



NEWS

Operation Western Gambit clears insurgents in Now Zad

By Cpl. Clayton Vonderahe

NOW ZAD DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Marines and sailors wait in the cold, dark, desolate Afghan desert. The air is heavy with moisture, teasing the troops with a potential downpour. If the rain came, then the aircraft wouldn't. The rain never came. An MV-22 Osprey swooped down into position next to the Marines and in an instant they were loaded inside. Each Marine was carrying enough water, food and gear to last them for several days away from any kind of support. On Nov. 26, Operation Western Gambit began. Marines from 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, loaded into helicopters and trucks from their bases in Now Zad and Musa Qal'eh Districts to enter into villages where coalition forces had never been to disrupt the insurgent forces controlling the area. **(STORY)**



Medical initiative brings hope to isolated communities

By Cpl. James Clark



SANGIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan --Nearly 100 civilians crowded the small dusty road outside of Patrol Base Florida, in the Sangin District, Dec. 2. Some had traveled by taxi from far off villages, having heard through word of mouth that the Marines and Afghan forces with 1st Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, would be holding a medical initiative, or temporary clinic, that day. The event was aimed at bringing Navy corpsmen with Alpha Company into contact with a local doctor, in order to assess his performance, provide assistance and guidance, and perhaps most importantly, medical supplies. Meeting

with 62 patients, and assessing a range of symptoms from the common cold and flu, to general weakness attributed to malnutrition, brought to light the bitter reality of those forced to grow up in an environment without an efficient health care system, explained Petty Officer 3rd Class Travis Stavros, a Navy corpsman, from Grandville, Mich., and a 2000 graduate of Grandville High school. **(STORY)**

Marine linguists' passion for Afghan culture inspires plan for local youth

By Cpl. Meredith Brown

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- For Lance Cpl.'s Lauren Kohls and Sarah Lowe, both Pashto linguists with 2nd Radio Battalion, Task Force Belleau Wood, education is the building block to the future of Afghanistan. With this in mind and a passion for the culture, the two Marines teamed up during their deployment and founded a non-profit corporation, Hayla International. Hayla, Pashto for "hope," is an up-and-coming endeavor that the Marines started on their yearlong deployment to Helmand province, designed to provide alternative education solutions in Afghanistan. With the help from Lowe's husband,



Sgt. John Lowe, who provided administrative assistance throughout the Marines' deployment, Hayla International was incorporated in Texas, July 28, 2011. Throughout much of the poverty-stricken and rural province children do not have the option to get educated because in many cases it is unsafe to build a school, explained Lowe, a native of Rensselaerville, N.Y. The Marines' inspiration to start Hayla International came from their passion for Afghan culture. As linguists, Kohls and Lowe had a unique opportunity to learn Pashto and about the Afghan culture and lifestyle, explained Kohls, a native of Stafford, Va. Now, they are using this knowledge to develop Hayla International. **(STORY)**

UK and Afghan troops conduct dawn raid in Helmand

Defence News



British troops and Afghan commandos have conducted a daring dawn raid under fire to target a suspected improvised explosive device (IED) factory in Helmand province. Operation EAGLE'S SHADOW saw more than 90 soldiers from the Brigade Reconnaissance Force (BRF) fly in three helicopters to the suspected factory in northern Nahr-e Saraj district. The area had earlier been cordoned off by Scimitar Mk2 armoured vehicles equipped with 30mm cannons, and Warthog all-terrain troop carriers armed with .50-calibre heavy machine guns and 40mm grenade machine guns. The vehicles, crewed by the Formation Reconnaissance Squadron, the BRF and the Warthog Group, helped to protect the

landing sites as the helicopters swooped in. Once on the ground, the soldiers came under harassing fire from insurgents as they moved in towards the compounds. But the insurgents withdrew after two short fire fights, and, with a protective Apache attack helicopter now overhead, the soldiers moved on to the compound where local Afghans said insurgents had been manufacturing IEDs. **(STORY)**

Marines plunge into frigid canal to save nine Afghans

By Cpl. Reece Lodder

LOYA DARVISHAN, Afghanistan -- Dimly illuminated by a sliver of moonlight, eight shadowy figures quietly patrolled a gravel road set against a swiftly flowing canal. At the front of the squad, Afghan National Army soldier Zaheed deliberately moved a metal detector from side to side, cautiously sweeping the road for improvised explosive devices. Fellow ANA soldiers and Marines from 2nd Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment followed closely behind. As daylight fell into dusk here Dec. 2, they had departed Patrol Base Barcha to re-supply Marines at a nearby observation post. With their mission complete, the partnered patrol trekked through the chilly night back toward the PB. A vehicle approached, and its once-distant headlights rapidly became larger. Zaheed stopped sweeping and stepped into the middle of the road. He waved his arms and yelled for it to stop, but the driver seemed to be unaware. **(STORY)**



Afghan National Army soldiers bid farewell to mentors as they move on to broader, more independent logistics and tactics

By Cpl. Katherine M. Solano



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- The Marines with the Embedded Partnering Team, 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward), held a farewell dinner for their Afghan National Army counterparts aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, Dec. 9. According to Capt. Patrick Ross, the officer-in-charge of the EPT, the team "was partnered with the 215 Corps Logistics Battalion, Afghan National Army, to provide [mentors], staff development and technical training, in order to accelerate the maturation of the battalion. Through

daily, direct advising and partnering our Marines and sailors attempted to prepare these Afghan soldiers to operate independent of coalition forces.” The time has come for the ANA to begin training with a larger-scale operation, more specifically the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Training Mission - Afghanistan. It was with this upcoming transition in mind that the Marines and ANA soldiers came together for a “hail and farewell” between the outgoing EPT and the incoming NTM-A EPT. **(STORY)**

Afghan route clearance platoon keeps Nawa roads IED free

By Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

NAWA DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Beneath dusty roads lies a silent danger that is, perhaps, the last remaining threat posed by a decidedly weak insurgency in southern Helmand. Improvised explosive devices have become ingrained in the American and Afghan consciousness over a decade of conflict. During this time coalition and Afghan forces have become increasingly adept at defeating this cowardly device. Afghan National Army soldiers with 1st Brigade, 215th Corps Route Clearance Company are currently working to keep southern Helmand roads clear of IEDs with the help of Marines and sailors of Alpha Company, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion. “This is mainly their show,” said Sgt. Mark Mirarchi, a squad leader with Alpha Company, 3rd CEB and 24-year-old native of Philadelphia. “We’re just here to support them from an overwatch position.” **(STORY)**



Getting the word out in the Upper Sangin Valley

By Cpl. James Clark



ANGIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Nestled along Route 611, one of the few improved roads in Northern Helmand province, sits Patrol Base Florida, a home away from home for the Marines of 1st Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. The Marines’ arrival at the beginning of winter, prior to the outset of Operation Eastern Storm, a coalition and Afghan National Security Forces effort to drive the insurgency from key territory in the Kajaki District, was greeted with suspicion at first. In the months that followed, crowds have formed outside the patrol base each day and double in size during the weekly shuras, or meetings, with approximately 50 local citizens in attendance, recently. “We’re starting to build pretty strong relationships with a couple key mosques,” explained 1st Lt. Edward Yoo, a platoon commander from Bronxville, N.Y., and a 2009 Bowdoin College graduate. “In the past, the Taliban had a lot more freedom of movement. At the first shura, security was a large topic, but after the first few weeks, as security improved and we built trust and rapport, we started turning from how we could help them, to how they can help themselves.” **(STORY)**

Afghan, American students build relationships via video teleconference

By Cpl. Reece Lodder



HAZAR JOFT, Afghanistan -- For the second time in Garmsir district this year, Afghan and American high-school students interacted over a video teleconference here, Dec. 8. The VTC, held at the Garmsir Agricultural High School, was hosted by the non-profit organization Spirit of America in coordination with Marines from 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, currently serving in the Garmsir. In April, the Los Angeles-based organization partnered with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment to host a VTC for Afghan and American students at the Kadalo Drab School further south in Koshtay. “The VTCs are an extension of our mission — connecting the

American people to the coalition mission on the ground in Afghanistan," said Matt Valkovic, the manager of Spirit of America's commander support program. "They provide students on opposite sides of the world an unfiltered cultural exchange." **(STORY)**

Members of Congress visit Marines of RCT-8

By Cpl. Clayton Vonderahe

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Afghanistan -- Six members of the U.S. House of Representatives arrived at Forward Operating Base Delaram II, Dec. 10, to meet with constituents serving in Afghanistan and gain an understanding of the dynamics in the regiment's area of operation in Helmand province, the southern most province of Afghanistan.

Representatives Paul Ryan, John Carney, Jason Chaffetz, Frank Guinta, Marlin Stultzman and James Lankford were given a brief overview of the unit's mission by Col. Eric Smith, the commanding officer of Regimental Combat Team 8, and key personnel within the regiment. The congressmen then met with Marines within the regiment from each representative's respective state, to include Wisconsin, Delaware, Utah, New Hampshire, Indiana and Oklahoma.

(STORY)



VIGNETTES

Six deployments, two Purple Hearts: Memphis Marine uses experiences to inspire others

By Cpl. Katherine M. Solano



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- The end of his first deployment with 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit brought a lot of tumultuous times for Sgt. Charlie Brown, a Data Network Specialist with 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward). The September 11 attacks happened, prompting Brown's unit to pull him off of leave and send him to Iraq. Continued action in Iraq kept Brown deployed for the better part of five years. The Memphis native did four tours in Iraq, his third being the most memorable. Originally a machine gunner with 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Brown's squads were accustomed to days filled with patrols and security operations throughout Iraq. When the Kilo Company Marines found a rock quarry that needed to be secured,

and subsequently patrolled, they went through their routine of setting up a squad schedule. "Five minutes after we got ready and the schedule was set and everything, I was on rest time," began Brown. "I heard three thumps. I looked at the [Marine on post] and yelled 'what does that sound like?!' **(STORY)**

The flying chef of Afghanistan

Defence News

A chef from the British Army has been flying around the front line in Helmand province, Afghanistan, feeding troops in austere locations using only basic equipment to produce quality meals. Warrant Officer Class 2 (WO2) Simon Macey is a trained chef and part of the Royal Logistic Corps. As a Forward Operating Base Catering Warrant Officer he is responsible for the front line feeding of most of the troops based in Helmand. Having left Camp Bastion armed with 700kg of fresh food and other goodies, he has been getting out and about by helicopter, road vehicles, and sometimes even on foot. WO2 Macey said: "I have been doing this for around six weeks now, and working with a colleague we have visited almost half of the checkpoints [CPs]. I like to put a spin on this as if the troops were on



'Come Dine With Me'. I arrived at a location with a box of goodies and an idea of the menu for the meals." **(STORY)**

Iowa Marine sets security, keeps morale high on Afghan deployment

By Sgt. Earnest J. Barnes



FIRE BASE FIDDLER'S GREEN, Afghanistan -- Having peace of mind means each service member with Headquarters Battery can concentrate on his specific job to accomplish the mission. Being able to laugh eases the tensions jobs bring while in a combat zone. These Marines and sailors have a brother-in-arms who provides them with both peace of mind and laughter, keeping morale high as they serve a seven-month tour in Afghanistan. Corporal Theodore J. Crisswell, a Waukon, Iowa, native and field radio operator with the battery, is in charge of his squad's security element. He provides protection for his fellow Marines when crossing areas where they are vulnerable to an enemy attack, as well as a few laughs, courtesy of the wild sense of humor he developed growing up in his grandmother's house. Crisswell enlisted into the Delayed Entry Program prior to graduating high school in 2008, which gave him the opportunity to prepare for the rigors of recruit training. "Everyone was excited we were about to graduate, and they were (playing) the 'what are you going to do' game," Crisswell stated. "I told them, 'I am in the DEP, and I'm going to join the Marines.'" **(STORY)**

Three cousins serve together in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Brian Adam Jones

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Lucas, Josey and Steven grew up together. They graduated high school together. They joined the Marine Corps together. They completed boot camp at Parris Island, S.C., together. They trained to be helicopter mechanics, and checked into their first unit together. And now for the second time in two years, they're deployed to Afghanistan together. The three men, all from Scott County, Tenn., are cousins. As they discharge their duties as mechanics and crew chiefs on Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369's UH-1Y Hueys, they have one another. "We grew up really tight," said Cpl. Josey Chambers. "We have literally been together our entire lives." After graduating Scott High School in 2008, the cousins joined the Marine Corps in rapid succession, all with aviation contracts. They went to boot camp in the same platoon, and all trained to work on the same type of aircraft. In an even more rare scenario, they all received orders to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369, based at Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton, Calif. **(STORY)**



VIDEO

Musa Qal'eh Wadi Crossing Opens, Connects Disjoined District

By Cpl. Clayton Vonderahe



MUSA QAL'EH, Afghanistan -- Commerce and travel through the District of Musa Qal'eh just became easier with the completion and grand opening of the Musa Qal'eh Wadi Crossing, Dec. 9. The new crossing was officially opened to traffic by Helmand Provincial Governor Gulab Mangal, accompanied by the Regional Command Southwest Commanding General Maj. Gen. John A. Toolan Jr., and several members of 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, during the event which drew a crowd of officials and elders from areas throughout the province to witness the progress and realize the potential of what the new bridge means to the region. "The symbolic nature of this wadi crossing

cannot be understated,” said Lt. Col. Bill Vivian, the commanding officer for 2/4. “Connecting Musa Qal’eh, which has been seen as an island of security to the rest of the province, I think this symbolizes that connection. This is really a crowning achievement, not only for 2/4, but for all the battalions who have fought here before us.” [\(VIDEO\)](#) [\(STORY ByStaff Sgt. Ryan Smith\)](#)

Soldiers Offer Holiday Honors to Fallen Comrades in Afghanistan

By Staff Sgt. Jeremy Ross

Voiced package about the 375th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion out of Mobile Ala. hosting a Wreath Across America ceremony honoring five Soldiers killed in Southwest Afghanistan over the last year, Dec. 10, 2011, at Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province. There are sound bites from LTC Edwin Lugo, Maj Gen. John Toolan, Pfc Jason Brendel. [\(VIDEO\)](#)



Operation Western Gambit: Commander's Point of View

By Cpl. Clayton Vonderahew

Marine Lt. Col. Bill Vivian and supporting imagery as he explains Operation Western Gambit. [\(VIDEO\)](#)

Washington Marine commander discusses Afghanistan deployment

By Cpl. Tommy Bellegarde

Vancouver, Wash., native 1st Lt. Jordan Harris, the commanding officer of 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, attached to 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, reflects on the platoon’s deployment in Marjah district, Helmand province thus far as 1/6 nears its return to the United States. [\(VIDEO\)](#)

MEDIA COVERAGE/Interviews

A Marine’s Christmas Song:

“A Marine’s Christmas Song” currently has more than 100,000 views from its various placements across video sharing sites. It is also being embedded and mentioned by various media nationally.

[Pawnee Marine Dedicates Christmas Song To Families Separated By War – News 6, Tulsa, Okla.](#)

[Wife discusses Marine husband's Christmas song – Yuma Sun, Yuma, Ariz.](#)

[Yuma Marine's Christmas song a big hit on Internet – KSWT-TV, Yuma, Ariz.](#)

[Afghan route clearance platoon keeps Nawa roads IED free The North County Times, San Diego, Calif.](#)

[Marines plunge into frigid canal to save nine Afghans](#)

The Examiner, Charlotte, N.C.

Georgia's 33rd Light Infantry Battalion worksto bring peace, justice to
Shukvani
MOD of Georgia

Local Marine deployed for holidays
Lance Cpl. Michael M. Jenkins
KCAU-TV Sioux City, Iowa

Gunnery Sgt. Richard White
Gazette Virginian, Halifax, Va.

Cpl. Katrina Oyer
WTKF-FM, New Bern, N.C.

Gunnery Sgt. Richard White
News and Record, Halifax, Va.

Cpl. Katrina Oyer
KLTT-AM Colorado Springs, Colo.

CWO Kyle Moschetto
Fox Sports Radio

Cpl. Steven R. Hall
KURV-AM Edinburg, Texas

Marine Cpl. Erik Stagar
Radio Lia

Lance Cpl. Lauren Kohls
interview by Cpl. Brown

Lt. Col. Edwin Lugo
interview by SSgt. Ross

Lance Cpl. Sarah Lowe
interview by Cpl. Brown

Pfc. Jason Brendel
interview by SSgt. Ross

Cpl. Brandy Bates
interview by Cpl. Brown

Pfc. Rocio Cato
interview by SSgt. Ross

PO2 Kimberly Ryan Personality
interview by Cpl. Brown

Lt. Col. Bill Vivian
interview by Cpl Vonderahe

Sgt. Cody Barbour
Interview

Lance Cpl. Jesse Town
Interview

Sgt. Joseph Andrew
Interview

Gunnery Sgt. Richard White
Interview

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

Cpl. Ibanez Beltran
Modesto, CA

Lance Cpl. Rebecca Moehl
Dayton, OH

MSgt. John Fugate
Okina, JP

Lance Cpl. Jakie Thompson
Amarillo, TX

MSgt. John Fugate

Lance Cpl. Arden Tripp

Somerset, KY

Cpl. Christina Friday
Riverton, WY

Cpl. Nicholas Chrisosto
Stockton, CA

Lance Cpl. Leroy Moore
Puyallup, WA

Lance Cpl. Nathaniel Lange
Stratford, WI

Capt. Kyle Schull
Satertown, SD

Cpl. Maurice Lawson
Mableton, GA

Lance Cpl. Roy Butler
Chesapeake, VA

Billings MT

Lance Cpl. James Woresch
Helena MT

Lance Cpl. Ryan Chapman
Rochester, MN

Lance Cpl. Martin Powell
Shelbyville, TN

Lance Cpl. Robert O'Connell
Shirley, NY

Lance Cpl. Jacob Hilt
Council Bluffs, IA

Lance Cpl. Michael Duran
Baldwin Park, CA

1st Lt. Alex Urankar
Mountain Lakes, NJ

HM3 Brandon Farrell
Newport Richey, FL

Cpl. Chad Clark
Burleson, TX

MERRY CHRISTMAS