

## NEWS

### One team, one fight: Our Marines in Afghanistan

*Produced by Cpl. Daniel A. Wulz.*

Marines make a difference in the world. They know it, that's why they do what they do. Maj. Gen. John Toolan, commander, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) and Regional Command - Southwest talks about what a MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force) is and does, and what Marines are and will be doing in Afghanistan. ([video](#))



### Recon COIN ops create change in Upper Sangin Valley

*By Staff Sgt. Ryan Smith*

SANGIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Since the early days of their deployment to the Upper Sangin Valley of Afghanistan, the Marines of 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion have been relentless in their pursuit of insurgents, often fighting a battle not traditionally suited for their expertise. With the use of counter insurgency operations, or COIN, the Marines are finding new ways to remove the insurgent networks from areas and assisting local villages in creating the peace the people of this area desire. "We're going to go out there and get with the people...the population is

the objective," said 3rd Recon Bn. Commanding Officer Lt. Col. Travis Homiak. "We looked at the level of fighting that happened prior to our arrival and it was a very kinetic area. We are trying to ratchet down the violence. Previous battalions in this area had a very tough fight to get to what we are capable of doing now. "By focusing on [the citizens] you directly challenge the enemy," said Homiak. "The best way to disrupt the enemy was to gain and maintain contact with the population. The worse thing you can do to the enemy is to get with the population and show them that you are offering them a better way." ([story](#))

### Victory in Nawa: the final chapter

*By Cpl. Jeff Drew*

*Editor's note: This is the final installment in a four-part series chronicling a trek across Nawa district called the Nawa Victory Walk, a four-day, 30-mile patrol by U.S. Marines and Afghan National Army soldiers.*

NAWA DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan -- Sailors and Marines with 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, slipped from the relative warmth of their sleeping bags, braving the morning chill, and began to prepare for the day. The final day of the Nawa Victory Walk was upon them, and the Marines were excited to finish the four-day, 30-mile patrol. The trek brought together Mercer Island, Wash., native Lt. Col. Tyler Zagurski, the battalion commander, and Afghan Lt. Col. Gul Ahmad, the kandak commander of 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, in a patrol across the district to promote confidence in Afghan security forces and talk to residents. ([story](#))



# Afghan National Army hosts Sangin residents, promotes security

By Sgt. Earnest J. Barnes



SANGIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Representatives from the Afghan National Army, along with Afghan government representatives, hosted Upper Sangin Valley elders during two shuras, or meetings, concerning security and development recently. More than 200 men from the villages of Kotazai and Kalawal gathered to discuss the future of security in the area, a vital concern if further development is to continue in the area. This willingness to come together is a sign of local residents' efforts to work toward solutions for a brighter tomorrow. An imam, or Muslim religious leader, opened the two separate events with a prayer and encouraging words. Leaders from the ANA Cashf

Tolai, which translates to Intelligence Company, and other Afghan National Security Force representatives followed, adding their own prayers and sentiments. [\(story\)](#)

## More than 12 militants killed in Afghan operations

By Ghanizada

November 27, 2011 -- Officials in the ministry of defense of Afghanistan following a statement said at least twelve militant insurgents were killed following military operations by Afghan security forces during the past 24 hours. The statement further added operations were conducted in various regions of the country during the past 24 hours including southern Kandahar province, Logar province, Nangarhar province, Helmand province, Khost province, Zabul province, Farah and Uruzgan province. The officials in the ministry of defense of Afghanistan also said, at least 21 other insurgents were detained during the military operations. Afghan security forces also seized some ammunitions and explosive devices during the operations, the statement said. According to reports, at least 5 Afghan national army service members were also injured during the operations across the country. [\(link\)](#)



## Afghan police capture two suspects with ammunitions, weapons, explosives

*Helmand Governor's Media Center News Release*

Afghan police captured ammunitions and weapons in Helmand province in Nada Ali district and Nahar-e-Seraj Highway from Kandahar to Helmand. Captured munitions and weapons included machine guns, radios, magazines with machine-gun rounds, mines, remote controls, batteries and materials used in the making of mines. Security Commander of Helmand Headquarter Col. Kamaludin Shirzia said that majority of these ammunition and explosives were brought from our neighbor Pakistan for the purpose of

destructions in Helmand. Two persons were captured and are under investigation for possession of these munitions. A commander of the Taliban, Mulla Lal Mohammad, reputed by Nasrat, was captured by International Security Assistance Forces in Helmand province, Marja District, Matakai area. The captured commander had a dangerous and exclusive reputation in Nada Ali and Marja districts; he assassinated 15 innocent civilians in front of the local residents. When he was captured, the local residents of Marja demanded the government submit him to the civilians, for judgement. If not handed over, the civilians recommended harsh punishment such as hanging. [\(Helmand Governor's Media Office\)](#)





## UK, Afghan soldiers launch Operation Courageous Mountain

*A Military Operations news article*

November 24, 2011 – British and Afghan soldiers launched an airborne operation into an isolated area of Helmand province which they then swept for any insurgent activity.

Operation TORA GHAR, or 'Courageous Mountain', was conducted by soldiers from C Company (C Coy), 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (1 PWRR), and the Afghan National Army (ANA), flown into the western Dashte area, west of Nad 'Ali district, on two Chinook helicopters. The operation enabled the UK and Afghan forces to demonstrate to remaining insurgents the ability of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the ANA to strike at will. It also allowed them to gain an

understanding of the local terrain and the people who live in this desert area, which falls outside the influence of the Afghan Government. The operation saw C Coy patrolling with the ANA through previously uncovered ground, focusing on major compound groupings in the area to meet with locals. They found that the population had historically supported illegal narcotics production in order to survive. [\(story\)](#)

## Marines ready Garmsir for transition of authority

*By Cpl. Colby Brown*

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- When 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, nick-named the Lava Dogs, arrived here mid-April, expectations were of a deployment filled with improvised explosive devices and sporadic firefights. The Lava Dogs transferred authority from 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, who found more than 400 IEDs and engaged insurgent forces numerous times during their deployment. Seven months later, the Lava Dogs' deployment experience has been vastly different than that of their predecessors. "Instead of focusing on 400 IEDs, we focused on



the Afghan people," said Lt. Col. Sean Riordan, 1/3 battalion commander and a native of Montclair, Va. "It was a great surprise to not have to find two or three IEDs everyday because all that does is slow you down and prevent you from being close to the people you are trying to protect." Insurgent IED activity has decreased by more than 80 percent, since 2/1's rotation out of Garmsir. Small arms fire has decreased by more than 90 percent. These statistics are especially remarkable considering 1/3 operated in Garmsir through the summer months, typically known as fighting season for insurgents. [\(story\)](#)



## CDS: We're en route to deliver Afghanistan strategy

*A Military Operations news article*

Nov. 24, 2011 --The Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), General Sir David Richards, has said in an interview that in ten years time we will all agree the war in Afghanistan was necessary.

General Richards gave an interview about UK operations in Afghanistan to The Times newspaper, published today. In the piece, CDS spoke about the reasons for the mission, the current strategy and plans for the UK's military withdrawal. General Richards said that we won't really know how successful the mission in Afghanistan has been for a few years yet, but justified the mission saying: "You have to be prepared to fight for one's freedom and one's security. And if you go

back to the situation in 2001 - and I think people tend not to do this sufficiently often - and think of those twin towers, think again of what happened here in London a few years later, and just pause as to whether or not, if we had not gone into Afghanistan, we wouldn't have had a lot more of that. "All the people that I've got under me have been fighting for ten years to ensure that this country and the people of this country will not have such a high risk of that sort of thing being inflicted on them. "And the fact is that . . . over the ten years there has not been a terrorist attack launched from Afghanistan." [\(story\)](#)





## Marine squadron in Afghanistan wins Pentagon's top maintenance award

*By Cpl. Brian Adam Jones*

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Just days into their second deployment to Afghanistan in two years, the Marines of Marine Electronic Warfare Squadron 1, an EA-6B Prowler squadron deployed from Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., learned they received the Pentagon's top maintenance award for their efforts in 2010. The Secretary of Defense maintenance awards program recognizes outstanding performance by units maintaining military equipment and weapons systems. Six units

from across the Department of Defense are recognized annually. One of the six award winners receives top honors as the Phoenix Award winner. After being recognized in the small unit category, Marine Electronic Warfare Squadron 1 was named the Phoenix award winner in a Nov. 18 news release by the Department of Defense. "It's unprecedented," said the squadron's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Chandler Seagraves. [\(story\)](#)

## Operation North Pole ramps up for holiday mail rush

*By Cpl. Katherine M. Solano*

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- The Marines with the Postal Detachment, Headquarters and Service Company, 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) are accustomed to moving upward of 10,000 pounds of mail per day, but with the holiday season approaching, that amount will nearly double. With the increase of letters and packaging reaching 20,000 pounds or more per day, the postal Marines reached out to other units for service members to temporarily work at the postal lot from Nov. 1-Jan. 1. The influx of mail led the leaders of the 2nd MLG (FWD) to enlist the support of 24 extra pairs of hands in Operation North Pole. Without the extra help, Lance Cpl. Markevis Seth, a postal clerk with the Postal Detachment, says there would be too much mail to manage. [\(story\)](#)



## THANKSGIVING DAY



## Commandant of the Marine Corps visits frontline troops in Helmand province

*1st Lt. Timothy Irish*

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Afghanistan -- The Commandant and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps visited nine Forward Operating Bases and Combat Outposts spread across all of Helmand province, Afghanistan, in one day, Nov. 24. General James Amos and Sgt. Maj. Michael Barrett took time to address the Marines for Thanksgiving and to talk about the missions accomplished since their last visits in September. "You're making a difference," said Amos, addressing the Marines at COP Alcatraz in Northern Helmand province. "We are going to walk out of here under a victory flag because of the progress you are

making. The focus of the world has been on this area for so long and we are starting to see the progress we had hoped for when we began our mission in these areas." Throughout the visit they answered questions from Marines about the future of the Corps. Topics ranged from budget cuts, the Corps' potential drawdown, uniform policy and the recent news of Marines serving overseas in Australia. "It seems like the command is concerned and care enough to come down to talk to us," said Lance Cpl. David Filho, a Marine with 1st Battalion, 6th Marines at COP Alcatraz. "They get a chance to see how we operate and it shows that we are not forgotten," added the Colorado Springs, Colo. native. [\(story\)](#) [\(video by Cpl. Katherine Keleher\)](#)



# New England's Own delivers Thanksgiving dinner to Patrol Base Boldak

*Cpl. Katherine Keleher*

PATROL BASE BOLDAK, Afghanistan -- In the barren desert of Helmand province, Marines with Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, thought their Thanksgiving was going to be just another day. It was not. The Marines were pleasantly surprised by a visit from leadership who convoyed to Patrol Base Boldak from Camp Leatherneck, both in Helmand province, hauling a trailer loaded with a Thanksgiving feast. As soon as Lt. Col. Brian O'Leary, commanding officer of 1/25, Maj. Bruce Stoffolano, commanding officer of Weapons Co., 1/25, Sgt. Maj. Andrew Tomelleri, sergeant major of 1/25, and 1st Sgt. Adam Sheinkin, company first sergeant for Weapons Co., 1/25, stepped foot on Patrol Base Boldak they knew it was time for business. Leadership quickly set out the pre-cooked food, supplied by Task Force Belleau Wood, before it cooled down and started serving the more than 40 Marines who were fresh off patrol. [\(story\)](#)



## FROM THE FRONT



## Faith on the 'front lines': service members find strength in Afghanistan

*By Cpl. Jeff Drew*

MUSA QAL'EH DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- For many, faith provides a foundation of core values and an inner strength required to accomplish any mission and weather any hardship. It is a difficult word to define, however, as it means many things to different people. For service members deployed to a combat zone, faith takes on a whole new meaning. For many Marines and sailors, the tragedies of war are apparent on a daily basis and often require a reserve of mental, moral, and physical strength that can only be found in a person's faith.

"Faith – I've never really thought about putting it into words," said Ventura, Calif., native 1st Lt. Robert Mahua, a Weapons Platoon commander with 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment. "Faith is something we believe, something abstract, something you can't hold with your hands or see with your eyes. Faith is the ability to believe, know, and trust that there is a higher power greater than me, which is helping me stick to the principles that I believe in," said East Chicago, Ind., native Lt. Cmdr. James Gennari, the senior nurse for the Shock Trauma Platoon with 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment. [\(story\)](#)

## VIGNETTES

### Enjoying every minute of life: Marine beats cancer, gains new outlook

*By Cpl. Katherine M. Solano*

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- At 18 years young, many men are thinking about their first year of college, their high-school sweetheart, their favorite sports team or even their impending adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it. For many, the furthest thing from their mind is a cancer diagnosis – for Cpl. Daniel Botero, it was a reality. The Colombia, South America, native decided that at 18, he was going to give back to the country that has, in his own words, given him hope and opportunities in life, by enlisting in the military. With a four-year sacrifice on his shoulders, Botero had already done more than the majority of his peers. Fast forward through training and, just as he was about to begin his military occupational specialty classes to become a combat engineer, he was faced with a prospect that some adults cannot even fathom. He was diagnosed with cancer in February 2009. Not only was he diagnosed with testicular cancer, but doctors told him it had spread. His liver, lungs and brain also had cancerous cells. A new Marine and a new adult, Botero now added new cancer patient to his life's résumé, while putting his Marine Corps career on hold. [\(story\)](#)



## Coming of age through war:

By Cpl. James Clark

### Lance Cpl. Damien Mathis

KAJAKI SOFLA, Afghanistan -- The walls are thick with furtively scratched lines and the roads exist only as hollowed lanes. Distinctive villagers earn a place on the landscape with detailed memories. Each patrol is inspiration and recorded in vast detail. Combat art in the hands of young men is still alive as one Marine sketches for relief from the rigors of war. This is just a small glimpse into the mind of Lance Cpl. Damien Mathis, from Fayetteville, N.C., who now serves as an M249 squad automatic weapon gunner, on his second deployment to Afghanistan with 2nd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Mathis, a soft-spoken and introverted 21 year old, views his art as more than just a source of expression, it is an integral part of his identity, which isn't hard to believe when he shares that he began to sketch and draw before he learned to walk. [\(story\)](#)



## Java Joe: MedLog Sailor serves up gourmet coffee to fellow troops

By Sgt. Justin Shemanski

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- While an electric burner warmed to its optimum temperature, Petty Officer 3rd Class Joseph Ehler continued with the rest of the preparation work. After several ounces of water were poured into an aluminum reservoir, extra-fine coffee grinds were carefully measured and packed into a reusable funnel filter, then all components were combined – the product of this daily ritual would amount to pure morning bliss in a matter of a few more minutes. The resulting aroma, created as hot pressurized steam pushed through the grinds, was

already attracting a crowd. Is there a better way to begin the daily grind than with a cup of genuine Neapolitan-style espresso? [\(story\)](#)

## Marine brothers meet in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Colby Brown

CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan -- When Cpl. Axel Benitez joined the Marine Corps more than three years ago, he never thought his younger brother would follow in his footsteps. It's been more than two years since they last met. Benitez arrived to Afghanistan with Combat Logistics Battalion 1 as a radio operator, in early October, only to find that his brother was in the same country. Much has changed since they last spoke; his brother now wears the eagle, globe and anchor and corporal chevrons as well. "I never thought he was going to join the Marine Corps," said Axel, 21, and a native of Worcester, Mass. [\(story\)](#)



## Deer Park Marine keeps RCT-5 up and running

By Staff Sgt. Miller

CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan -- Deer Park, Texas native, Lance Cpl. Michael Logan Wood, is currently serving a one year tour with Regimental Combat Team 5 in Afghanistan as a Motor Transportation Operator. Although most Marines would consider a 21-year-old to be relatively green, Wood has already experienced more than most civilians will in their lifetimes. Wood lived a rather quiet upbringing in the small town on the outskirts of Houston. His parents, Joe Wood and Patricia Williams separated when he was eight years old, and he is the youngest of three children. His second oldest sister, Emily, recently graduated

from Texas A&M, and his oldest, Rachel, has been the marketing manager for Gringos restaurant for the last six years. Wood attended Deer Park High School where he was a track star, excelling in the 100 and 200 meter sprints. [\(story\)](#)



## VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Toolan discusses Marine Operations in Afghanistan, MAGTF

By Cpl. Daniel Wulz

Maj. Gen. John A. Toolan, commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) and Regional Command Southwest, discusses the role of MAGTF in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province. ([link](#))

ANA Soldiers Recieve Medical Training

By Cpl. Clayton Vonderahe

Soldiers with 2nd Brigade, 215 Corps, Afghan National Army, received medical training from Naval Corpsmen with Regimental Combat Team 8, Nov. 19. ([link](#))

Lance Cpl. Michael L. Wood

By Staff Sgt. Andrew W. Miller

Wood, a motor transportation operator with Regimental Combat Team 5 and 21-year-old native of Deer Park, Texas, talks about his job and his family. Part 1 of 2. ([link](#))

Lt. Steven Thomas/Cpl. Logan Homstad

By Lance Cpl. Lopez

Thomas, and Homstad, talk about their improvements on the condition of a bridge, critical to both local travel and military missions, on a major intersection between Marjah ([link](#)) and Nawa, Nov. 12.

Pfc. Nicholas Wert

WHTM-TV

Harrisburg, Penn. ([link](#))

LCpl. Garrett Duggan

WVUE-TV

New Orleans, La. ([link](#))

LCpl. Shane Duvall

KARK-TV

Little Rock, Ark. ([link](#))

LCpl. Deidre Jones

Brodhead Independent

Brodhead, Wisc. ([link](#))

SSgt. Russell Freeman

KTRE-TV

Nacogdoches, Texas ([link](#))

Sgt. William Means

KWTV-TV

Oklahoma City, Okla. ([link](#))

MSgt. Robert Allen

Stillwater News Press

Stillwater, Okla. ([link](#))

Sgt. Brian Mayorga

KNSD-TV

San Diego, Calif. ([link](#))

Cpl. Anthony Perez Jr

MSNBC (National) ([link](#))

LCpl. Phillip Roberts

WFIE-TV

Owensboro, Ken. ([link](#))

GySgt. Robert Alman

WCNC-TV

Charlotte, North Carolina ([link](#))

Pfc. Nicholas Wert

WPMT-TV

Harrisburg, Penn. ([link](#))

MSgt. Robert Allen

KTUL-TV

Tulsa, Okla. ([link](#))

Sgt. Eric Rader

WDTV-TV

Clarksburg, West Virginia ([link](#))

Cpl. Leonard Knudsen

WMAQ-TV

Chicago, Ill. ([link](#))

Sgt. William Means

KOCO-TV

Oklahoma City, Okla. ([link](#))

GySgt. Moises Vilca

CNN en Espanol (National) ([link](#))

## AUDIO INTERVIEWS

MSgt. Kenneth McFadden

Fox Sports Radio (National) ([link](#))

SSgt. Russell Freeman

Daily Sentinel

Nacogdoches, Texas ([link](#))

Sgt. Adrian Howard

Green Hills News

Nashville, Tenn. ([link](#))

LCpl. Deidre Short

Brodhead Independent

Brodhead, Wisc. ([link](#))

Cpl. Derrick J. Stein

Topsail Voice

Topsail, North Carolina ([link](#))

GySgt. Robert Alman

Union Daily Times

Union, South Carolina ([link](#))



Pfc. Vincent Jablonowski  
Las Vegas Review-Journal  
Las Vegas, Nevada ([link](#))

Sgt. Christopher Anderson  
Winchester Sun  
Winchester, Ken. ([link](#))

Cpl. Matthew Martin  
The Recorder  
Latham, New York ([link](#))

SSgt. Luis Juarez  
Marietta Daily Journal  
Marietta, Ga. ([link](#))

Sgt. Thomas Norris  
WNTX-Radio  
Fredericksburg, Va. ([link](#))

Cpl. Matthew Miller  
Frederick County Report  
Winchester, Va. ([link](#))

Cpl. Kevin Marra  
Marietta Daily Journal  
Marietta, Ga. ([link](#))

Pfc. Nicholas Wert  
WHP-Radio  
Harrisburg, Penn. ([link](#))

MSgt. Michael Noble  
Suffolk News Herald  
Suffolk, Va. ([link](#))

Cpl. Ethan Stoeckel  
WGMD-Radio  
Rehoboth, Del. ([link](#))

Cpl. Bryan Menz  
Mustang Times  
Union City, Okla. ([link](#))

SSgt. Jonathan Waytas  
WKSL-Radio  
Salt Lake City, Utah ([link](#))

GySgt. Ronald Williams  
St. Charles Journal  
St. Louis, Mo. ([link](#))

SSgt. Julie Seadler  
TKF-Radio  
Eastern North Carolina ([link](#))

## MEDIA COVERAGE

US military legacy rubs off on Iraqi youth  
By Bushra Juhi, AP ([link](#))

Years of detective work led to al-Qaida target  
By Sean D. Naylor, Navy Times ([link](#))

Strategic Partnership with US is in the Interest of Afghanistan, National Front says  
TOLONews.com ([link](#))

Afghan council endorses US security pact,  
Aljazeera ([link](#))

Afghanistan 'loya jirga' endorses lingering US presence, but in what form?  
by Tom A.Peter, Christian Science Monitor ([link](#))

US Marines to wind down Afghan combat in 2012  
by Robert Burns, AP ([link](#))

Afghanistan Thanksgiving: Marine's top general spends holiday In Helmand  
by Robert Burns, AP ([link](#))

Afghan army need more enhancement to lead night operations  
by Ghanizada, Khaama ([link](#))

Jirga assembly agrees to extension of US military agreement  
Afghanistan News.Net ([link](#))

Hundreds of Afghans protest pact with U.S.  
USAToday News ([link](#))

## LINKS

Regional Command Southwest  
2nd Marine Division  
RCT-5  
RCT-8

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing  
2nd Marine Logistics Group  
Task Force Helmand  
Task Force Helmand on Facebook

Task Force Belleau Wood on Facebook  
FaceBook

*ROUND-UP summarizes Public Affairs Office activity from Regional Command Southwest, commanded by Maj. Gen. John Toolan and covering Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, Afghanistan. Content created by Marine Corps Combat Correspondents, Navy Mass Communication Specialists, Combat Camera and UK media operations under Task Force Helmand.*

