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NEWS

Afghan National Army prepares for air interdiction mission

By Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan – Since their arrival in early August, Marines and sailors with Regimental Combat Team 5 have been conducting air interdiction force missions in support of various operations throughout Helmand province. These missions have successfully disrupted insurgent freedom movement, focusing on individuals suspected of smuggling narcotics, weapons and improvised explosive device making materials through the outlying desert regions in the RCT-5 area of operations. Until recently, only Marines have conducted these interdiction operations. But now Afghan National Army soldiers with Military Police Tolay, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps are stepping up to the plate. In preparation for future operations, Afghan National Army soldiers conducted AIF training under the watchful eye of Marines with the RCT-5 Embedded Training Team here, Dec. 19. **(STORY)**



Afghan surgeons meet, new medical kandak takes form

By Sgt. Earnest J. Barnes



CAMP SHORABAK, Afghanistan -- Afghan National Army surgeons with the 215th Corps and their coalition partners met for a medical conference recently to discuss challenges with medical services in the 215th Corps, solutions for those challenges, and the future of a newly established medical kandak within the corps. According to Brig. Gen. Zamin Hassan, the chief of staff for the 215th Corps, the mounting obstacles with the training of combat medics, medical supply management, and control of medical personnel called for a reform of the medical program. Hassan said other commands held their own medical conferences recently,

but the 215th Corps is the first Afghan National Army unit to stand up a new kandak strictly dedicated to medical services. "We initiated this; I personally signed to have a medical kandak established," said Maj. Gen. Farooq Pawani, the deputy commanding general for the 215th Corps. "All the issues in the medical field will be task organized, and all the challenges we have will be solved." **(STORY)**

New cultural center opens on Camp Leatherneck

By MCC(SCW) L.A. Shively

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- A throng of Afghans, British and Americans surrounded Maj. Gen. John Toolan, Maj. Gen. Ematullah Dawlatzai, and Maj. Gen. Sayed Malook, to witness each cut a gold ribbon, officially opening the new Afghan Cultural Center on Camp Leatherneck, Dec. 17. "It's very important to bridge cultures between Afghanistan and the coalition forces," said Toolan, commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) and Regional Command Southwest. "We do appreciate their culture and are willing to learn more about it," Toolan said, adding that when a person sees his or her culture respected, they will return that respect in kind. Dawlatzai, regional chief of police and the 707th Zone commander, and Malook commanding general of Afghan National Army's 215th Corps, joined Toolan for a tour of the building after the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The three generals shared a meal after the tour. **(STORY)**



Prime Minister pays Christmas visit to troops in Afghanistan

Defence News



Prime Minister David Cameron has visited UK troops deployed to Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan to wish them a Merry Christmas. Mr. Cameron had been en route to Camp Bastion to pay an early Christmas visit to UK servicemen and women based there, but when a sudden dust storm blew in, closing the Camp's runway for the first time this year, the PM's plans had to change: "You just have to take it as it comes in this job," he told the media. "What we have experienced today is what people working out here experience all the time." The delay gave the Prime Minister the chance to meet members of RAF 12 (B) Squadron. Based at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, the Squadron flies operations across the whole of Afghanistan. Mr.

Cameron was shown around a Tornado jet, and also met with United States General James Huggins, the Head of ISAF Regional Command (South), to discuss military progress in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister later joined soldiers and air personnel in the Services' canteen, where they chatted over tea. **(STORY)**

The road less travelled; Marines push COIN along Route 611

By Cpl. James Clark

SANGIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- The dirt along Route 611 has been pulverized to dust, turned to a trail of fine powder dotted with boot prints belonging to the Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. The footprints cover the landscape, blown away by wind, convoys of armored transports and civilian caravans, only to be replaced the following morning by another series of exhausting patrols. Each day the Marines and sailors of 1st Platoon depart Patrol Base Florida and make their rounds through their area of operations in the Sangin District. When they first arrived, their presence was greeted with malevolent intent, in the form of small arms and indirect fire. Even the patrol base itself became a target. In the months following their arrival, the insurgency has been pushed to the fringes -- replaced by a local populace struggling to find a voice after a long silence due to past fear and intimidation. Traveling roads and footpaths that have become



as familiar as the streets where they grew up, the Marines of Company A, have come to recognize the faces of the men and children they pass during each patrol. They know histories and stories, having literally exchanged words while breaking bread. **(STORY)**

Unmanned helicopter makes first delivery for Marines in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Justin Boling



CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan -- Unmanned systems have revolutionized combat aviation, providing a colossal advantage in the fight against terror with surveillance and close-air support. Recently, a detachment of Marines from Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 in Afghanistan added aerial resupply to the list of UAV capabilities. The detachment completed its first unmanned aerial system cargo delivery in a combat zone using a helicopter in Afghanistan, Dec. 17. "We delivered cargo today that was supposed to be delivered by convoy, now that convoy has three pallets that it does not have to carry,

"explained Maj. Kyle O'Connor, the officer-in-charge of the squadron's cargo resupply unmanned aerial system detachment. The unmanned helicopter moved about 3,500 pounds of food and supplies to troops at Combat Outpost Payne. The helicopter, an unmanned variant of a K-MAX, completed the delivery in about an hour and a half. "It is a milestone, certainly. We have delivered a lot of loads in the States during training, testing and evaluation," said Steven Athanas, a representative from Lockheed Martin. "Now that we have integrated it into the battlespace, we have gone from what you think can happen -- to what can happen." **(STORY)**

2nd MLG (FWD) introduces new LVSR 16 via licensing course

By Sgt. Justin Shemanski

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Ushering in a new era of logistical support equipment, Marines attached to the 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward)'s G-4 licensing section began operator training on the Logistics System Vehicle Replacement 16 Tractor, Dec. 18. Seven motor transportation operators from the 2nd MLG (FWD) and 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD) participated in the week-long course to familiarize themselves with the new asset and the robust set of capabilities it offers. In addition to introductory classroom instruction, students were required to log 50 miles behind the wheel with and without a trailer and an additional number of miles while actually hauling a load, noted Sgt. Justin Jackson, the licensing chief for 2nd MLG (FWD). "We really want them to get a feel for how this thing operates, its characteristics," said Jackson, of Dierks, Ark. The LVSR 16, touted as "heavy duty hauling for the heavy duty fleet" by its manufacturer, Oshkosh Defense, features several notable improvements when compared with current fleet equipment. **(STORY)**



Operation Eagle Hunt takes flight

By Cpl. Marco Mancha



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- United States Marines and Afghan National Security Forces filled the air with dust recently as dozens of their vehicles rolled into the desert. Afghan camouflage-painted Humvees and small, green trucks with gun turrets led the way into the lower region of the province in search of insurgents. The Afghan-led operation was a small shaping operation to clear the Taghaz area of southern Helmand in preparation for future counterinsurgency operations to expand Afghan-led security. United States Marines are providing support to the Afghans throughout these operations in order to assist Afghan efforts to expand

security, stability and development in the province. More than 75 U.S. troops, including a few improvised explosive device detection dogs, accompanied roughly 100 Afghan Border Police and Afghan Uniformed Police members during the operation. A majority of those U.S. personnel were the Marines and sailors of Border Advisor Team 1. The BAT-1 mission was simple: advise their Afghan brothers in arms when necessary, assist with logistics, and accompany their Afghan counterparts on mounted and dismounted partnered patrols. **(STORY)**

The BAT knocks it out of the park in Helmand province

By Cpl. Daniel Wulz

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- In the Helmand province of Afghanistan, Afghan National Security Forces are slowly taking the reins from the Marine Corps, protecting locals, fighting the insurgency and upholding Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan law. Recently, Marines and Sailors of Border Advisory Team 2 have been mentoring 2nd Kandak Afghan Border Police to ensure that the transition from Marines to ANSF forces goes smoothly as Marines and coalition forces withdraw from the Helmand province. The BAT 2 is composed of 21 Marines and Sailors whose occupational specialties span the war-fighting functions. The BAT received in-depth cultural guidance which allows them to instruct, advise and mentor Afghans. Marines and Sailors of the advisory team don't just train Afghans. They utilize their cultural awareness to also advise coalition forces on their Afghan partnerships. "Other forces are not always as culturally in tune as BAT 2," said Capt. Brian D. Vukelic, officer in charge, BAT 2. "We sleep, eat and work with the Afghans every single day and we use our knowledge to help other Marines and coalition forces plan and work with the Afghans in an effective manner. That will allow Afghans to gain a foundation of security to take over on their own in the future." **(STORY)**



UK troops support Afghan led Operation WINTER SUCCESS

Defence News

Nearly 1,000 British and Afghan soldiers and Afghan Police have taken part in a major operation to clear insurgents from a crucial area of Helmand province. Operation ZAMESTANI PEEROZI, or 'WINTER SUCCESS', was planned by Afghan National Army staff and was led by Brigadier General Sheren Shah, commander of the 3rd Brigade of 215 Corps. It saw more than 280 British troops join forces with 550 warriors from the Afghan National Army (ANA) and patrolmen from the Afghan Uniformed Police in the area where the boundaries of Nad 'Ali, Nahr-e Saraj, and Lashkar Gah districts meet. Troops from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

mentored and advised Afghan soldiers and headquarters staff through the operation, which cleared insurgents from between three major routes that run through the area before building new checkpoints to increase security. Soldiers from 2nd Battalion the Rifles Regiment, 2nd Battalion the Mercian Regiment, 5th Battalion the Rifles Regiment, and 3rd Battalion (the Black Watch) the Royal Regiment of Scotland were among those who joined the operation, alongside Estonian forces. Afghan engineers were mentored by sappers from 35 and 38 Engineer Regiments as they tackled the complex work of building new checkpoints. **(STORY)**

Combat cooks feed 'America's Battalion' in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Reece Lodder

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELHI, Helmand province, Afghanistan -- The clock has barely passed 4 a.m., and the base is asleep. Few souls aboard Forward Operating Base Delhi have stirred to brave the morning cold, a bitter chill that lingers until it's been chased away by the mid-day sun. Outside the drab concrete 'chow hall,' five Marines trudge in and out of the cold with cooking containers and boxes of food. These combat cooks didn't rise early for physical training. They have mouths to feed. In two short hours, the cooks of Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment will open the doors for breakfast, the first of three hot meals they'll serve to approximately 500 people that day. The meals are a welcome alternative to infamous pre-packaged meals, ready-to-eat, said Sgt. Aaron Sarinana, a 23-year-old cook from El Paso, Texas. "Everybody is happy to see a hot meal, rather than just opening an MRE," Sarinana said. The cooks, otherwise known as Marine 'food service specialists,' divide their tasks of preparing a feast of eggs, bacon, oatmeal, waffles and French toast. Some of the choices differ from the previous day, but otherwise, preparation is business as usual. They rip open packages, warm or cook the contents and shift the cooked food into large green warming containers. **(STORY)**



HEROES

SECNAV visits FOB Nolay, awards two Marines

By 2nd Lt. James Stenger



FORWARD OPERATING BASE NOLAY, Afghanistan -- The Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus traveled to Afghanistan this week to visit with Marines and Sailors of Operation Enduring Freedom. As part of his tour, Mabus met with troops from the 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) aboard Forward Operating Base Nolay, Dec. 18. While there, he awarded two Marines with the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and congratulated them on a job well-done. Sgt. Stacy McGuffin, of Havelock, N.C., and Cpl. Clinton Haller, of Olympia, Wash., were honored to receive recognition by the Navy's senior civilian leader. Brig. Gen. Michael

Dana, the commanding general of the 2nd MLG (FWD), then gave Mabus a tour of the various logistics lots and facilities on Nolay, offering an assessment of the MLG's progress in retrograde operations. As the leading logistics organization in Regional Command Southwest, the 2nd MLG is well underway in the process of accounting for, sorting and redistributing RC (SW)'s gear and equipment. **(STORY)**

Dade City, Fla. Marine's versatility rewarded

By Staff Sgt. Ryan Smith

*FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Afghanistan -- Versatility is the name of the game when it comes to young Marines serving in austere environments of Southwest Afghanistan. The ability to adjust on the move is a trait often taking years of experience to master. Whether it was running hundreds of miles of cable or occasionally taking up a machine gun during convoys, one regimental Marine used his versatility and drive to finish his deployment stronger and better than begun. For his versatility during deployment and strong work ethic, Cpl. Nicholas Cordoba, a field wireman for Regimental Combat Team 8, received a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal as well as title of 2nd Marine Division Marine of the Quarter for 2nd Quarter of 2011. "I was surprised," said Cordoba humbly. "I know I pushed myself hard doing my (Marine Corps Institute classes); everything that needed to be done to make a Marine his best, and I did do that. I wasn't expecting the Marine of the Quarter. I was expecting...if I push myself a little harder maybe I'll get a promotion sooner or get noticed. It did work. It's nice, but it's a tough job to be a Marine and become a better Marine and build myself the best I can. It's a good thing to be Marine of the Quarter though." "He exemplifies everything you would want to be in a Marine," said Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Libby, the communications operations chief for RCT-8. "He's professional and courteous; he does the job to the utmost and makes sure it's done completely the first time. His professionalism puts him above his peers." **(STORY)***



Hometown heroes: Operation Eagle Hunt's Team 1

By Cpl. Marco Mancha



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Operation Eagle Hunt tested both the minds and bodies of the Marines and sailors supporting their Afghan brothers as they worked together to search southern Helmand for insurgents. The recent Afghan-led operation was a small shaping operation to clear the Taghaz area of southern Helmand in preparation for future counterinsurgency operations to expand Afghan-led security. United States Marines are providing support to the Afghans throughout these operations in order to assist Afghan efforts to expand security, stability and development in the province. The Marines and sailor of

*Team 1, Border Adviser Team 1, provided support to Afghan Border Police and Afghan Uniformed Police members, who spearheaded the operation, to offer advice when necessary, assist with logistics, and accompany their Afghan counterparts on mounted and dismounted partnered patrols. The nights were cold, and the group weathered through wind chills nearly in the single digits, freezing water, and soggy mud as they carried packs and gear weighing more than 100 pounds. Their beds consisted of holes in the dirt they dug for themselves. The 12-man adviser team carried everything its members needed to survive for days in the battlefield everywhere they went, their tactical packs filled with water, food, sleeping systems, hygiene kits, warming layers, and more. **(STORY)***

VIGNETTES

US Marine father reflects on son's journey in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Brian Adam Jones

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Sept. 11, 2001, was Hugh Cuturia's 8th birthday. "I think that's when it actually struck," said his father, Brian LaPointe, a Marine Corps gunnery sergeant deployed to Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. "He was up, looking around for his presents. He came and got me and said something's wrong. I think it brought him to want to join the Marine Corps." Cuturia is now 18, a Marine lance corporal serving on the front lines in Helmand province, Afghanistan, with 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. "This is his very first time away from the family over the holidays," said LaPointe, a native of El Paso, Texas. "But in a way it's not, because he's got me out here." Separated by just a stretch of Afghan desert, the father and son have been able to visit a couple of times since LaPointe arrived in theater in September. "It's a lot of fun seeing him," LaPointe said. "I can see him wondering, 'Do I say dad or gunny?'" "I'll settle for anything," LaPointe added, "I love the kid to death." As an infantryman, Cuturia patrols a region that includes Afghanistan's Marjah district. Once a hotbed of insurgent violence, Marjah and the outlying areas in southwestern Afghanistan have recently shown signs of tremendous progress. **(STORY)**



Breaking the 'glass ceiling' in the SWA hut

By MCC(SCW) L.A. Shively



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Navy Master Chief Kathy Keith chuckles at the idea she has a soft side; and laughs out loud if someone mentions her iron foot. Keith claims the title of first female construction mechanic master chief and is a Seabee, a double-down rarity. Though she's reached the top of the food chain – master chief is the highest rank an enlisted person can achieve in the Navy – it's been a winding road full of potholes. During her years at Fort Zumwalt High School in her hometown of O'Fallon, Mo., she toyed with the idea of studying psychiatry, but chose to operate and repair trucks instead of sorting out another person's

mind. She became interested in the Navy while attending trade school for diesel mechanics so she could drive big rigs cross country. "I decided I didn't want to deal with everybody's problems because psychiatrists usually drive themselves nuts," Keith explained with a slight grin. "But I didn't want to drive a truck without knowing how to fix it. I'd always worked on equipment – doing cars and stuff with my dad. I decided I didn't want to deal with everybody's problems because psychiatrists usually drive themselves nuts," Keith explained with a slight grin. "But I didn't want to drive a truck without knowing how to fix it. I'd always worked on equipment – doing cars and stuff with my dad." **(STORY)**

War-hardened Afghan soldier reflects on living through 30 years of conflict

By Cpl. Meredith Brown

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Mirali was 27 years old. He took up arms to protect his country and his family in Daykundi, located in south central Afghanistan. While fighting against the Soviet Army, Mirali's leg was injured when he took shrapnel from a rocket. He was later captured in his village and tortured by the Russians. "They would persecute me and beat my fingers and they knocked out my teeth," Mirali ex-

VIDEO "They captured me because I was supporting the [Afghan] government and protecting my country."

Mirali escaped from the Russians and fled to Pakistan. He stayed there for a year before returning to Afghanistan. "God kept me alive because it wasn't my

Final Exercise parents had passed away and two of his brothers immigrated to Iran. The remainder of his family was killed during the Soviet invasion. After enduring the hardship of the Russian invasion, the Taliban rose to power and Mirali had to endure another storm under the regime's rule. His family had left him a small home with some land but that was taken from him when the Taliban came to power. Before the Taliban were here, we had a good, comfortable and the training was good, they learned during the eight week course. Produced by Martha C. Story
Joint Sustainment Academy Southwest Combat Medic Course
 By Cpl. Meredith Brown
 Afghan National Security Forces students complete the final exercise in the Combat Medic Course at Joint Sustainment Academy, Southwest. The final exercise challenged the students to use all the skills they learned during the eight week course. Includes soundbites from Petty Officer 1st Class Terry Gray, from New Albany, Ind. **(VIDEO) (PACKAGE)**



Afghan National Army prepares for air interdiction mission

By Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez



Afghan National Army soldiers with Military Police Tolay, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, and Marines and sailors with the Regimental Combat Team 5 Embedded Training Team train for an upcoming air interdiction force mission here, Dec. 19. U.S. Marine Maj. Shannon Neller, a the Regimental Combat Team 5 Embedded Training Team executive officer, and 38-year-old native of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Capt. Kevin Shiels, a supporting arms liaison team leader with Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company and 32-year-old native of Chicago, provide security during an air interdiction force training operation here, Dec. 19. In preparation for future operations,

Marines with the RCT-5 ETT trained the ANA soldiers on disembarking the CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter, interacting with individuals at their objective and properly searching personnel and vehicles. With transition of lead security authority quickly approaching in several southern Helmand districts, participation by ANA soldiers in unique military operations like AIF missions is essential to building the local population's confidence in the capabilities of their security forces. **(VIDEO) (STORY)**

Lance Cpl. Blake Brown

By Staff Sgt. Andrew Miller

U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Blake Brown, a Tuscaloosa, Ala. native, is currently serving a one-year tour with Regimental Combat Team 5 in Helmand province, Afghanistan. Brown, 22, graduated from North Side High School in 2008 and is a Ground and Air Transportation Coordinator with the RCT-5 logistics section. He is the son of Kelly and Roy Brown. **(INTERVIEW)**

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