them on a case to case basis. They are shipping them to Asadabad and then to us."

A nonprofit organization founded by Don Schoendorf called Free Wheel Chair Mission was giving away wheelchairs at no cost to the physically disabled poor in developing countries on a nondiscriminatory basis, with the intent to make a difference in an individual's life. Through this organization and the efforts of the troops, not only do they find ways to provide comfort to the masses in the region, they find it in unexpected places.

"The young man wanted to get a higher education, but due to a birth defect that hindered him from walking, he couldn't attend school," Marino said. "The young man also received a buddle of school supplies to accommodate him through his learning."

Most countries have an emergency network, such as 9-1-1 or some type of healthcare provider to accommodate those who are in need. Here in Afghanistan there are no such systems in place. Therefore, the Marines and ANA soldiers along with A/1-26 IN have to come up with new ways of helping the locals.

"It is a surprise to see there are no programs for the disabled like this in Afghanistan," he said. "Some of our Marines and Afghan National Army Soldiers were out on patrol and came across a bumper sticker that mention a website call freewheelchairmissions.org on another wheelchair and took up and interest in the program."

Able Main's Marine ETT mentor and provide training to the ANA and helps them maintain the security and welfare of the people, keeping them well aware of their surroundings in helping not only the healthy, but the disabled as well.

"Providing help to the ETT is a part of what teamwork is all about," 1st Lt. Steven Benedotti Able Company 1-26 from Blairstown, N.J., said. "The wheelchair donation was a really good mission the locals appreciate the good will the teams provide, also we are trying to set up an ambulatory system for the area of Konar."

In order to get the locals what they need, the ETT and ANA must take on the tasking of patrolling the area with the help of A/1-26, pulling security for the teams to accomplish their missions. The Soldiers of 1-26 have been working closely with the ETT on building and distributing the wheelchairs and also providing security and stability in the region by coordinating with the local villages on security issues.

"This is a weekly thing and future missions are in the works, such as continuing the relationship between the locals and ISAF and pushing the agreement tribal elders made at the Watapor District Center during a security Shura, to keep the Taliban from seeking refuge in their villages," Benedotti said.

Photo By SPC Russell Gilchrest

Soldiers from the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division discuss how they will get their Mrap vehicle back on to it's tires in the Korengal Valley, Konar Province, Afghanistan, on 19 November, 2008.

Full of Fire: The job of a Cannoneer

Photo By SPC Jean-Paul G. Li

U.S. Army soldiers conduct arterially firing at Forward Operation Base Mehtar Lam in Afghanistan on 18 October, 2008.

Story By Pfc. Charles Wolfe
3rd BCT, 1st ID, PAO

A short, well-kept haircut. A cleanly-shaven face. Soldiers throughout the Army have many things in common with one another, whether a cosmetic trait forced by regulation, or an experience in their service, such as Basic Combat Training. Though they may share similar chapters, however, every Soldier's story is different. For every man and woman in uniform there is a different story to tell, each one unique and distinct. Inside an organization of mirror images is a grand mosaic of individuality.

Spc. Isaac Full, 24, a Fire Direction Specialist from Canby, Minn., wrote the Army into his story two years ago when he enlisted in February 2007. With plenty of support at home, Full joined the Army's ranks at the lowest level, entering Basic Training with no prior promotions.

"I came into the Army with no rank and nothing to lose. I knew that my family was backing me no matter what," Full said.

With wars in two countries, going to battle seems like a foregone conclusion to many new Soldiers. Even as a fresh-faced recruit, Full was mentally preparing himself for deployment.

"I was 22 knowing that after I got out of basic training I was going to deploy," Full said.

His assumptions came to fruition when he deployed with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division in July. Though Full had been sure he would deploy since his first day on active duty, he was still met with a strong mix of nerves before leaving for his first tour of duty.

"The day we deployed was a day of anxiousness and worry," Full said. "Anxiousness to be somewhere I have never been before, anxious about being in a situation that I have never been in before, and worried about the consequences of making one small mistake."

It's been five months since Full embarked on his first deployment. As a Fire Direction Specialist, Full has spent much of his time analyzing data from artillery strikes, making sure the 155mm rounds fired from his unit's powerful cannons land only where they're supposed to. After a wide range of missions, he's found the training he received in his home station of Fort Hood, Texas, has helped him through true-to-life combat situations.

"All the training I received back in Fort Hood and the knowledge passed along to me from the senior Soldiers and officers over me have all been used," Full said.

Success in the Army, especially during deployment, is something every Soldier can be proud of. Soldiers and family alike can take pride in their service and the milestones it encompasses.

"With every step I have taken since getting on that plane [on Feb. 15, 2007] to being here, not even two years later, I have accomplished and made more people proud than I feel I had in 24 years," Full said.

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>
> *Spc. Isaac Full*

Soldiers and non-commissioned officers have noticed Full's ample work ethic. Just a few months after arriving in Afghanistan, Full was promoted to Specialist by waiver, chosen by his NCO over his colleagues.

"He's an outstanding Soldier. He pretty much sets the standard for my section," Staff Sgt. Lester Deville, Fire Direction Chief and Full's NCO, said. "He'll take initiative on anything."

Spc. Full is committed to enjoying life. On duty, Full is a committed and hard-working Soldier, but when the office closes for the day, he can be so much more.

"He's a hunter, a fisher, he plays golf, he's very family-oriented, and definitely loves the military," Deville said.

Tapping into a healthy power source

Story By Chaplain (Maj) Steve George
3rd BCT, 1st ID

The story is told of a woman who once asked her husband for a particular brand of vacuum cleaner as a gift. It was a "top of the line" model that she thought would make vacuuming the floor much easier. For Christmas that year, the husband bought his wife the vacuum cleaner. She was so excited she immediately reached behind the Christmas tree and plugged it in. She began to vacuum with great gusto when suddenly the machine shut off. She flipped the switch and started it up again, only to have it shut off after a few seconds. She flipped the switch once more and the same thing happened again. Her husband grew concerned and he gave it a try. Unfortunately, he got the same results. Disgusted, he decided the vacuum was defective and he would have to take it back the following morning. When he reached behind the Christmas tree to unplug the vacuum he discovered the problem. The vacuum had been plugged into the Christmas lights switcher plug! Whenever it lost its current the vacuum would quit!

Where does our "power" come from? Does our source of power consistently give us the inspiration and encouragement to face each new day with energy and excitement? Or do we sometimes find ourselves getting "short-circuited" by the occasional demands of life, which can sap our strength and leave us feeling run down like that hapless vacuum cleaner, plugged into the Christmas lights switcher plug?

The Psalmist once remarked, "My help cometh from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth," (Psalm 121:2). For the Psalmist, the "power" in life – the ongoing "current" for daily operations – was rooted in the Eternal Creator, the One who made heaven and earth. What might that mean for us?

First, I believe that a careful reexamination of where we search for our strength and our sustenance – our "shield and portion" to use biblical language – might be in order. St. Augustine once noted that "our hearts will restless be until they find their rest in Thee," (speaking of the Almighty). He spoke of a "God-shaped hole" in our hearts that only God can fill. If we want a power source that never runs out or leaves us hanging, seeking the creator of the universe is a time-honored, tried-and-true place to go. Abraham Lincoln alluded to this when he said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming sense that I had no other place to go…" Who better to seek assistance from than the one who made us?

Another aspect of tapping into a healthy power source is our "internal wiring." To what extent are we willing to receive what the Almighty has for us? I grew up in an old house with wiring dating back to the stone ages. Periodically, the power would go out and we would discover that parts of our turn-of-the-century, ceramic-fuse-and-wire electrical system were no longer serviceable. We had to replace them with newer fixtures.

Sometimes, we rely on "old circuits" in our lives – old ways of doing things or thinking about things. Those ways tend to hamper the pure, renewing energy, which our Creator has to enliven us. The good news is this – the "Master Electrician" is always prepared to assist us in switching out the old, less-than-useful circuitry in our lives. When "old wiring" fails us, the Almighty is fully capable of transforming the old into the new. The writer of Revelation said it beautifully with these words: "Behold, I am making all things new," (Revelation 21:5). The important thing is to remain open to change.

As we continue on toward the holidays, may the power which comes from above be ours in abundance. May we be strengthened and encouraged for every good work, knowing the power of the Almighty dwells within us. Be blessed and have a power-filled holiday season!

The Warrior's Poem

Written By Edward C. Connor Staff. Sgt. US Army, Retired

It is your honor and courage that will win this noble fight
In a place of sand and stone
A lonely Soldier far from home
Fighting in winter's cold and desert shot
Where comes the close and angry shot
Away from home in a far off land
At war in the dust of Afghanistan
The caves so dark and very deep
The mountain slopes so high and steep
Where madmen lurk to kill another soul
And danger makes the blood run cold
Far so far you come with one aim
To free the world from terror's chains
America's precious blood was shed so far and wide
Dark and evil men run, but cannot hide
Combat Soldier, you're freedom's spear
So precious you are and all so dear
So stand tall for freedom and be so proud
And march your ranks and sing out loud
The stars and stripes wave with glory true
They fly so high because of you
Fix bayonets you mighty warriors all
You are there for us and answered freedom's call
You fight the war in dark of night and all day long
Your courage shines forth for all to see and leads the way
We honor freedom's fighters both living and dead
For your brave sacrifices and the blood you shed
Though in war many of you died
Your great valor still gives us pride
In America's hearts you truly live and shine so bright
It is your honor and courage that will win this noble fight