



The PHOENIX PATRIOT

“...From the Ashes...”

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Photo By Lt. Janette Arencibia

Guard Chief Visits Troops, Promotes Son In Combat

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Tom Roberts

The Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, visited troops in Afghanistan during his latest trip overseas. Blum and his new Cmd. Sgt. Maj., David Ray Hudson, met with many Soldiers in Kandahar, who appreciated a visit from the command group.

Blum addressed the Soldiers saying, “You’re all doing

exceptional work providing support to the warfight in an austere environment.”

The next day Blum traveled to Jalalabad where Embedded Training Teams (ETT) provide mentorship and assistance to the Afghan National Army (ANA). At this stop Blum met his son, Captain Mark Blum, a mentor with the 201st Regional Command Assistance Group. Capt Blum postponed his promotion five months so

his proud father could pin the rank of “Major” on his son in a combat zone.

Maj. Gen. Munir Mangal, commander of the ANA’s 201st Corps, briefed Blum on the current warfight situation and the status of his forces.

Blum also visited Camp Phoenix in Kabul where Task Force Phoenix Commander, Brig. Gen. Douglas Pritt, and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Brunk Conley, hosted face-to-face briefings

with key leaders. Hudson and Conley discussed enlisted Soldier’s issues and concerns.

Blum presented his command coin to service members exhibiting excellence in their efforts to train and mentor the ANA. He seemed truly pleased with the progress in Afghanistan.

Blum will continue visiting National Guard Soldiers at the frontlines of the Global War On Terrorism in the coming days.

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On Point w/ the CSM

Junglers,

The Search for Excellence.

Webster defines excellence as the quality of being excellent, and excellent is defined as superior.

We are seeing superior work, attitudes, and performance demonstrated by

all the warriors of Task Force Phoenix. Together we can accomplish great things, but it takes quality work from each individual for our collective group to achieve excellence as a team.

Each and every mission that we are tasked with is important. From training the ANA, to making sure the maintenance on our Dukes and Acorns is done properly. Without our mechanics keeping things running we don't move. Without our SECFOR watching our back we can't work with relative security. Without the company level ETT out there laying it on the line every day, we can't accomplish our mission. Every one of us has a job to do and every job is important. If we all think that our job is the most important job and must be done in the most excellent fashion, our collective mission cannot help but be accomplished.

When we look back on this mission in a year, five years, twenty years, our wish is for each of you to be able to look back and say, "I made a difference, I gave my best, and I helped my nation and a new nation achieve and maintain freedom." The last thing we hope for any of our warriors is for them to look back and say, "If I had only tried a little harder or given a little bit more."

Don't settle for less; don't rationalize why substandard is OK, and never, ever, ever quit reaching for your best. When we all do that, there are no limits to what we may accomplish.

I am proud of each and every one of you and thank my lucky stars to be part of such a professional and caring group of warriors.

Brunk Conley
CSM, USA
Command Sergeant Major



General Guidance

Warriors,

Task Force Phoenix is at the leading edge of significant changes taking place in Afghanistan. We are expanding our relationship with ISAF and assisting in the training of the Afghan Police organizations. Our mission set is expanding along with the Afghan National Army

and we are all being asked to do more.

The training Kandaks at KMTC are being increased in size from 700 to 1600 with no increase in staff. Our logistical personnel are supporting the standup of the Police logistical system in addition to the work they already do for the Army logisticians. The list of mission changes, adjustments and expansions goes on every day and I am sure this will continue throughout our deployment.

Change in Afghanistan is inevitable, and in fact is welcome. In the best selling book, "Who Moved My Cheese" the author, Dr. Johnson, provides some advice we should all understand and embrace:

Change Happens – They keep moving the cheese.

Anticipate Change – Get ready for the cheese to move.

Monitor Change – Smell the cheese often so you know when it is getting old.

Adapt to Change Quickly – The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you can enjoy new cheese.

Change – Move with the cheese.

Enjoy Change – Savor the adventure and enjoy the taste of new cheese. Be Ready to change quickly and enjoy it again and again.

Accept the Fact – They keep moving the cheese.

Our five pillars of success include leadership and creativity. Both of these attributes tie in perfectly with the change advice from Dr. Johnson. We need to be the leaders of change and use our creativity to develop innovative solutions to facilitate the changes we are creating in the Afghan National Army and Police.

This deployment and mission really are unique adventures that will be the highlight of our Military careers. I encourage you to enjoy the experience and embrace the changes taking place.

Douglas A. Pritt
Brigadier General,
Commanding

Fellow Patriots and Warriors,

What is success and how do we measure it here in Afghanistan?

I would ask you all to remember that each and everyday we do our part to assist the goals of mentoring, supporting our Embedded Training Teams, and striving for stability here in Afghanistan. We must not lose sight of the "Big Picture," to provide an environment where Afghans can have the opportunity to defend their country, educate their children, and start to grow a new

economy for the future.

It may not come as quickly as we expect. Afghans have had their country decimated by nearly thirty years of war and it takes time to recover from the total devastation of governmental and economic ruin. However, we can all take an individual and personal step in the right direction each and every day.

I challenge every Warrior to take a personal interest in effecting change. Whether dealing with Soldiers from the Afghan National Army or Interpreters or village elders and teachers, remember we are all ambassadors of our na-

tion and representatives of a vastly different concept of individual rights and responsibilities.

Have patience and faith in our mission, and each other, and take a moment to reflect on your personal contribution to our success. A handshake and shared smile may not seem like much today but over time a spark can be kindled, a life can be changed and Afghanistan will be reborn for the future. Don't lose site of the vision but strive to do your best for Afghanistan and future generations of mankind. Success starts with you.

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Camp Phoenix Fire Department - Volunteers Are Smoking

Story and Photos by
1st. Lt Cathrin Fraker

By the time the “Big Voice” called for all fire personnel to report to the north side of the dining facility (DFAC) the first responders from Camp Phoenix Fire Department (CPFD) were already on the scene.

Just after 1 a.m. a fryer in the kitchen caught fire. Personnel from Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) kitchen staff attempted to put the fire out with an extinguisher, but the fryer was too hot and the grease continued to ignite. A Soldier saw the smoke and radioed Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Hanson, Camp Phoenix Fire Training Officer.

Hanson, along with Maj. Joseph Morris, Chief Warrant Officer Matthew Lutz and Staff Sgt. Robert Surette were the first firefighters to arrive on the scene. The first step was to smother the fire in order to keep it from re-igniting.

The firefighters used a garden hose to cool the sides of the fryer until they were able empty it and take it outside. Once the fire was out, the doors of the DFAC were opened to assist ventilation.



CPFD firefighters remove a fryer from the dining facility of Camp Phoenix after it caught fire the night of Sept. 9.

The CPFD is responsible for protecting all of Camp Phoenix, a 20-acre facility. CPFD’s members have a wide variety of training and experience from new volunteers to experienced firefighting veterans. CPFD draws on the civilian skill sets of the Soldiers and Sailors who proudly volunteer for this additional duty.

Morris of Gastonia, N.C., is the Fire Chief and was a Kansas City Firefighter for nearly eight years before he pursued a career as a Physician’s Assistant. Hanson, of Oklahoma City, Okla., uses experience gained as a training officer for the Oklahoma City Fire Department to develop training scenarios for the volunteer members of CPFD. Surette, the Fire Marshall from Keizer, Ore.,

has been a volunteer firefighter in rural Oregon for over 20 years. Lutz, of Kenosha, Wis., is the Deputy Fire Chief and received extensive firefighting training through the Navy. He was a captain and training officer for East Moline, Illinois, Fire Department.



Major Joseph Morris, Gastonia, N.C., instructs Sgt. Prickett and other firefighters during an August Battle Drill.

CPFD trains the 14 volunteers approximately four times a month through classroom instruction and battle drills. Much of the equipment they use comes from firestations in Oregon that donate the equipment. CPFD has also ordered \$82,000 worth of additional equipment ranging from ladders and rescue equipment to foam and nozzles.

These Warriors volunteer to train and respond to fire calls in addition to their regular duties. Their dedication helps ensure the safety of Camp Phoenix.

ANA Officers Make Army Better With Technology

Story and Photo by
Cmdr. Chad Snee, 205th
RCAG PAO

KANDAHAR – Twenty-one Soldiers from the 205th Corps of the Afghan National Army (ANA) completed a course on basic computer skills and usage at Camp Shir Zai on Oct. 4.

The graduation ceremony was the third for ANA Soldiers and approximately 60 students have completed the course so far.

Capt. Sham Sudeem, automation officer for the ANA 205th Corps, coordinates the courses and works closely with the Canadians to provide instructors.

When the graduation ceremony began, all of the stu-

dents were seated in front of the Dell computers that were used to train them.

Each Soldier sounded off smartly when he was called forward to receive his course completion certificate. He then thanked the presenting instructor for the certificate and turned around to show the audience the evidence of his hard work.

Several students, motivated by their experience in the course, proudly proclaimed, “I will spend my life in the service of Afghanistan!” The conviction and pride in their voices inspired all in attendance.

The Executive Officer of the ANA 205th Corps, BG Khwaja Murad, attended the graduation ceremony

and echoed the feelings of his Soldiers. Murad explained that it was a big step for the ANA to move from recordkeeping using pens and paper, which he says is very inefficient, to using computers.

“Computers will make our jobs easier,” he continued. “We can then teach others the skills we have learned.”

“The certificate you received is a great milestone in your officer corps,” Canadian Maj. John Blythe, Commanding Officer of the Multinational Brigade, said. “It is not just a piece of paper, it acknowl-

edges your desire to use technology to do your jobs better, which will help you become better leaders. Take those certificates back to your homes and display them with pride.”

After decades of war and upheaval, the ANA officer Corps steadily marches toward a better future.



Graduates of the 205th Basic Computer Course, proud of their accomplishments.

Afghan Medic - Patriotic Example To All



Photo By Sgt. Margaret C. Nelson

ANA combat medic Mohammad Younis demonstrates how to suits up for a medical qualification course.

Story By Sgt. Margaret C. Nelson

Part One of a Two-Part Story

HERAT, Afghanistan – The future of Afghanistan and its Army is the “responsibility of the Afghan people,” said Afghanistan National Army (ANA) combat medic Mohammad Younis.

Younis is a combat medic serving in the 203rd Corps at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Camp Victory located 10 miles southeast of Herat. He has been an ANA Soldier for two years.

In a metal warehouse you’ll find Younis carrying out his commitment by volunteering to instruct his fellow Soldiers. His students include peers changing career paths and future medics fresh from Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC).

The 24-year old is a survivor who has already witnessed a lifetime of violence. He was born during the Soviet occupation, endured the hardships of civil war as a toddler, and as an adolescent suffered through the tyrannical reign of the Taliban.

His past drives his need to participate in his country’s future. A sense of patriotic duty prompted this former poet and community health worker to join the ANA as a combat medic.

“I’ve always had the need to serve

my country. Afghanistan has never had anything as strong as the ANA. We have a new government and I have lots of hope,” Younis said.

The all-volunteer ANA has been in existence for approximately five years and is being mentored and assisted by the United States and its coalition partners.

“I was sent here to train ANA medics,” said U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Victor Quiniano, an Embedded Trainer at Camp Victory’s Medical Clinic. “Younis has seen more combat and saved more lives in the last two years than I have in a career that spans 21 years. I’m humbled.”

Younis displayed the traits of a care-giver early. He was nicknamed, “Hamkar” (Pashto for mediator or person who likes to help) by his friends growing up.

He went into the health care profession after dropping out of school in the 10th grade to help his family. Younis continued his education in Pakistan obtaining certification as a community health care worker. He was earning the U. S. equivalent of \$300 a month, a good salary in Afghanistan, before joining the ANA.

Younis took a sizeable pay cut when he quit his job as a health-care specialist to join the ANA. As a second-year Soldier he earns approximately \$100 U.S. each month.

“The pay was not important to me. Afghanistan is changing for the better with its first strong Army. I wanted to be a part of that,” Younis said. “I like the respect and honor of being a Soldier in the ANA.”

Younis displays a photo album that holds images of loved ones and key events that have occurred during his Army career. He shows the images of a mission where two improvised explosive devices (IEDs)

killed and seriously injured ANA Soldiers. The two separate incidents occurred within two hours of each other. He explains how he worked alongside U. S. medics saving four of the seven Soldiers involved in the first explosion, and four of the six Soldiers in the second.

“Those were some of the worst scenes I have been to. And then another one went off killing more,” he said. “I tried everything I knew to save my countrymen at both scenes, but some died at the scene because their injuries were bad. We tried.”

Younis will not soon forget those he lost. The suffering is captured forever in his photos although he does not need the reminder of what those injuries were as he describes in detail the carnage that the IEDs inflicted. As he describes the scene,

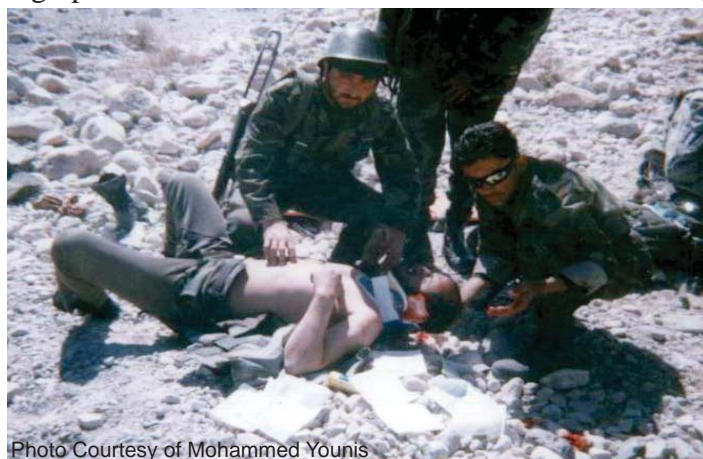


Photo Courtesy of Mohammed Younis

Younis cares for a fellow Soldier at the scene of an IED attack. Younis keeps these photos in a treasured photo album.

he looks off into the distance, his voice wavers, and his eyes become moist. He looks defeated reflecting on that moment in time.

“I did everything I knew to do, but those injuries...,” Younis said

Then the moment passes and he continues explaining the album’s contents, the credentials he has earned during his career. He confides that the decision to reenlist this year will depend on a promotion and the raise that comes with it because he plans to marry.

“It would be a shame if the ANA lost him. He’s invaluable. His vision, his contributions,” Quiniano said. “He would leave a huge void.”

Command Sergeant Major Visits Injured Soldiers

Story By Lt. Janette Arencibia

Photos By 1st Lt. Timothy Merritt

KABUL, Afghanistan – At least once a week Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Safi Roshan visits with Soldiers at Kabul Military Hospital to share a little of his day and personally thank each Soldier for his service. These visits provide an opportunity for Soldiers to express their progress and concerns with the Sergeant Major who shares this information with his Chief of Staff.

Some of the issues that Roshan is reviewing with the Chief of Staff include the types of duties Soldiers are assigned once they return to their units. Rather than being sent home, injured Soldiers may be assigned new tasks or light duty so they may continue to serve their country. Roshan and the Chief of Staff are also reviewing options for instituting disability benefits.

Most of the Soldiers Roshan visits are in the orthopedic ward and have suffered from injuries as a result of gunshot wounds while defend-



Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Roshan Safi shakes the hand of fellow Afghan Soldier Nazaromha Amad, a patient at Kabul Hospital. Amad was injured during combat operations in the Kunar region.

ing Afghanistan against insurgents. ANA Soldiers have a passion for completing their treatment and returning to the fight. Mohanna Raiz, from 3rd battalion, 2nd Brigade, 203 Corps, is one of these brave Soldiers.

“I am the only son of my father and I have a son of my own, but I

want to go back to the fight for my country. I will fight until they kill me,” Raiz said.

Soldiers receive treatment ranging from acute emergency care to physical therapy followed by orthopedic treatment. The continuity of care ranges from a few days to several months depending on the injury. Dr. Abbas Mangul is head of the Emergency Room and works alongside at least five other physicians and several nurses and technicians. These medical professionals diligently seek the most appropriate course of treatment for Soldiers in order to get them back to their units when possible.

The patients in the orthopedic ward are thankful for the time that Roshan visits with them and they express their hope to see representatives from their own units. Although they suffer from broken bones and wounds that require healing and therapy, their spirits are not broken. This is the message they convey to Roshan, knowing that he will return to see them again.



Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Roshan Safi visits with an ANA Soldier receiving treatment at Kabul Hospital for injuries received in battle. Roshan visits the Soldiers at least once a week.

Ghost Stories

Story By 2nd Lt. Amanda Straub
Photos By 1st Lt. Cathrin Fraker

In Muslim culture, Ghosts are called Djinn (pronounced "Gin"). One Djinn is called a Djinni, but these supernatural beings have more in common with western ghosts than they do with the wish-granter in Aladdin.

Muslims, including Afghans, believe that Djinn are a race of beings who live apart from the human world, but they may accidentally or purposefully interact with humans from time to time. Djinn have the power to do both good and evil and can be mischievous or helpful. There is a whole chapter on Djinn in the Holy Quran. They are usually invisible to people, but can take on different shapes or temporarily appear visible. Sometimes the way to see a Djinn is by using a vision enhancing device like a telescope or binoculars.

One story tells of a hunter who saw an extremely large deer grazing at a distance. When he raised his rifle and looked through his scope he saw a man standing in the field. He quickly lowered his rifle and saw

the deer again peacefully grazing. The hunter raised his rifle once again to take aim and saw the man's grotesque face looking at him. The hunter pulled the trigger, but instead of falling, the man in the field angrily started toward him. The hunter dropped his rifle and saw the magnificent deer lying harmless in the field, but he ran in terror leaving the prize for someone else.

In a land of conflict like Afghanistan, it is natural that many Djinn stories revolve around the decades of war and strife in the country. Good Djinn often share their warrior spirit with worthy Soldiers and thwart the plans of the enemy. During the fight of the Mujahadeen against the Soviet Occupation a group of weary Freedom Fighters took refuge in a mosque and fell asleep. A Djinn came to one of the sleeping Soldiers in a dream and warned him that the Russians were coming. The Soldier woke abruptly and roused his companions just in time to see Russians surrounding the mosque and preparing to attack. The Mujahadeen rallied together and successfully defended themselves and the Mosque.



of Afghanistan



Afghan Soldiers are not the only Soldiers who encounter Djinn. You never know, you may have the opportunity to see a Djinni while serving in Afghanistan like some of our American counterparts say they have done at FOB Salerno. The story goes that a few years back two Marines were pulling guard duty in a tower overlooking a cemetery when they saw a little girl and a goat pass by the base. When they took off their night vision goggles, she disappeared. When they put their goggles back on the girl reappeared on the tower balcony. The horrified Marines ran from the tower and refused to return to their post despite threats of punishment. In some versions of the story, the two men are crying.

Last year two paratroopers guarding the same tower said they heard a shrill, painful laugh coming over the radio. They said it sounded just like a little girl. They called around to the other towers to see if someone was

playing a joke, but no one else had even heard it.

The next night the same two paratroopers were back in the haunted tower, on edge, when they said the temperature suddenly dropped a few degrees and they felt something moving behind them. They heard a sound like someone stepping on the trap door that leads to the tower. The two men spent the rest of the night huddled together with the radio in a corner of the tower trying not to move. Soldiers from another tower called over the radio and said they could see a three-foot form walking around the tower and waving. The frightened Soldiers made it through the shift without any other problems.

One of the troopers said he felt that the ghost was a good ghost, and it was just having fun. If you find yourself in Salerno, be sure to say, "Hi," to the Djinni of the cemetery tower, but don't try sticking her in a bottle.

ANA Beats Multi-National Competition In Germany

Story by Lt. Janette Arencibia
Photo by Senior Airman Ashley Difalco

KABUL, Afghanistan – In Afghan ceremonial tradition, a Quran reading preceded congratulatory remarks made during the very first homecoming ceremony for Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers who completed training in Germany. Training lasted three weeks from Sept. 9 through Sept. 20, 2006, and ranked the ANA Soldiers in first place among other participants in the exercise.

The training included infantry and artillery skills taught by professionals from other nations. Soldiers felt the training provided hands on experience, one of the best types of learning and skills application.

Although this training was the first of its kind for the ANA, they did very well. ANA Soldiers had an opportunity to refine their newly acquired skills before competing against other nations participating in exercises. There are some areas for improvement though,

especially regarding communication. Another area for improvement is the opportunity for increased cooperation from the Afghan embassy. Increased coordination would allow more soldiers to be educated regarding their skills and abilities.

“If the training continues, it will be very beneficial,” said Maj. Gen. Mangal, 201st Corps Commander.

The ANA came in first place among other participating countries based on a point system used to determine skill and ability.

“It is required that we improve our experience,” Mangal said. “We are an Army that defends democracy, human rights, and defends our country.”

As certificates were distributed to each of the thirty-seven graduating Soldiers, they shouted “Juwani,” (pronounced “Jwinn”) meaning thank you and long life, in Dari.

“These certificates are proof of your skills and abilities and over the years that pass, you will want to keep this with you,” Mangal reminded the Sol-

diers.

In resounding agreement, each Soldier declared his allegiance to Afghanistan, and his readiness to defend her.

This was the first time for many of the Soldiers to leave Afghanistan. Afghan leaders and American mentors hope that there will be more opportunities like this in the future.

“I am sure that if the [Afghan] government takes care of the ANA, they will continue to improve,” Mangal said. “We are very grateful to the United States.”



“Juwani!” an Afghan Soldier shouts at his homecoming.

ETT's Visit Panjshir Valley

Story by 1st Lt. Cathrin Fraker

Members of Headquarters Security and Support Command (HSSC) Embedded Training Team (ETT) recently visited Panjshir Valley with Brig. Gen. Raziiq, Afghan Commander of the Security Brigade. During their visit, the ETTs met with the provincial governor, delivered school supplies, and attended a ceremony celebrating the contributions of Ahmed Shah Massoud.

Col. David Wellington, a member of the N.H. National Guard and former Commander of HSSC, and Raziiq conducted a key leader engagement with Haji Bahlol, Panjshir Provincial Governor, to discuss recent economic improvements in the province as well as village elder concerns about education and the ability of children to attend primary and secondary schools.



This donkey is hauling school supplies to a remote village with the ETTs of HSSC, who normally work at MOD.

“The future of Afghanistan relies in the ability of the young people to receive a good education,” said Bahlol.

On Sept. 9, Afghan and American Soldiers loaded school supplies onto donkeys and led them down a cliff, across the river to a remote elementary school, Dasta Riwan, unreachable by vehicle. Raziiq’s ANA Soldiers distributed school supplies donated by Putnam Investments, an American company. School officials were very thankful for the supplies, since they do not receive any type of funding or support for the little school.

On Sept. 10, Raziiq and the HSSC mentors attended a ceremony honoring the contributions of Ahmed Shah Massoud at his tomb in the Panjshir Valley. Massoud is considered a National Hero among many Afghans. He was a military leader who played a key roll in pushing the Soviet army out of Afghanistan. During the rise of the Taliban, Massoud became the military leader of the Northern Alliance, who opposed the Taliban. He was assassinated during a suicide attack on Sept. 9, 2001, two days before the deadly attacks in the United States.

Dignitaries at the event included Massoud’s brother who is the first vice president of Afghanistan, the U.S. Ambassador, and Maj. Gen. Benjamin C. Freakley. Vice President Massoud emphasized the need of Afghan people to take responsibility for their safety and to assist the Afghanistan Security Forces in defeating Anti-Government Elements.

Ordinarily, the HSSC ETTs work in the offices of the Ministry of Defense. They were moved by the remarks at Massoud’s Ceremony and were thankful for the opportunity to attend and help a wider circle of people.

Declining Artillery

Story By Capt. Benjamin Tupper, 203rd RCAG ETT

Afghanistan – We began the day with a mission brief before accompanying a unit of Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers on a patrol through one of our most contested areas. Enemy contact was likely, but the Afghan Soldiers were excited to take the fight to the Taliban. Even the lowest ranking Afghan Soldiers had a high degree of patriotism and commitment to defeating the Taliban and bringing peace to Afghanistan. They all volunteered to serve their country and the dangers of combat didn't cool their enthusiasm. About an hour into our patrol the Taliban ambushed us in a village of simple mud compounds.

We found ourselves pinned down and taking fire from all sides. We effectively returned fire and kept the enemy from advancing on our position. We were holding our own but decided to call in reinforcements in an attempt to surround the enemy. Given the distance and terrain our reinforcements had to travel, it could have been hours before we saw them. Time became another enemy we had to manage.

While maneuvering my forces during the engagement I received word from my higher that they had artillery lined up and ready to use. All I had to do was adjust it accordingly onto the enemy positions. While this would have worked well, my concern was that the compounds occupied by the Taliban were civilian. The chance of killing innocent Afghans who happened to be holed up inside was high.

I've been invited for Chai on many occasions into similar compounds and they are normally filled with dozens of children, elderly people, and women during the day. I figured that for every Taliban the artillery hit we would also hit a high number of innocent people trapped in the crossfire.



Photo By 2nd Lt. Amanda Straub

This young girl peers from the doorway of a typical Afghan Compound.



Photo By Maj. Arnold Strong

An Afghan Soldier watches for enemy and prepares for combat.

I was forced to make a difficult decision - one that pitted the lives and safety of my Afghan and U.S. Soldiers against those of innocent civilians. My decision was made for me when I remembered a moment from another engagement with the enemy. Taliban fighters had occupied a family compound and fired at us from over the mud walls with AK 47's and Rocket Propelled Grenades. We returned heavy fire on the compound and the enemy fled.

Within minutes an elderly woman came running out of the compound. She was racked with fear, her face covered in tears and sweat. She was waving pictures in her hands. I approached her with my interpreter and she wasted no time in showing me pictures of her son, a member of the Afghan National Army. She was proud of him and had let him join the Army to fight the Taliban knowing the dangers it brought with it. She wanted us to know, even at risk to her safety, that she had not allowed the Taliban to enter her compound, but they had done so at gunpoint with threats to her and her family. Her fear, her bravery, her need tell me about her support of the Afghan Government, cemented in me a desire to do everything I could to protect her and people like her, in combat. Even if it meant assuming additional dangers on my part.

With this image fresh in my head, I declined the artillery. I was willing to accept the greater risk to myself and my brave Afghan and U.S. Soldiers. We volunteered to be combatants in this cause. The families within the compounds did not.

While this meant another hour of tough combat against a well defended enemy, we persevered and managed to drive off the enemy with no loss of life to our forces. When all was said and done, we left the battlefield knowing we had taken the higher ground and done what was right and fair for the people of this village. It's what our U.S. and Afghan National Army Soldiers do.

Featured Patriot - Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Hanson

Story by 2nd Lt. Amanda Straub

Photo by 1st Lt. Cathrin Fraker

For some, retirement means slowing down and enjoying the long deserved rest and break from the demands of a career. After retiring from the Oklahoma City Fire Department after 22 years, Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Hanson continues to serve his country as a member of the Oklahoma Army National Guard. Sgt. 1st Class Hanson joined the Army in 1974 to be a firefighter and served on active duty for 3 years. After a 16 year break in military service, Hanson, a native of Oklahoma City, joined the Oklahoma National Guard.

Hanson is extremely proud to contribute to Task Force Phoenix's mission of rebuilding Afghanistan and establishing stable security forces to protect the people here.

"This country, and it's people, have been devastated by so many years of war," Hanson said, "it will take as many years to repair the damage."

As a medic and a platoon sergeant, Hanson cares for his Soldiers like a father and prepares them for the worst parts of combat duty as a medic: treating the wounded.

"I am very proud to be working with these men," Hanson said. "Most of

them are young and have yet to experience the reality of dealing first hand with the dead or severely injured, or the confusion and demands of getting control of emergency or combat situations."

Hanson is a survivor of the trauma of the A.P. Murrah Bombing, otherwise known as the Oklahoma City Bombing. Hanson was a firefighter called to deal with the results of the horrific tragedy and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. He is passionate about preparing and protecting (as much as humanly possible) the medics under his command for the worst-case scenario they may be called to deal with in a combat zone.

"They will all come back home different men," Hanson said, "hopefully better men, but all will be changed. One of my main goals is to ensure that what happened to me does not happen to them, or if it does, that it will be identified [and treated] as early as possible."

Hanson misses his wife Carol, and their three children very much, but he understands the importance of stabilizing Afghanistan and the need for a long-term presence here.

"We are doing the right thing by being here," Hanson said. "If we pull



Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Hanson serves CJTF PHX as a medic, Platoon Sergeant and Training Officer for the fire department.

out, the Muslim extremists would re-establish themselves and strike out at every nation that doesn't follow their version of Islam. I hope to show the people that we are friends, not an occupation force, and we are here for the long haul."

Despite Hanson's many duties and busy schedule, he can't seem to get the fire out of his blood. Hanson volunteered for additional duty with the Camp Phoenix Fire Department and serves as the training officer ensuring that the other CPFD volunteers are ready to protect their fellow Warriors from fire threats.

Sound Off - What Do You Like About Halloween?



"Spending time with my son and eating most of his candy."

Sgt. James Schrack
Charlie Co. 1/180th
Oklahoma City,
OK



"I like going to costume parties and getting candy."

Sp. Javier Hernandez
Alpha Co. 141
Fresno, CA



"I enjoy getting to be someone else for a little while and pretend to be something that I really could never be, like a red-eyed, long-tongued, pointed-eared troll."

2nd. Lt. Michael S. Palmer,
S6, 141 LTF
Monmouth, OR



"I enjoy taking my kids out."

Sp. Shane Bohnenkamp
HHC, 41st
Pendleton, OR



"I enjoy helping my kids make their costumes."

Staff Sgt. Michael Galletly
Charlie Co. 1/180th
Oklahoma City,
OK