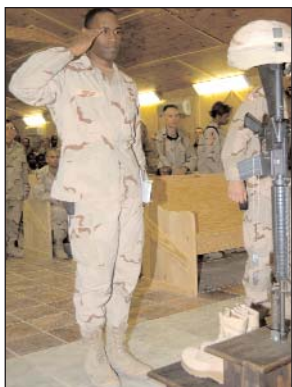


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Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A Soldier from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment scans the distance for possible enemies during Operation Vigilance April 15 in Wardak province, Afghanistan.**

## 3-116 Inf. air assaults into Wardak province for Operation Vigilance

**By Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen**  
Editor

WARDAK PROVINCE, Afghanistan - As the sun peeked over the mountains early on the morning of April 15, three CH-47 Chinook helicopters packed with U.S. and Afghan Soldiers sped toward their target in Wardak province.

When the helicopters landed, the Soldiers raced out the back ramps. While the Afghan National Army Soldiers formed a perimeter around the compound, Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment from the Virginia Army National Guard searched for three men suspected of having ties to the Taliban.

The men were not home at the time, and thus evaded capture. However, the Soldiers were able to locate and confiscate some weapons, and they gained valuable intelligence during questioning

of others.

The air assault mission was the first mission of Operation Vigilance. The operation was expected to last several days and included humanitarian aid drops in several villages, said Lt. Col. Blake Ortner, commander of 3rd Bn., 116th Inf. Rgt.

"The objective this morning was we were going after three targeted individuals that we were trying to kill or capture," Ortner said. "From here on out, we'll have some additional targeted operations, but also a lot of patrolling and other operations within Wardak to set conditions for the future."

Due the large amount of snow this past winter and the bad road conditions, the mission was delayed several times, Ortner said.

"This was essentially an operation we wanted

**See "Wardak" page 6**

# Opinion & Commentary

## Commander's Corner

# Reenlistment offers many incentives



**Col. Gary H. Cheek**  
CTF Thunder Commander

While some of you in Regional Command East are nearing the end of your tour in Afghanistan, others are just starting. Regardless of how long you've been in-country, the fact that you're here now is all that really matters.

Every Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine has made a great contribution to the fight here. While some of us might feel our role was not a big deal, I beg to differ.

Each and every one of you should be enormously proud of your contribution to the Global War on Terrorism. That we have not had an attack on U.S. soil since you have been here is tribute to the success of our collective efforts.

Many of you will decide that after spend-

ing a year or more away from your friends and family that you have had enough - it is time to quit, let someone else take it from here. For those who have made that decision, I say "Thank you." You have done more than 95 percent of Americans in defense of our country, and you have earned our thanks, respect, and gratitude.

But I would say to all servicemen and women: consider staying on the team. Never since the birth of our nation have we been so threatened. In this war, the "long war" as General Abizaid calls it, all services will need leaders to bring us through the challenges that lay ahead. The experience you have gained here is extremely valuable and will be a great asset to the future defense of our nation.

Each of you has personal considerations in the decision to stay on the team. We understand that, but you need to know that your service is important, has made a difference, and we need you on our team - to ensure we can preserve the freedoms our country enjoys.

In addition to the gratification you get just by serving here, there are many other incentives to staying in the military, particularly if you reenlist while deployed. These options include station of choice, training opportunities, education benefits, and, of course, money.

At Forward Operating Base Salerno, there is a small, one-man office that plays a small part of a very big job. The Army career counselor there, Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth E. Jerby, does everything he can to get the Soldiers what they would like to have as part of their reenlistment.

Sergeant Jerby tells me there has been a great interest in reenlistment during this

deployment. The Army is offering a great reenlistment bonus for Soldiers who are deployed to Afghanistan, Kuwait and Iraq.

Many Soldiers have already reenlisted and others are still planning to. Some have reenlisted because they believe so much in what we are doing; while others did it for the bonus. If you're looking to get a reenlistment bonus, remember: you have to physically be in country on the day of reenlistment to get a reenlistment bonus.

One of the things that was very frustrating to so many Soldiers for a while was that many desired to take advantage of the reenlistment bonus but they were not in the reenlistment window, and therefore, in most cases, were not able to reenlist. The Army has taken care of that too and made it possible for nearly everyone to take advantage of the deployment reenlistment bonus.

As of Jan. 18, any Soldier deployed to Iraq, Kuwait, or Afghanistan is allowed to reenlist regardless of reenlistment window. With this new policy in place any Soldier deployed to these locations can reenlist and get a reenlistment bonus provided they have not already gotten a bonus in the zone they are currently in.

This is one of the greatest opportunities provided to Soldiers for reenlistment.

I know that the reenlistment options for different service vary widely. Even if you would not receive a reenlistment bonus, I ask you to consider staying in uniform. Every Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine should take the time to discuss his or her options and opportunities with a Career Counselor and consider staying on the team during this critical time in the history of our country.

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Col. Gary H. Cheek

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Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter

### Editor

Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

# America's Battalion Marines come to the aid of Afghan kids

By Cpl. Rich Mattingly  
3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt.

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Children suffering from difficult-to-treat medical conditions in rural Afghanistan may have no better friend than the Marines of "America's Battalion."

Over the course of their deployment to Afghanistan, the Marines and Navy Corpsmen of 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, have come to the aid of several local children who otherwise were not receiving treatment for very serious injuries. One such local teenager named Syed Ullah, recently received a prosthetic eye after Marines on patrol in Nagalam discovered his wounds.

"Last year an insurgent's 107 mm rocket landed in Syed's village during an indiscriminate attack that has become the mainstay of (the insurgents') tactics. The rocket sent shrapnel into his face and arms, disfiguring him," said 1st Lt. Justin Bellman, executive officer, India Co. 3/3. "The Coalition forces flew Syed to Bagram Airfield in order to receive medical attention, but despite sewing up numerous wounds and re-constructing Syed's nose, the doctors could not save his left eye."

Syed, promised a prosthetic eye by the Coalition forces, went back to his village and waited. He thought he had been forgotten when Marines came upon him during a patrol through his village.

"He was told when he was injured last year that he would get a prosthetic



courtesy photo

**Petty Officer Rodrigo Martin, hospital corpsman with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, stands with Syed Ullah, who happily displays his new prosthetic eye at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan.**

eye," explained Bellman, "but it never happened. It's important to show the Afghan people that no matter what unit is here, the Coalition is working together to fulfill our commitments."

With the help of the Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team and Task Force Victory, both located at Bagram Airfield, Syed was transported back to Bagram to receive an evaluation at the Egyptian Hospital.

It was determined by the Egyptian doctors that the eye socket would support a prosthetic eye.

Petty Officer 1st Class Rodrigo Martin, Navy Corpsman with 3/3, joined Syed and traveled to Kabul for the prosthetic fitting at the Nor Eye Hospital in Kabul.

"He was a bit nervous about the whole process," Martin said of Syed's reaction to driving through the busy traffic of Kabul. "He's from a very small village where life is much different than it is in Kabul."

Once in Kabul, the doctors were able to examine Syed and fit him for an eye on the same day. He returned to Bagram and was homeward bound the next day.

"I am very grateful for the Americans help," Syed said through an interpreter. "My family and I will be praying for their safety." Syed even offered to work at the nearby Coalition base for free in order to repay the favor the Marines did for him.

"We try to do everything we can for Afghans we encounter who need medical treatment," said Martin. "Sometimes we can't help, but when we can it's a really great feeling."

Humanitarian assistance projects such as this constitute an important part of America's Battalion's operational approach to their security mission in Afghanistan.

Wherever possible, the Battalion leverages the rapidly developing Afghan government to provide or assist in these services.

These projects help gain and maintain the trust and support of the Afghan population, which is critical to fighting a successful counter-insurgency.

## Insurgents pay the price for rocket attack on Salerno

**CJTF-76 Public Affairs**  
News Release

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan - At least 14 insurgents were killed late April 15 as Coalition helicopters, aircraft and artillery responded to a rocket attack at Forward Operating Base Salerno.

"It was a combined arms effort," said Maj. J.R. Mendoza, Task Force

Thunder Fire Support Officer. "We were able to see the launching point of the rockets and we brought everything we had to bear on it."

Mendoza explained that the base was postured to respond to just such an attack.

"They shot at us with rockets and we were responded with artillery, fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft,"

Mendoza said.

"These rocket attacks are, by their nature, indiscriminate," said Lt. Col. Robert Cornejo, Combined Joint Task Force-76 Fire's Chief. "They attack not only our forces but innocent civilians as well. This seems to be the norm with insurgent rocket attacks."

"Our fires, by contrast, are precision oriented fires and are only launched after pre-

cautions are taken to prevent collateral damage," Cornejo continued.

The base came under attack from an initial volley of four rockets Tuesday night. No one was injured and no equipment was damaged as a result.

Initial reports indicated that the insurgents intended a second volley but TF Thunder's counterattack prevented them.

# CTF Thunder says goodbye to fallen NCOs

By Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen  
Editor

**FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan** - Upon learning of a major problem in at a remote base in Paktika province, Master Sgt. Edwin Matos-Colon pulled his supervisor aside and said, "Sir, I will go."

A couple days later, another problem arose at a different base in Paktika, and Master Sgt. Barbaralien Banks said to the same supervisor, "Sir, I will go down there."

The two NCOs then went to solve the problems together. To anyone who knew them, this was the ultimate testament to who they were, said Maj. Dewey Mosley, Combined Task Force Thunder logistics officer and the two Soldiers' supervisor.

"They died doing their duty," he said. "And I will miss them more than words can say."

Matos-Colon and Banks were among 18 service members and civilians killed when the CH-47 Chinook helicopter they were riding in crashed near Ghazni, Afghanistan, on April 6 on its way back to Bagram Airfield.

The two were members of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, Combined Task Force Thunder and worked at CTF Thunder's Administration and Logistics Operations Center at Bagram.

On April 12, Soldiers from HHB and other units at Forward Operating Base Salerno said goodbye to the two Soldiers during a memorial service.

Matos-Colon, 42, of Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico, was a mechanical maintenance supervisor who entered the Army in March 1984, and was assigned to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in April 2004.

Banks, 41, of Harvey, La., was a senior food management supervisor who entered the Army in March 1988, and



**Master Sgt. Barbaralien Banks**

was assigned to Schofield Barracks in May 2003.

Sgt. Christian Monk, a member of HHB, CTF Thunder, spoke at the service. She said Banks was a strong female role model whose faith and motivation carried Monk through her toughest times during this deployment.

"I hope to take what I have learned from her and pass it on to my Soldiers," Monk said. "She was like a mother to us all. I am proud to have served with such a dedicated Soldier. She will be greatly



**Master Sgt. Edwin Matos-Colon**

missed."

Colonel Gary H. Cheek, commander of CTF Thunder called Matos a bundle of positive energy.

"He was a man of great enthusiasm, one who would take on any mission, any task," Cheek said. "He would always do it right and always do it to standard."

Cheek also said if you looked up the word mechanic in the dictionary, he's certain there would be a picture of Matos beside it.

"If it had an engine, he loved it," Cheek said. "Vintage

cars, motorcycles, Humvees - these were his passion, and he lived that in the United States Army."

While every bit the professional Soldier, Cheek said everyone knew Banks as a quiet, calm and reserved person.

"But don't let that fool you - she knew her business, was devoted to her Soldiers and won the respect of everyone around her," he said.

Cheek noted that the command lost a few Soldiers and Marines during this deployment here, and said each one was tough to take.

"Regardless of whether you knew the person or not, the pain is felt by all," he said. "It's much tougher though when you know the person. In the case of these two, I think I can say we loved them very deeply."

Matos-Colon is survived by his daughter, Evelyn. Banks, who was promotable, is survived by her daughter, Lashuwanta, and her son, Kent.

The cause of the crash is under investigation.



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**Spc. Allison Urbatsch (left) and Staff Sgt. Victor Perez, personnel specialists for Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, Combined Task Force Thunder, salute a memorial to Master Sgts. Edwin Matos-Colon and Barbaralien Banks April 12 during a memorial service at Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan.**

# Cooperation amidst tragedy

By Capt. Jim Tierney  
3rd Bn., 116th Inf. Rgt.

GHAZNI, Afghanistan - Last November, the U.S. Army's 25th Military Police Company spent several hours a day training the Afghan National Police of Ghazni on basic police skills and tactics.

On April 6, the police were called upon to implement some of those lessons alongside members of the Afghan National Army when a U.S. Army helicopter crashed near a brick factory during a turbulent windstorm.

Within moments of the tragic crash of the CH-47 Chinook helicopter, citizens, Afghan police and members of the Afghan National Army responded to help coalition forces at the scene.

"Local citizens contacted the police to inform (them) of the crash," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Blake Ortner, commander of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, the Virginia National Guard unit operating in Ghazni. "Within minutes, members of the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army were on the scene responding to the incident."

The helicopter was flying a resupply and transport mission through southern

"The ANA and Ghazni police provided a pivotal role in the emergency response mission. Their professionalism and dedication throughout speaks highly of the progress made in the province of Ghazni."

- Lt. Col. Blake Ortner,  
commander, 3rd Bn.,  
116th Inf. Rgt.

Afghanistan when it crashed. Ghazni police immediately worked to secure the site. Moments later, members of the Afghan National Army stationed in Ghazni arrived to help preserve the scene.

Staff Sgt. Stephen Mudge of the 25th MPs helped train the local police and was called out to the scene of the crash.

"We're struck with mixed emotions," Mudge said. "On one hand, we're very happy to see the level of professionalism of those police we trained. On the other, we're devastated that we have to respond to an incident where we've lost fellow soldiers."

"This tragedy measured the effectiveness of the provincial and local government," Ortner said. "The ANA and Ghazni police provided a pivotal role in the emergency response mission. Their professionalism and dedication throughout speaks highly of the progress made in the province of Ghazni."

Once the soldiers of the 3-116th Infantry arrived on the scene, a joint Emergency Operations Center was established to synchronize the efforts of the Afghan and coalition forces. The center served as a command and control center where the Ghazni chief of police, the ANA commander, coalition forces and other entities involved in the security and recovery of the site could coordinate efforts.

The local police and ANA weren't the only Afghans to respond. Several private citizens, along with employees of the brick factory, came out with shovels to help extinguish the fire. Many offered their condolences to the U.S. forces at the site.

An investigation into the cause of the crash is ongoing.

The remains of the 18 crewmembers and passengers were flown to Dover Air Force Base, Del., for identification.



Sgt. Tara Teel

## Crash victims honored at Bagram

Service members pay their last respects to those who were lost in the CH-47 helicopter crash near Ghazni, Afghanistan, April 6. Fourteen Soldiers, one Marine and three Kellogg Brown and Root employees were honored in a memorial service at Bagram Airfield April 15.

## Wardak from page 1

to kick off to disrupt any of the spring attacks that may be going on up here," Ortner said. "We seem to have a larger threat up in Wardak than we do in other areas, so we wanted to kind of preempt some of that."

The mission came nine days after a CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed in Ghazni, killing all 18 people aboard. Many of the Soldiers who took part in the Operation Vigilance mission are based at Forward Operating Base Ghazni, which is just a few miles from the crash site, and participated in the recovery effort of the crashed helicopter.

Specialist Robert Mumaw, an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon gunner with Company B, 3rd Bn., 116th Inf. Rgt., said the crash weighed on a lot of Soldiers' minds.

"We saw that first-hand, so that was probably the biggest worry, not going in and doing the actual mission," he said.

Mumaw, a native of Woodstock, Va., said once he hit the ground, those worries disappeared and he was able to



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A Soldier from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment emplaces a mortar tube during Operation Vigilance April 15.**



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A Soldier from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment walks past the ruins of a bombed-out building and destroyed armored personnel carrier during Operation Vigilance April 15.**

focus on the mission at hand.

"The entry went well, it went quick," Mumaw said. "We put the females in one room, segregated the males, and had the female MP search the females."

Mumaw said they found 17 to 20 RPGs, about 200 rounds

of 7.62 mm ammunition, a few AK47s and a few grenades. Additionally, they found large amounts of cash on the women.

Wardak province is located southwest of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. Because of its proximity to the capital along with the fact that Ring Road - Afghanistan's lone major highway that connects several of the country's biggest cities - passes through the eastern part of the province, Ortner said a Coalition presence in the province is important.

In the past, the Coalition has not had a significant presence in the province, Ortner said, but that's something he's working to change.

"Our big intent was to get up here and really get a feel for the area," he said. "We wanted to get a lot of patrols out to a lot of villages and try to build confidence in the people."

For Mumaw and his fellow infantrymen, the operation was a chance to get their boots muddy.

Coming into the deployment last year, many Soldiers from the battalion didn't really know what to expect coming here. Some of them have found themselves pulling guard duty in towers at Bagram Airfield.

"Infantry just ain't used to getting stuck in towers," he said. "This is what we're supposed to do."



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A Soldier from 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment searches a crawl space for weapons during Operation Vigilance.**

# Gardez PRT helps christen new school

By Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen  
Editor

AHMAD ABA, Afghanistan - A bright spring sun shone off the metal roof of the Sadet Khail School creating a brilliant light among a sea of sand and rocks.

Eventually locals hope the school will become a beacon, drawing students from surrounding villages there to further their education.

Several hundred people gathered at the school April 16 for a grand opening ceremony, including the provincial governor, Coalition leaders and dozens of students.

The new school replaces a cramped three-room building that was previously used as a school to teach grades one through six. It is more than twice as big as the old school and will teach grades one through nine - about 550 students in all - said Ahmad Gul Ahmadi, the new school's headmaster.

"I want to show the people that we are serving the people as best as we can," Ahmadi said. "I want more to people to come here. I encourage the people to send their children and daughters to this school, and I'm going to teach them myself."

The Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team prepared designs for the new school and funded the project with about \$100,000 from the Commanders' Emergency Relief Program.

Construction started in September, but was shut down for three months during the winter because of heavy snow. Local laborers actually did the construction, with the PRT providing quality oversight.

Speaking at the ceremony, Lt. Col. Brendan O'Shea, commander of the Gardez PRT, said he is proud to work as a partner with the Afghan government in helping rebuild this country.

"After so many years of warfare, I realize that there are a lot of projects that need to be done in Afghanistan," he said. "We need roads, and we need hospitals and we need businesses.

"But of all these things, I believe that education is perhaps the most important," O'Shea continued. "Because with education, it will give you engineers that you need to build roads, it will give you the doctors for your hospitals, it will give you the lawyers to make laws and have good governance."

O'Shea said the school was one of his personal favorite



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**A group of Afghan girls sing the Afghanistan national anthem during the grand opening of the Sadet Khail School April 16 in Ahmad ABA, Afghanistan.**

projects to watch develop, and since it is close to the PRT compound, the team could see the work from start to finish. O'Shea encouraged the locals in attendance at the ceremony to have their children attend the new school.

Also speaking at the ceremony, Col. Gary Cheek, commander of Combined Task Force Thunder, urged the village elders to protect the new school and send their children to it, both boys and girls.

"But remember that it's only a building, it takes students and teachers in order to make it a school," he said. "To the teachers, I tell you that you hold the future of Afghanistan in your hands. Teach the children well, teach them about peace and teach them that knowledge brings prosperity."

Cheek told the students in attendance that they are the future of Afghanistan and advised them to study hard and listen to their teachers and parents.

"Your job is to give your children an even better Afghanistan than the one that's here today," he said.

Cheek then asked the villagers to let the word go out from the village that it's time to quit fighting, and it's time for everyone to come in and join the future of Afghanistan.

With an ear-to-ear grin, Ahmadi said he was very grateful to the PRT and the other people who worked hard to help build the school.

"I hope a lot of children and new people will come to this new school and they will really like it," he said.



Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

**Hakim Taniwaal, governor of Paktia province, cuts the ribbon during the grand opening of the Sadet Khail School April 16 in Ahmad ABA, Afghanistan.**

# 3/3 Marines get new look at insurgents

By Cpl. Rich Mattingly  
3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt.

KHOST PROVINCE, Afghanistan - With a low, buzzing sound, the unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle known to Marines as the Dragon Eye, swooped over the patrol leader's head and out through the jagged mountainous terrain, ever watchful through its two nose-mounted cameras.

In close radio contact with its operator located a few miles away, the patrol monitored a site from which they believed Anti-Government Forces had recently fired rockets at the Marines.

The use of the Dragon Eye by the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, "America's Battalion," in Afghanistan marks the first use of Marine Corps unmanned aerial vehicles in the Operation Enduring Freedom theater.

On the heels of its successful employment during Operation Iraqi Freedom in Fallujah, the Marines of 3/3 are using the Dragon Eye in the high elevations and difficult terrain of eastern Afghanistan to gain an important advantage over insurgent threats here. The small Kevlar and fiberglass vehicle has been giving the Marines on the ground a whole new perspective and a tactical edge.

Just a few years since being designed at the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, the Dragon Eye is coming into its own as "over-the-next-hill, around-the-next-corner" surveillance technology. The Dragon Eye can



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Cpl. Richard Derby, Dragon Eye Operator with Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, monitors the Dragon Eye's cameras during operations in eastern Afghanistan.**

go completely unnoticed by the enemy, weighing in at just five pounds and leaving only the radar signature of a bird.

"They don't see or hear the Dragon Eye at all when I raise the altitude," said Cpl. Richard Derby, battalion maintenance chief and Headquarters and Service Co, 3/3's Dragon Eye operator.

"I can see what the enemy is doing with-

out alerting them or putting a nearby patrol in danger." Derby added, however, that the Dragon Eye could also be a powerful deterrent when flown at lower altitudes.

"People tend to scurry away when they see it coming in low," he said.

Easily deployed by two Marines using a large, rubber band or even a running start, with one Marine then controlling the aircraft from a small computer, the Dragon Eye is specifically designed for the kind of small-unit fight the Marines of America's Battalion are experiencing here. When man hours are a precious commodity, and a commander needs real-time intelligence and situational awareness in his battle space, the Dragon Eye comes into play.

"We use it to check out potential rocket points of origin and improvised explosive devices or even fighting positions that Marines might have difficulty picking out from the ground," said Staff Sgt. Khalif Ahmad, platoon sergeant with Headquarters and Service Co., 3/3. "It's definitely keeping our situational awareness at a higher level."

With a UHF transmission capability of five kilometers and a 100 meter field of view, the aircraft can record video and take still camera shots of the battlefield, all of which are relayed in real time to the operator.

"While squads are out and searching an area, I can fly the Dragon Eye to more outlying areas to see what's going on," said Derby. "It saves us a lot of time and increases our effectiveness."

Derby displayed the backpack he used to carry the Dragon Eye, which he easily broke down into five separate pieces.

The Marine Corps Warfighting lab has designed the Dragon Eye to be extremely easy to use as well. Unlike other unmanned aerial vehicles that require constant control, the Dragon Eye is controlled by a small laptop computer on which operators can enter a preset route and then concentrate on monitoring the cameras through a glasses-like video screen.

"I'm the eyes aloft for the patrol leader, and I'm always just a call away when he needs more information or for me to check out an area," said Derby.

Derby said that his training consisted of an intensive four-day class after which he was able to deploy and maneuver the Dragon Eye in the field with little difficulty.

"The trick is in dealing with all of the mountains," said Derby. "The terrain here is tough on Marines and it's tough on the Dragon Eye's sensors too."

"It's a learning process for me to improve its handling and work around some of its limitations," Derby added.



Cpl. Rich Mattingly

**Cpl. Richard Derby, Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, launches a Dragon Eye over the mountains of Afghanistan.**



# Medal of Honor recipients visit troops

## Former soldiers of war tell their stories to wartime soldier of today

By Sgt. Tara Teel

CJTF-76 Public Affairs Office

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ORGUN-E, Afghanistan - Soldiers pulled up chairs and piled almost on top of each other around tables in the small dining facility to hear various, animated war stories the visitors had to tell that ranged from getting shot down in a jet to getting ambushed by the enemy.

Four Medal of Honor recipients from different services visited troops at FOB Orgun-E and another Coalition forces base in the Paktika province April 5 and 6.

Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness, retired U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Littrell, retired U.S. Army Col. Jack Jacobs and retired U.S. Navy SEAL Lt. Thomas Norris, all fought in the Vietnam War where they all received the highest award for valor given in the armed services, the Medal of Honor.

"The best part about the visit was seeing the expressions on the Soldiers' faces when we visited and knowing that they were really glad that someone cared enough to come see them," said Littrell.

"It is an honor to have these men here with us," said First Sgt. Mario Cocktrel, Company A, 1st Battalion 508th Infantry (Airborne). "It is very educating for the younger Soldiers here to be in the presence of such accomplished gentlemen."

The visitors met with the leaders of FOB Orgun-E for a briefing on the area, a summary of what they do, and what they hope to accomplish during their year-long deployment to Afghanistan.

"This country's in good shape and we have sharp, brave, intelligent troops who are trained to do military things here, building a country and a country's government," said Thorsness.

"We really appreciate the job you are doing here with terrorism," Norris said to the troops. "You are on the front line right here."

The visitors took turns telling the jam-packed dining facility about the events that led up to them getting their respective Medal of Honor awards.

"This trip was important for morale," said Sgt. Major Bradley Meyers, 508th opera-



Sgt. Tara Teel

**Medal of Honor recipient Gary Littrell tells Soldiers from Battery D, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, about the patch he wore when he was member of the 173rd Brigade.**

tions sergeant major. "You see all the Soldiers smiling, talking with the (MOH) recipients, listening to their stories, and everyone is really enjoying themselves."

Thorsness talked to the Soldiers about freedom, something that was stolen from him as a prisoner of war for six years after he had to eject from his aircraft on his 93rd mission in Vietnam.

"We are born in the United States with freedom and you never realize how lucky you are until you don't have it anymore. There are a lot of places where freedom is not guaranteed."

During the talks at the dining facility, the Medal of Honor recipients were more than eager to listen to the Soldiers' tales and asked questions about their previous deployments and their time in Afghanistan.

"It was really great hearing their support and coming from those who did so much more, it made us feel really good and proud," said Spc. Scott Chamley, Battery D, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment.

The second stop on the trip was to another even smaller Coalition forces camp in Paktika province. Again the leaders of the forces there briefed the visitors on their purpose in the area, how they work with the other Coalition troops and interact with the locals.

Here, the Medal of Honor recipients piled into the back of a pick-up truck with some of the troops, drove to a MK-19 grenade machine gun that was mounted on a truck, and given the opportunity to shoot a few

rounds. They competed trying to be the best shot of the group. They might not have hit the bull's eye, but they had a blast doing it.

Hopping in the truck again, they visited with each unit in the camp checking out what they do and ended up at the artillery gunners asking, "Can we shoot the Howitzer?" The Delta Battery Soldiers provided each with a round to fire. Two of the honored guests gave their chance up to two of the Soldier escorts traveling with them saying that the Soldiers would probably never have a chance like that again.

As the day was coming to an end and the helicopter headed to Bagram Airfield, a dust storm picked up and forced the pilots to land once again at FOB Orgun-E.

"The most exciting part was hearing that we were going to have to set the chopper down in the middle of an unsecured field because of the sandstorm," said Littrell. "Fortunately we did not have to do that, however we did get to stay at the Orgun-E base overnight and that was even better. We would rather be out here with the Soldiers at the remote bases, getting to know them, hearing their stories and bonding with them."

The visits to the two bases boosted the morale of both the Soldiers and the recipients and left a lasting impression on both as well. The recipients said they planned on coming back to visit the Soldiers as soon as possible.

"People back home love you guys," said Norris. "Our hats are off to you."

# Personnel detachment provides service to Salerno

By Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen  
Editor

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan - At this time last year, units here were pretty much on their own when it came to personnel actions.

Whenever some sort of action was needed, chances are it had to be done in person at Bagram Airfield. This presented not only an inconvenience, but also loss of productivity at one of the most forward bases in Afghanistan.

That changed in July when a detachment from Task Force 556th Personnel Support Battalion arrived from BAF.

The detachment is comprised of Soldiers from the 847th Personnel Support Battalion, an Army Reserve unit out of Whitehall, Ohio, and the 556th PSB, an active Army unit from the 25th Infantry Division (Light) out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

The 24-person detachment handles everything from evaluation reports and promotions to identification cards and R & R leave for the 1,500 active



Spc. Laura Griffin

**Spc. Christopher Holman, a personnel service specialist with the 847th Personnel Service Battalion, gives a newcomers' brief to Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 504th Infantry Regiment April 20 at Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan.**

duty and reserve component service members here.

"Before we came down here, a PSB would never be out this far," said Master Sgt. Michael Estridge, the detachment sergeant.

"We're as far forward on the battlefield as you can go to assist the Soldiers and take care of their needs," said 1st Lt. Paula Wilson, the detachment commander.

Wilson said having a PSB right on FOB Salerno is much more efficient for the units here.

"Rather than losing weeks of Soldier time, they're losing less than a day of Soldier time by being able to walk over here and get it done," she said.

When the detachment initially arrived at FOB Salerno, it had its work cut out for itself. The Soldiers learned that they

had to set up their tent, dig trenches around it as well as set up their own communications.

The Soldiers also had something more dangerous to deal with when they first got here. Back then, FOB Salerno was the frequent target of enemy rockets.

"We had a lot of anxiety with the Soldiers, and we tried to minimize that by doing our pre-planning to get down here," Wilson said. "Until you get here, the fear is very high because of what the people were being told."

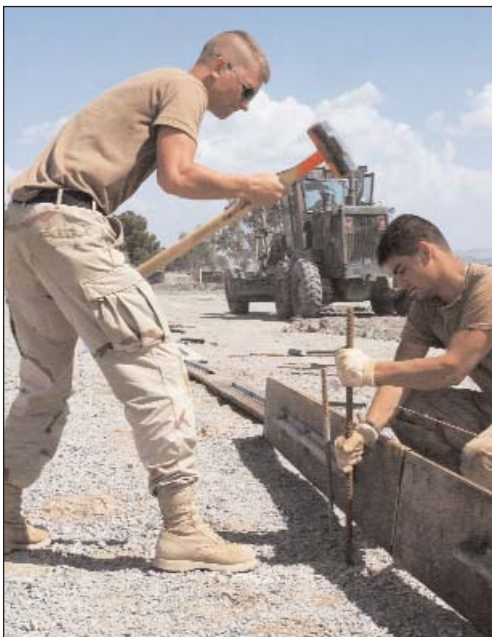
Wilson said everyone in the detachment experienced their first rocket attack within their first week at FOB Salerno.

The deployment has been even more of an eye-opener for Sgt. Jenny Frizzell, one of the personnel specialists at the Salerno detachment. Apprehensive about just coming to a base that was known to be the target of frequent rocket attacks, Frizzell soon found herself accompanying Marines on combat patrols.

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# Engineers build new helicopter pad at Salerno

By Pfc. Vincent Fusco  
20th Public Affairs Det.



Pfc. Vincent Fusco

**Spc. Steven A. Larsen and Spc. Jose L. Valdez work on the molds for a new helicopter parking area.**

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan - A squad of Soldiers worked through the day constructing molds needed to complete a concrete parking area for helicopter traffic at Forward Operating Base Salerno.

The concrete pad is part of a project which includes the new maintenance hangar pad.

"Eventually there will be a concrete taxi area connecting the two sites, with a clamshell covering for the hangar," said Master Sgt. John Twardowski, a platoon sergeant in C Company, 367th Engineering Battalion, a reserve unit from Minnesota.

Twardowski and his Soldiers took over the job of completing the project started by 528th Engineers, a reserve unit from Louisiana.

The maintenance and landing areas are part of a three-month construction plan for the base.

Staff Sgt. Cory J. Poulin, a squad leader

with the unit, said that the wet and dry seasons of Afghanistan can be a problem during construction.

"In the summer, starting in late May, there are 120 days of heavy winds," said Poulin. "When it does rain, the ground doesn't absorb water well, so everything runs off."

The 367th was tapped to work on this project for their job efficiency, technique and experience in military and civilian construction. However, many members of the unit are serving at the different fire bases in the country. Only eight Soldiers from the unit are available to work on the parking area site.

When finished, the Army medical evacuation units and Marine Corps forces will use the helicopter landing and maintenance area.

"It's all about improving the standard of living," said Twardowski. "That's what we do. My guys are hard-working, hard-charging guys. They always do their best job. As long as we're here, we want to do as much as we can and do a good job."

# Economic\$ 101: Afghan style

## Conference paves way for economic prosperity in Nangarhar province

By Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter  
CTF Thunder Public Affairs Office

JALALABAD, Afghanistan—The sound of merchants shouting to passers-by, the braying of donkeys, mixed with sounds of eastern music, 100 conversations and auto traffic makes up the cacophony of sound typical of a market place in eastern Afghanistan.

That sound may be typical today but soon that market place is going to be mixed with the sounds of escalator hum, splashing fountain water and hushed conversations of busy shoppers discussing where they should stop for a chai or café late.

The U.S. Agency for International Development and On the Frontier coordinated an Economic Conference with the provincial governor, Din Mohammad and his government officials from Nangarhar province and its key business leaders in Jalalabad.

Mike Brennan, originally from New York City, works for On the Frontier in Kabul. On the Frontier is a private sector firm out of Cambridge, Mass., that was brought in by Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance to run an economic development project where they set up work with industries by getting them to collaborate and work together on certain initiatives.

"We're here in Jalalabad to help build an institutional council for the governor who is very open to the right types of economic development for his people. That includes allowing the private sector to take the lead in identifying business obstacles and then OTF can work with the private sector to address those obstacles," he said.

"The first good sign of this economic conference was that yesterday they agreed to have private sector firms and civic sector leaders participate on the council with voting rights."

Brennan brought Diego Etcheto with him. Etcheto also works for OTF and puts his skills in sales and his Masters of Business Administration to good use on this project.

"He is also good at herding cats," said Brennan. "His job is to get a widely diverse group of business people together to collaborate on a couple different initiatives."

Etcheto from Olympia, Wash., laughed at the cat-herding reference and said, "I am here to give to Governor Din Mohammad and his economic advisors an idea of the different opportunities available



Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter

**Omar Zahilwar, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development for Nangarhar province explained the plan to members of the economic conference for district development in the region.**

to the Eastern regions."

"That includes some things that they could do or look at to develop the export potential of their current industries and to start creating industries that have export potential to bring wealth and prosperity to the region."

One of the speakers at the conference was Omar Zahilwar from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Nangarhar province. "The government does many great things but people don't acknowledge it. They have an ownership problem so the big hurdle here is to get everyone believing in the projects," he said.

"The Nangarhar provincial government

is working on establishing a district development plan, by first collecting business data so they can create a business profile that they can present to the people who make the decisions."

Zahilwar added, "One of the challenges to this process is resources, both human and materials. Things that the people did before naturally or without compensation they now expect to be paid for."

Everyone at the conference understands that there will be problems in the startup. Etcheto explained that part of the new economic process in the beginning will be that goods have to be produced in Afghanistan and then sent to Pakistan for packaging, sales and export.

He gave as an example how an Afghan carpet is now produced in Afghanistan for about \$50 and then sold to Pakistan for packaging and exporting to America and other countries. That cost after the carpet leaves Pakistan is now \$157.

The gathered Afghan businessmen asked why they only received one-third of the final cost of the exported carpet and Pakistan received two-thirds.

Brennan explained, "At present, business in Afghanistan lacks customer knowledge of their own Afghan carpets so they need to develop market strategies, improve their infrastructure like power, sewage, water and roads and then understand their customers so they can take advantage of a product improvement cycle."

When Afghanistan is able to do this they can then eliminate some of the middleman costs going to Pakistan and increase their own profit margin, according to OTF. Also the majority of carpet designs come from Pakistan.

Afghanistan's carpets had a reputation 50 years ago but lost that market visibility in the interim and consequently the market.

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"It was awesome," she said of the opportunity to go out on patrol. "It was cool to get out and see what we're doing over here."

On these patrols, Frizzell's job was to separate and search female Afghans, since Afghan culture prohibits men from doing so.

As far as her role as a personnel specialist, Frizzell said it gives her satisfac-

tion knowing she came down to help service members who didn't have a PSB before.

"Otherwise, it would be a lot harder for them to get the work done," she said.

Estridge said his job is rewarding because he gets to see other people's needs get taken care of.

"I've been walking down the street and had people come up and thank me for taking care of their needs," he said. "It might be something real simple to us, but to them it was a big deal."

# Afghan officials, Coalition hold milestone conference

By Capt. Tony Apisa  
3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Rgt.

JALALABAD, Afghanistan - Over the past three and a half years, Coalition forces have taken the lead in providing security in the war-torn country of Afghanistan.

However, on the heels of a successful presidential election in October of last year, and the establishment and growth of indigenous security forces, the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, the government and the people of Afghanistan are in the midst of reversing the roles.

The Marines of 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, "America's Battalion" have been working side-by-side with Afghan government officials, Afghan National Army soldiers, and Afghan National policemen since November 2004, when they first arrived in Eastern Afghanistan.

Through continuous joint operations with the ANA and ANP, as well as consistent meetings with provincial, district, and village leadership, the Afghans have begun to take a larger role in establishing security for their nation.

In an effort to further this progress, America's Battalion coordinated with local officials to hold a conference for the Coalition and Afghan leadership from four provinces in Northeastern Afghanistan.

This conference was the first of its kind in Afghanistan, as key leaders from Nuristan, Laghman, Kunar and Nangarhar provinces joined together March 27 and 28 to establish a united front against the Taliban, HIG and Al Qaeda insurgents, who are still waging attacks throughout the region.

The conference was geared towards sharing current procedures and strategies being used in each province and



Cpl. Justin Schaeffer

**Coalition personnel, provincial leaders and law enforcement officials eat lunch at the Jalalabad governor's palace during the Northeast Regional Governor's Conference on Security March 27. The two-day conference discussed security issues and unity of efforts in Eastern Afghanistan.**

unifying their efforts. Topics that were discussed included establishing regional security standards, combating anti-government activity and enhancing the ANP.

Doctor Assif, deputy governor of Nangarhar province, and the host of the event, said that he was "glad to see the authorities gathered to talk about security in this region of Afghanistan. The security organizations in this area need to fully coordinate their activities with each other." Realizing that security is a critical step in the progress of the nation, he added, "For a successful reconstruction process we need security."

Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines has been working alongside the

Nangarhar and Laghman provincial ANP as well as the 1/1/203 Kandak (the ANA equivalent of a battalion) with great success.

"This Governor's conference was a milestone. Though the Coalition hosted it, it was the Afghan leadership that set the agenda and decided upon initiatives that will undoubtedly lead to a more stable environment," said Capt. Eric Kelly, Lima Company Commander.

As a result of the conference, all parties involved agreed that a formal delineation of duties for each organization was needed; that a cooperative and combined approach to security issues must be continuous; and that provincial security working

groups would be established to share information.

"The Northeast Regional Governor's Conference on Security has established a cooperative framework for the Afghan leadership to use while addressing their common security challenges, such as insurgent activity and organized crime. These are important steps in setting the conditions needed for the eventual withdrawal of international forces," said Lt. Col. Norm Cooling, commanding officer, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines.

The unifying effect of the conference was tangible. "It was quickly realized that pulling their voices together as a region will make a strong impact with the central government. This is yet another positive step towards stability in a previously turbulent area," said Kelly.

"The two day conference was a great success," said Rozi Khan, deputy governor of Kunar province. "By working together we will gain the people's trust. We must have the assistance of the people in order for us to succeed."

In a nation where tribal and ethnic differences have historically placed barriers in the way of any type of national unity, political and security leaders from various areas were able to sit together and discuss common ground.

"The dedication and commitment to the nation of Afghanistan demonstrated by its provincial leadership at this security conference was inspiring," said Maj. Steve Hunter, civil military operations officer, 3/3, who orchestrated the conference. "The Afghans are taking the initiative to secure their individual and national prosperity."

Due to this success, the Afghan leaders have decided to establish a regional security commission to meet monthly with the key leaders from each agency.