



----- Jan. 8, 2012 -----

NEWS

The 'unstoppable' peace process in Nad 'Ali

By *Tristan Kelly*

With a reduction in violence of 86 per cent compared to 2010, the people who live in Nad 'Ali district, an area once renowned for being a hotbed of the Taliban insurgency, are enjoying unprecedented levels of security. And now, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has announced that the area, which is to the west of Lashkar Gah in Helmand province and within the British area of operations, will be among the second tranche of areas across the country to begin formal transfer to Afghan security control. However, today's relative security has been hard fought and some years in the making. British and other ISAF forces first entered the region in 2006. Work soon began to disrupt and dislodge the Taliban from the region and in December 2008 a major operation - named SOND CHARA - was launched by British, Danish, Estonian and Afghan forces to clear insurgents from the district centre. **(STORY)**



New series gives voice to Afghan leaders

By *Gunnery Sgt. Pauline Franklin*



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- A new series called "In their voices" kicks off today to give local Afghan leaders a means to tell the world about their successes and challenges in Helmand. The series is a compilation of video interviews with key leaders in several areas of Helmand, to include Sangin and Marjah, and provides personal accounts of the areas prior to coalition forces arriving, as well as current conditions. The Afghan people have long been embroiled in the battleground that is their home. Their history is filled with invasions from foreign nations, internal strife, and Taliban insurgents bent on domination of the population. However, the people of Helmand are working to build a brighter future, one of security and peace. "We want to build Afghanistan into a stable, democratic and prosperous country, a country that is the peaceful home of all Afghans, and that enjoys friendly, mutually rewarding relations with all its near and extended neighbors and beyond," said President Hamid Karzai, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, during the December International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, Germany. **(STORY)**

Solar energy project provides new opportunities for shop owners in southern Afghanistan

By Cpl. Meredith Brown

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan -- Against the backdrop of a piercing mid-day sun, a squad of U.S. Marines quietly patrols along a Garmsir road. A slew of guests walk evenly within their ranks, following their escorts through the bazaar. For the first of three times this week, the Marines of Guard Force Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, provide security for their guests to meet with local leaders at the district center here. This isn't their first task of the day. A few hours before, they posted security from guard towers around nearby Forward Operating Base Delhi, providing overwatch in the biting cold, shivering through five-hour, early morning shifts. It also isn't their last duty of the day. Each is part of Guard Force's endless cycle of shifts on post, patrol and rest. Even during their rest time, each of the platoon's three squads remains ready to function as a quick reaction team. "Our operational tempo is rigorous and our schedule is always changing," said Sgt. Curtis Wolf, a 27-year-old Guard Force squad leader, and native of Bellevue, Mich. "The grind for our Marines is seven months of irregular sleep hours and not much off-time." Guard Force isn't a traditional infantry platoon. It's a melting pot of Marines from various occupational specialties. **(STORY)**



From insurgent hotbed to commercial hub: Afghans, Marines clear Safar Bazaar of remnants of illegal activity during Operation Sandman

By Cpl. Reece Lodder



SAFAR BAZAAR, Afghanistan -- Safar Bazaar was once a hotbed for insurgents, its shops teeming with illegal drugs and streets laden with improvised explosive devices. Over the last two years, four Marine infantry battalions and their Afghan National Security Forces counterparts have labored to make it safe. Today, the buzzing bazaar is the commercial hub of southern Garmsir district. Thousands of Afghans from around the district travel to the bazaar each week to purchase goods. On 'Bazaar Day' every Tuesday, a sea of approximately 2,500 eager shoppers swallows up the

streets. From the shade of his shop, a butcher stood behind an array of meat hanging from metal hooks. Two men baked bread and cooked kabobs for hungry visitors while their neighboring vendor attempted to draw interest to his dusty collection of shoes. Down the road, the methodical reverberation of a hammer hitting metal revealed a man crafting a trailer frame outside his shop. **(STORY)**

Open for business: 9th ESB builds route to bring further growth to Helmand

By Cpl. Katherine M. Solano

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- The Marines with 9th Engineer Support Battalion, 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward), are currently conducting a mission that is, in some of the engineer's own words, a vital operation. They are constructing a route in an area that otherwise has nothing like it. The development of this main supply route is vital because it will ensure that the local nationals have a safe way to transport their goods throughout Helmand province, said Cpl. Mark E. Mattiaccio, a heavy equipment operator with 9th ESB. "There really are no other [established] roads out here that can be proclaimed as safe for the locals to drive on," Mattiaccio continued. **(STORY)**



Apache strikes senior Taliban commander

Defence News



A senior Taliban commander has been killed by an Apache helicopter strike during an operation conducted by British and Afghan soldiers to disrupt activity in an insurgent 'safe haven' in Helmand province. Soldiers from D Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 RIFLES), and their partners from the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have been taking the fight to the insurgents in the south of the Nahr-e Saraj district for the last few weeks. In the past two months, the combined forces have pushed the insurgency out of the Babaji area of the district, helping the Afghan police to build new checkpoints and cut off routes used by insurgents to infiltrate the area, and increase security. Now the British

soldiers and the ANSF have handed over responsibility for security for Babaji to Afghan police and are turning their attention to the Kopak region in the north of their area of operations - an insurgent 'safe haven.' [\(STORY\)](#)

Afghan general, provincial officials meet, discuss women's roles in Afghanistan's development, governance

By MCC(SCW) L.A. Shively

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Brig. Gen. Khatoon Mohammadzai, director for women's affairs in the Afghan National Army, recently met civilian and military leaders with the goal of improving women's participation in the development and governance of Helmand province and ultimately her country, Afghanistan. The group's first stop was the U.K.-led Bastion Role III Hospital to see and comfort patients. Through an interpreter, Mohammadzai said she was impressed with the high level of service the patients received. "I am very happy and very proud there are people here who are caring for them," Mohammadzai said to the 30 or so hospital staff who gathered around her in an ante-room. She gave special recognition to those in leadership positions and in uniform calling them heroes. Mohammadzai also commended the women. "You have all left your family behind."



[\(STORY\)](#)

ANA, Marine partnership establishes combat medics course

By Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez



CAMP GARMSIR, Afghanistan -- As a squad of Afghan National Army soldiers from the 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, patrols a dusty road, chaos ensues. A Marine advisor calls out that a simulated improvised explosive device exploded, and points to two Afghan soldiers, who fall to the ground as mock casualties. Several ANA soldiers immediately set up security, as another soldier rushes to aid the casualties. Within 10 minutes, the trainee has performed a combat life saver triage, and the casualty is being evacuated to the nearest clinic in an Afghan ambulance. The carefully controlled chaos is part of the final exercise for the inaugural 1/215 combat medic

course here, Dec. 31. "The course will be able to help us train soldiers to become medics and support our medical section," said Maj. Abdul Baqi, the surgeon in charge of medical operations with 1/215.

[\(STORY\)](#) [\(VIDEO\)](#)

Religious shura in Garmsir promotes peace and stability

By Cpl. Bryan Nygaard

GARMSIR, Afghanistan -- "Let there be no coercion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things." – The Noble Quran 2:256 During the 10 years that the U.S. and its ISAF allies have been in Afghanistan, the fight has not been for cities, hills or some other piece of land that holds strategic value. The fight has been for the minds of the Afghan people. The expression "hearts and minds" has long been dismissed as cliché and hollow, but it embodies the very essence of counter-insurgency operations being conducted to provide stability in a country that has been ravaged by war for more than 30 years. Afghanistan is a tribally divided multiethnic country of 29 million people who are united by the religion of Islam. It serves not just as a philosophy, but also as an all-encompassing part of their existence. Another trait shared among Afghans is a low literacy rate. According to Lt. Col. Pat Carroll (retired), the cultural and governance advisor for stability operations in Regional Command Southwest, illiteracy allows them to be easily influenced by insurgents. **(STORY)**



Combat engineers perform route recon mission, paving the way for road improvements in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Meredith Brown



SHIR GHAZAY, Afghanistan -- Two Marines carefully stepped out of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle and extended their metal detectors to full length during a route reconnaissance mission on Route Red, Jan. 1-3. The quick checks were conducted to calibrate the detectors and the Marines began the meticulous sweeping process, ensuring that the area was clear of improvised explosive devices. After the initial sweeps were made, the vehicle commander, Sgt. Mark Prado, stepped out of the MRAP and began his duties of taking photos and measurements of the area. The sweepers finished clearing the area and headed back to the

armored vehicle and Prado marked down the grid coordinates in order to catalog another section of Route Red. **(STORY)**

Royal Gibraltar Regiment playing its part in Afghanistan

Defence News

Members of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment are currently augmenting other units in Afghanistan and playing an important part in operations while other soldiers from the regiment have recently been training for potential deployments. Amongst those members of the regiment currently serving in Afghanistan is Major David King who deployed to Helmand at the beginning of October and is working as a staff officer at HQ Task Force Helmand based in Lashkar Gah: "My job is going well," he said. "A couple of years ago, it became clear that more effort was needed if we were to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Afghan people and I work as part of a team whose task is



to do just that. "I enjoy the work and I really cannot complain about my quality of life out here," Major King added. "As I'm at the main HQ, the food has the reputation of being the best food in Helmand province and we are provided with all the amenities we could wish for. Of course, I miss the family, although I do try to phone them every evening." Also from the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and currently serving in Helmand province is Lieutenant John Pitto who is attached to 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. **(STORY)**

2nd MLG (FWD) continues Operation Clean Sweep, Accounting for millions of dollars worth of gear and equipment

By 2nd Lt. James Stenger



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Over the last three months, Marine and sailors of the 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward) have accounted for, sorted, cleaned and processed several millions of dollars worth of gear and equipment in support of Operation Clean Sweep aboard Camp Leatherneck and Camp Dwyer. This operation is part of Regional Command Southwest's plan for redeployment and retrograde in support of reset and reconstitution (R4), which is a four-part term commonly used to refer to the concept of how the Marine Corps will most efficiently and effectively leave Afghanistan. Planning for the departure of forces has

become a primary focus of operations, along with the continued training of Afghan National Security Forces. Not only is the plan facilitating the process of leaving Afghanistan, but it is saving the Marine Corps money by identifying excess gear and reallocating it to the units deployed, vice ordering new equipment to be shipped here. **(STORY)**

HEROES

Postal Marines awarded for holiday season work ethic

By Sgt. Justin Shemanski

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- When skimming through the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal citations for Lance Cpls. Caitlin E. Johnson and Markevis J. Seth, it was evident as to why they were standing tall and proud before a general officer, Dec. 30, 2011. For their tireless work-ethic and dedication to duty during the holiday mail season, each Marine was awarded their respective medal by Brig. Gen. Michael G. Dana, the commanding general for the 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward). Both are attached to the MLG's Postal Detachment based aboard Camp Leatherneck, which is charged with delivering postmarked pieces of home to more than 22,000 military and Department of Defense personnel scattered across Regional Command Southwest's area of operation. **(STORY)**



VIGNETTES

Doc West: A corpsman dedicated to his Marines

By Cpl. Daniel Wulz



FORWARD OPERATING BASE PAYNE, Afghanistan -- Throughout the history of the Marine Corps, the navy corpsman has played a vital role alongside Marines, cauterizing wounds on ships as far back as the Revolutionary War and the days of the Continental Navy. Even in the iconic photo for the flag-raising on Iwo Jima, Petty Officer 2nd Class John Bradley, a pharmacist's mate (a previous hospital corpsman rate), can be seen alongside Marines on Mt. Suribachi. After nearly ten years as a corpsman, Petty Officer 2nd Class Cody T. West, Embedded Training Team 2, Border Advisory Team 2, began his third combat deployment with Marines, Oct. 2011. West originally joined the Navy to

become a parachute rigger and went to the Military Entrance Processing Station in, Aug. 2001, but after the attacks on the world trade center, Sept. 11, 2001, West started pushing to go to boot camp as soon as possible. In order to shorten his waiting time, West accepted a contract as a hospital corpsman. "I'm a corpsman by accident," West said, **(STORY)**

Puerto Rican Marine keeps steady beat in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Marco Mancha

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PAYNE, Afghanistan -- Puerto Rico, Spanish for “rich port,” is truly rich in its culture. Much of the island’s culture is centered on the influence of music, a blended, multicultural sound derived from many Latin genres, to include salsa, bachata and reggaeton. Rincón, Puerto Rico, native Lance Cpl. Jose Amaez carried his love of music, along with his combat gear, with him to the desert plains of Helmand province, where he is currently deployed. His journey started off on the beautiful beaches of Rincon. Well-known in the Puerto Rican community for its clear waters and breathtaking sunsets, Amaez spent the first 15 years of his life on the tropical island taking in its influential sounds. After moving to Orlando, Fla., with his family, the music enthusiast wanted to expand his musical abilities. Amaez already had a knack for dancing and playing instruments, such as congas and bongos, but one of his biggest influences pushed him to broaden his skills “My grandpa was a big influence in my love for music,” said Amaez. “I saw his love for music, and one day I saw one of his guitars, picked it up and never stopped from there.” He continued to practice and became very proficient with the guitar. Amaez also picked up a few other musical talents along the way and learned to play the violin and piano as well. **(STORY)**



A day in the life: Division chaplain makes his way around Task Force Leatherneck, one FOB at a time

By Maj. Bradley Gordon



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- “This is what it’s all about,” said Cmdr. Christopher Fronk, chaplain for 2nd Marine Division (Forward). “There’s nothing better than getting out to the Marines, to share their time and their devotion.” So starts the day of the Monaca, Pa., native with his trusty sidekick, religious program specialist Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Hawthorne, or “the bodyguard” as he is known to some. The two head for their first of several destinations within Helmand province aboard their own dedicated Marine Corps, Bell UH-1Y Huey helicopter, nicknamed, appropriately enough, the “Holy Helo.” In a day filled with flying,

prepping, conducting Mass and waiting, Fronk and Massachusetts’ own Hawthorne make their way to the smallest patrol bases to lift the spiritual, religious, moral and personal well-being of the members of Task Force Leatherneck. **(STORY)**

VIDEO

In their voices: Deputy district governor discusses progress

By Gunnery Sgt. Pauline Franklin

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- In both English and Pashto, elders are speaking out about transition. Haji Ahmad Shah, a block elder for the Marjah district, speaks about the changes he has seen in Marjah in his video interview for a series titled “In their voices.” The series provides personal accounts of the areas prior to coalition forces arriving, as well as current conditions, and allows the public to hear directly from Afghan community leaders, security officials and local government officials. Deputy District Governor Mohammad Rasoul Barakzai, deputy district governor of Marjah, talks about Marjah before coalition forces arrived and the progress and development since insurgents were forced out of the area. This video is part of a series called “In their voices,” a compilation of video interviews with key leaders in several areas of Helmand, to include Sangin and Marjah. The series provides personal accounts of the areas prior to coalition forces arriving, as well as current conditions. The “In their voices” series allows



the public to hear directly from Afghan community leaders, security officials and local government officials. This unprecedented effort is being provided to inform the public on the key issues of security and development in the province. Several print articles will also be linked to the series to provide further background on the progress the Afghan people have experienced in Helmand as well. Produced by Cpl. Tommy Bellegarde. Also available in high definition. Part 1 of 2. [\(VIDEO in English\)](#) [\(VIDEO in Pashto by Cpl. Tommy Bellegarde\)](#)

Question and answer with senior Marine pilot in Afghanistan

By Cpl. Brian Adam Jones



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan -- Maj. Gen. Glenn M. Walters, the senior Marine Corps aviator in Afghanistan, commands 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward), the aviation combat element for the southwestern regional command of NATO's International Security Assistance Force. He sat down to discuss the progress that has been made over the last 10 months in Helmand and Nimruz provinces under his command. The general weighed in on counterinsurgency efforts through the end of the Taliban's "summer fighting season," including Operation Eastern Storm, a major offensive to secure Route 611 and the area south of the Kajaki Dam,

key pieces of infrastructure in the Helmand River valley. He spoke of the role of aviation in counterinsurgency efforts and how his Marines and aircraft will continue to keep the insurgency on its heels right up until he transfers authority to 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) in the early spring.

[\(VIDEO\)](#) [\(STORY\)](#)

Coalition Forces Run New Years Half Marathon for Charity Video Package

By Cpl. Daniel Wulz

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - The town of Now Abad opened its first school, May 5, with the assistance of Afghan National Army soldiers and coalition forces. The village has high hopes for the 50 students expected to attend. "In a society that there is no school, there is no education. It will be dark like night," said ANA Lt. Col. Haje Obied Ulla, an education and religion officer with the 215th Maiwand Corps. "Education is like light, which brightens everything in the present and the future. This elementary school we established today will give the chance to the people to study. Become teachers, doctors,



engineers and officers. Our people need everybody and it would be possible via education and knowledge." The idea of a school being built was first thought of by ANA troops. After the initial planning, they proposed the idea to Marines with 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment. It was then that the U.S., British, Danish and Afghan troops began working together to make the idea a reality. "Our only wish is to pave the way for our kids and youths to study," Ulla explained. [\(VIDEO\)](#) [\(STORY\)](#)

MEDIA COVERAGE/Interviews

Eight soldiers receive Purple Hearts on Christmas Day in Afghanistan
by MCC Shively republished by The Army Times

Sgt. Randy King
Asheville, NC

Asheville Tribune (NC) interviewed -- platoon guide with 2nd CEB from Asheville

Sgt. Matt Garst

Charlotte, NC

Marine Corps Times published Marines save Afghans in daring canal rescue based on Times interview and an article by Cpl. Lodder, Marines plunge into frigid canal to save nine Afghans

Cpl. Jeremy Helfinstine

Clanton, AL

Publication: ABC 33/40 in Birmingham, Ala., posted the shoutout

MSgt James Fogel talks to WTKF-FM, Jacksonville, NC

Cpl Ernest Wetzel talks to Woodstock Villager, Woodstock, CT

Lance Cpl. Curtis Roehrig, Louisville, KY– Radio Lia

Two British security contractors are accused of arms smuggling as they are paraded in front of the press by Afghan police (Telegraph p17, Mirror p2).

HOLIDAY SHOUT OUTS

Cpl Daniel Peterson
Gastonia, NC

Cpl Jeremy Hefinstine
Clanton, AL

Lance Cpl Nicholas Werner
Troy, PA

1st Lt. Enrique Harris
Crafordville, FL

Lance Cpl Arthur Cabello
Ft. Worth, TX

HAPPY NEW YEAR