DESERT DEVIL DISPATCH

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SMA visits FOB Salerno

Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston shakes the hand of Spc. Eric C. Smyth, headquarters Combined Task Force Devil, after presenting him with a coin for excellence Oct. 11, at Forward Operating Base Salerno.

By Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke
Editor

FORWARD OPERATIING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan- Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston visited paratroopers of Combined Task Force Devil Oct. 11, during a tour of bases in Afghanistan.

Preston visited Forward Operating Base Salerno, which is the headquarters for the task force and home to approximately 2,600 U.S. service members and civilian contractors.

During his tour the Army's senior enlisted Soldier met with Col. Patrick J. Donahue II, commander of CTF Devil, senior non-commissioned officers from the unit and several hundred Soldiers of all ranks at a town-hall style meeting.

During the meeting Preston recognized various troopers from the task force by presenting them with commemorative coins. The Sergeant Major of the Army coin is one of the rarest and most sought after coins throughout the Army's tradition of awarding commemorative coins to outstanding Soldiers.

After the presentation of coins, Preston began fielding questions from those in the crowd. The focus of interest for many in the crowd was questions regarding the Army's new Advanced Combat Uniform.

Preston explained to the troops the numerous testing phases and features of the uniform saying that it was one of the first uniforms entirely tested and developed by Soldiers to make sure it was functional in combat.

Preston also reminded Soldiers of the importance of telling the Army's story when they return from a deployment.

"The people back home get to see what things are like over here through what I like to call a straw hole,"

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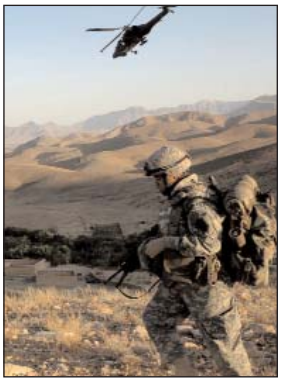

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Devil 6: Accomplishments from sacrifice

Col. Patrick J. Donahue II
Combined Task Force Devil Commander

I talked about our accomplishments in the last issue of the Desert Devil Dispatch. However, these accomplishments did not come without great sacrifice, so this issue we will recognize the sacrifices that led to our accomplishments.

I am proud to command Combined Task Force Devil, one of America's finest fighting forces. Part of that pride comes from the great sacrifices Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen and their families make in support of our mission.

I look around RC East everyday and see thousands of brave American service members and civilians doing their duty far from home without complaint.

We have had over 90 wounded in action and five who will never return home--clearly these troopers proved they were willing to sacrifice all for their country, and they embodied the concept of absolute duty.

Whether in peacetime or war, service members and their families continuously sacrifice for the United States of America, which is why they call what we do "service." Soldiers, Marines, Sailors and Airmen in CTF Devil have sacrificed over the last six months in order to protect our country from another attack, to rid Afghanistan of terrorists, and to set the conditions for reconstruction and a stable democracy.

> "It is not only the service members who are sacrificing; it is their family and friends as well."
>
> -Col. Patrick J. Donahue II
> *Commander*
> *Combined Task Force Devil*

It is not only the service members who are sacrificing; it is their family and friends as well. Our families back home sacrifice during deployment as well.

Mothers have to take on the responsibilities of fathers, and fathers must take on the responsibilities of mothers. We appreciate the sacrifices and the efforts of the families deployed on the home front. We could not focus on the fight and do our jobs in Afghanistan without their support.

Although these sacrifices are difficult to endure at times, I assure you they are necessary, honorable and worth it. Our fight here is worthwhile.

Col. Patrick J. Donahue

America is a country born from sacrifice, and it will continue to survive because of those who are still willing to sacrifice to keep her strong and free.

I thank all troopers, Marines, Sailors and Airmen in CTF Devil for serving America, and I especially thank our families for allowing us to do our duty and giving us that critical support needed while deployed. It is truly inspirational.

We should never forget the sadness and difficulties that bears in the homes of so many Americans whom have family members deployed -- Americans who have sacrificed all to protect America's most fundamental principle -- freedom.

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The CTF Devil Public Affairs Office is located in the Tactical Operations Center at FOB Salerno. It can be reached at DSN 318-851-0040 or via e-mail at carterg@cjtf76.centcom.mil.

To view back issues of the *Desert Devil Dispatch*, visit http://www.bragg.army.mil/afvc-a/desert_devil_dispatches.htm

Commander
Col. Patrick J. Donahue II
Command Sergeant Major
CSM Thomas Capel
Public Affairs Officer
1st Lt. Anthony Delsignore
Editor
Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke

Top Marine visits all Marines in AO

By Sgt. Robert M. Storm
2nd Battalion 3rd Marine Regiment

Spc. Laura E. Griffin

General Michael Hagee, Commandant of the Marine Corps, shakes hands with Cpl. Jordon Aguillaro, an infantryman stationed at Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team, Afghanistan, Sept. 27. The Commandant, along with Sergeant Major of the Marines John Estrada, not pictured, were on a trip to Afghanistan to visit every Marine deployed here.

JALALABAD, Afghanistan- The Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Michael W. Hagee accompanied by Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, visited the Marines and sailors of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Afghanistan Sep. 26.

Escorted by Lt. Col James Donnellan, battalion commander, and Sgt. Maj. Robert J. LaFleur, battalion Sgt. Maj., the Corps' top leaders interacted with the Island Warriors during their visit. General Hagee awarded three combat meritorious promotions as well as awarding 19 Purple Heart medals to Marines and sailors that have been injured during combat operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

"All the focus is on Iraq, so it's nice to know we're remembered in Afghanistan," said Lance Cpl. Carlos C. Plata, nuclear biological chemical specialist, from Plainview, Texas.

Plata was one of the Marines General Hagee awarded the Purple Heart to for his injuries sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device.

While visiting the Marines General Hagee talked about the future of the Marine Corps and also conducted a question and answer session.

The first topic discussed was the future of deployments, with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines scheduled to be the second to last Marine infantry battalion deployed to Afghanistan. The Commandant of the Marine Corps also discussed with the audience that the Marine Corps' intent is to continue working towards a 2-to-1 deployment schedule and then optimally to a 3-to-1 rotation schedule instead of the current 1-to-1, referring to days spent at home versus days spent deployed.

General Hagee also explained to the battalion how the integration of reserve units for deployments helps to alleviate some of the stress on active duty units.

Also discussed were changes in technology and Marine Corps policies for the future. Ideas such as equipping every Marine with a radio, night vision devices and Advance Combat Optical Gun Sight. The changes also included updated tactics being taught at the School of Infantry with a heavier emphasis on patrolling.

"We're empowering NCO's (non-commissioned officers) to make policy, you Marines in the field are the ones who will be determining policy for future Marines, the decisions you make will last," said General Hagee. "The future holds a greater likelihood of irregular wars fought in urban environments, wars will no longer be force on force, battalion on battalion, the enemy knows they will loose that way. We have to be prepared to fight against thinking enemies using asymmetric tactics." The Marines and sailors were glad for a chance to hear the news about changes in policies straight from the Commandant and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

"I think it's great that both the Commandant and the Sgt. Major came and greeted the Marines and sailors and allowed time for questions in order to give us information about the future of the Marine Corps," said Staff Sgt. Michael R. Kirby, supply chief, from Roanke, Ala.

Sgt. Robert M. Storm

Sergeant Major of the Marines John Estrada speaks with Marines from 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment during his visit to Camp Blessing, Afghanistan, Sept. 26.

ANA, Gun Devils cross train at Salerno

By Sgt. Adrian Schulte
Combined Joint Task Force 76 PAO

Sgt. Adrian Schulte

An Afghan soldier pulls the lanyard on a M198 155mm Medium Towed Howitzer during a cross-training event with the paratroopers of Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment at Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan Sept. 29

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan-The concussion vibrated through Mohammed Latif's body. The American artillery can accurately rain destruction from up to 30 kilometers away and Latif felt the power of the American artillery first hand as the gun belched a loud blast. After the smoked had cleared, a smile crept across Latif's face.

For Afghan National Army mortar-men, the opportunity to see American artillery at work came in the form of a visit to Forward Operating Base Salerno and the paratroopers of Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment Sept. 29.

The Americans and Afghans did some cross training on Combined Task Force Devil's M198 155mm Medium Towed Howitzers and were taught how to call for fire from an observation post in an effort to foster better relations between the two armies and to improve the Afghan Army's ability to use artillery assets.

"They (ANA) shoot mortars and have never shot the big guns, so they wanted to come here and cross train with us," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Kazaka, artilleryman, Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment.

The paratroopers began the day by showing their Afghan counterparts how to occupy a position in under six minutes with their Howitzer. They then broke down into two groups and walked the Afghan soldiers step by step through the different stages of setting up the gun and firing it.

Afghan soldiers were also loaded into a UH-60 Helicopter and inserted into an observation post where they would act as forward observers and call back to the firing point to request a fire mission from their fellow Afghans who were on the other end of the radio learning to fire the artillery.

"We showed them the different rounds we shoot and how we shoot with crew drills," said Kazaka. "We broke down everybody's job. The only thing that kicked their butt was trying to lift up the gun."

The groups then got their chance to feel the might of American artillery as each Afghan soldier got the chance to work with the American teams ramming the projectile, loading the powder, inserting the primer and firing the Howitzers. They returned to their buddies smiling and laughing as they talked about their experience after each Afghan had their turn.

"The best part is always the shooting," Kazaka said. "Watching their faces after they pulled the lanyard, just the way they jump with the look on their face like 'I just shot that?' That is the best."

"I like the way that Americans train," said Afghan mortarman Mohammed Latif, who joined the ANA a year ago. "It was too cool. I loved pulling the lanyard and actually firing the gun."

For both the Americans and Afghans, the day provided more than a loud bang and a ringing in their ears. It gave the opportunity to learn about each other and about what it takes to accomplish a mission.

For the paratroopers, it gave them a chance to meet some of their newest allies in the war on terror.

"Just working with the ANA was the best thing for my Soldiers," Kazaka said. "We've seen them around the FOB, but this is the first time we have intermingled with them. So that was awesome. You can tell that they are good people."

For the Afghans, the day showed the importance teamwork plays in the American Army.

"If they walk away learning one thing it would be how to work together," said Kazaka. "Because this gun right here is all about teamwork. When they first got out here, they were trying to do everything individually. I kept on telling them that you had to work together. You can't shoot this gun unless you have teamwork."

The Americans and Afghans worked together as a team today on Salerno. As the day ended and they parted company, the Afghans took that message of teamwork back to their unit where it will be used in future missions alongside of their Coalition allies.

The paratroopers plan to expand this training program in the future and establish a partnership with the Combat Support Kandak artillery units in RC East.

Sgt. Adrian Schulte

Staff Sgt. Joshua Kazaka (right) points out some features on a M198 155mm Medium Towed Howitzer during a cross-training event with the paratroopers of Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment at Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan Sept. 29.

Adaptation key for Red Falcons

By Spc. Mike Pryor
Task Force Red Falcon PAO

MIANASHIN, Afghanistan - Alpha Company's air-drop of supplies in the morning had fallen far from the mark, leaving water bottles and boxes of food strewn for hundreds of yards across the mountains. The paratroopers had spent the afternoon carrying box after box down from the ridgeline, but there were still several large loads that needed to be transported. With daylight rapidly disappearing, A Co seemed to have run out of options.

Luckily, that's when the Donkey Man showed up.

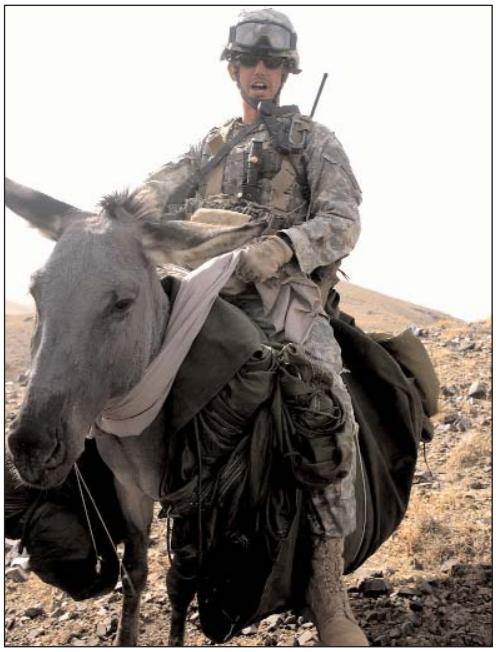
Spc. Daniel Boyle spotted the old man as he led a team of donkeys up a hill in the distance. With a flash of inspiration, Boyle realized the donkeys might be the solution to A Co's transportation problem. He beckoned the man over and began to negotiate. They quickly reached an agreement, and before long, each donkey was loaded up with an enormous bundle of supplies and ready to move out.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Sheppard mounted the lead donkey. He slung his weapon on his back and gave a gentle jab with his heels to spur the animal forward. As the donkey started trotting off, a sudden thought occurred to Sheppard.

"Hey, how do I make it stop?" he hollered.

But by that time the unlikely convoy was already on the move.

As the incident with the donkeys shows, "adapt and overcome" was the strategy on display when paratroopers from Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment and counterparts from the Afghan National Army conducted a five-day operation in the Mianashin region north of Kandahar in early October. The operation resulted in the arrests of three Taliban leaders and the destruction of two enemy safe-houses.



Spc. Mike Pryor

Staff Sgt. Matthew Sheppard of A Co, 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, prepares to move out on an improvised donkey convoy near Lwar Kowndalan, Afghanistan, Oct. 3.

"On a mission like that, you never know what situation you're going to find yourself in. That's why we just try to stay flexible and make the most out of whatever breaks we get," said Capt. Michael Shaw, A Co's commander.

The operation began with a pre-dawn air assault into the town of Lwar Kowndalan Oct. 1. Two Chinook helicopters with an Apache gunship for support deposited the paratroopers in a clearing just outside the village. The paratroopers flung themselves out of the Chinooks into a wall of dirt and dust kicked up by the rotar blades. The helicopters took off seconds later and as the dust settled, the paratroopers could see they had landed in a graveyard.

They moved out quickly and encircled the town by squads. Their objective was to capture several high-ranking Taliban operatives known to live in the village. With the ANA leading the way, they searched several houses and in no time had taken three enemy captive.

They were also on the lookout for a safe-house used by Taliban forces in the area. After several hours, Shaw decided to set up a patrol base from which to continue the search. He chose a high-walled, fortress-like compound surrounded by orchards. Ironically, soon after occupying the building, the paratroopers realized it

See "Adaptation" page 9

Sgt. Adrian Schulte

Big guns a blast for ANA...

Afghan mortarman Mohammed Latif loads a round into a M198 155mm Medium Towed Howitzer during a cross-training event with the paratroopers of Charlie Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment at Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan Sept. 29.

LTF 307 keeps CTF Devil mission ready

By Sgt. Adrian Schulte
Combined Joint Task Force 76
PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan- In the Global War on Terrorism, while the combat arms troops are doing their best to rid Afghanistan of enemy forces and provisional reconstructions teams rebuild the infrastructure, just as important are the Soldiers who provide the logistical and medical support to the war fighters.

Many of those critical links in Operation Enduring Freedom are made up of paratroopers from Logistical Task Force 307 based out of Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan.

LTF 307 is comprised of Soldiers from the 307th Forward Support Battalion out of Fort Bragg and of the 69th Transportation Company out of Germany. They are a pillar of support for the Coalition forces of eastern Afghanistan.

The task force provides all aspects of logistics, maintenance, medical and transportation support to Regional Command East and Task Force Devil, said Maj. Andre Danwin, LTF 307 executive officer. They also occasionally support Special Forces and the Afghan Kandak forces.

Whether it is pulling guard duty or providing female Soldiers to maneuver units dealing with Afghan women, the task force is operating above and beyond what is normally asked of them. The unit that normally supports three battalions at Fort Bragg is responsible for the equivalent of eight battalions in Afghanistan.

"We've got a lot of Soldiers going forward not doing their normal (jobs) helping the maneuver elements," Danwin said. "So my paratroopers, besides doing their supply jobs, their maintenance jobs and their medical jobs, are forward getting into where they are needed."

The task force is broken up into four companies. Dubbed the Diablos, Mad Dogs, Witch Doctors and Road Runners, they provide a full spectrum of support for their area of responsibility.

The Diablos of Alpha Company provide the supply support activity and are the distribution point of sorts for the units operating in eastern Afghanistan.

"We warehouse all classes of supply provided locally here. So if a unit needs anything from chemlights to support for the dining facilities here, it all comes through this central receiving point," Danwin said. "It's a whole scope of supply."

The company also provides ammunition, petroleum and water, which are all necessities for combating the enemy. A parachute rigger section that is based out of Bagram Airfield has so far dropped 350 containerized delivery systems. The containers can deliver anything from humanitarian supplies to ammunition and food.

Maintenance is a constant concern in the rugged climate and terrain of Afghanistan.

"When any piece of equipment is beyond basic maintenance, I have the mechanical experts do what ever needs to be done to get that piece of equipment going," said Danwin. "They can diagnose and actually fix the problems with vehicles, radios, radar equipment… the whole gamut."

Because the units are so spread out across the regional command, the LTF 307 maintenance company has been broken up forming small maintenance support teams. These teams are spread across the command allowing repair capabilities to the maneuver battalions.

A healthy Soldier is a happy Soldier - or at least one that can better accomplish his or her job. The paratroopers of Charlie Company are there to ensure the force is healthy. They also provide support for medical civic assistance missions to the surrounding areas.

"We are doing a lot of patient care helping Soldiers and doing a lot of local national care as well," said Sgt. Pablo Colon, C Co. healthcare specialist.

Sgt. Adrian Schulte

Mechanic Pfc. Justin Palmer cranks a wrench on a humvee while shop foreman, Sgt. Matthew Haynes, looks on at Forward Operating Base Salerno Sept. 28. The Bravo Company Soldiers help keep trucks up and running on the rugged Afghan roads.

The company's main job is the health and welfare of the Soldiers on the FOB, said Colon. They run sick call, missions to different FOBs.

"Anything they do here activity wise where they might need medical support, we provide it," he said.

The company also provides preventive medicine teams, which can determine health risks to the troops and find ways to contain them.

This is a unique experience for the support battalion paratroopers as it gives them hands-on experience in their jobs.

While the 307th FSB comes fully equipped out of Fort Bragg, for this deployment they decided to give their weary truck drivers a break and give a unit out of Germany a chance to earn their combat patches.

"This truck company said 'hey we're available to deploy and we are coming,'" said Danwin. "So we got a platoon from the 69th Transportation Company. It gives them the opportunity for a bunch of non-airborne personnel to be going to war with the 82nd guys, so that's good for them."

The troops from the 69th are busy driving on the rugged Afghan roads transporting equipment and coalition and Afghan army personnel.

"It's been great working with the 82nd," said Cpl. Holly Princevalle, a mechanic from the 69th Transportation Company.

"As far as maintenance goes, the Afghan roads are rough and there are only a couple of us down here from the company to take care of a whole fleet of trucks," Princevalle said. "So we've been getting used to working through the long hours."

"Probably the biggest thing we've brought besides a bunch of motivated paratroopers is we've allowed the maneuver battalions not to worry about logistics and to concentrate on the fight," Danwin said in reference to the task force's mission in Afghanistan.

For the next six months the troops of LTF 307 will continue to provide the support needed to accomplish the mission in eastern Afghanistan. As the harsh Afghan winter sets in, LTF 307 will have the needed supplies and assets in place to ensure the troops are taken care of.

"We do a lot of leaning forward in logistics," Danwin said. "We are the logistics experts for the maneuver guys so they can go out and kill the enemy. We are getting them what they need to do that even before they think about it."

TF vehicles get armor upgrades

By Sgt. Adrian Schulte
Combined Joint Task 76 PAO

FORWARD OPERARTING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan- When "Monster Garage" meets the War on Terror, you not only get a beastly looking machine, you also get a life-saving apparatus.

A team of mechanics from L3 Vertex Aerospace out of Oklahoma City came to Afghanistan in May to refit medium and light tactical vehicles along with some humvees with armor kits. The teams ranging from 23 to 36 mechanics have worked out of Bagram and Kandahar Airfields as well as forward operating bases Orgun-E and Salerno.

In their time in Afghanistan, they have refitted 197 vehicles with armor.

Most of the kits consist of prefabricated truck cabs which come fully intact. For most of the trucks, the mechanics replace the old cabs with the newer, up-armored ones in a two-day process, according to Jim VanGorder, L3 Vertex Aerospace site supervisor for Afghanistan.

"These cabs have done very well with mines," said VanGorder referring to one of the most common perils faced by drivers on the roads of Afghanistan and Iraq. He went on to recall one instance in Iraq where one of the up-armored trucks hit a "double stack" mine sending the vehicle on its side. The Soldiers inside walked away from the incident.

Most of the mechanics working on the vehicles are actually helicopter mechanics, VanGorder said. They came from all over the United States and volunteered for this assignment to get their foot in the door for an aviation maintenance spot in the company.

While the assignment may send some of these mechanics on to other, more permanent positions, they are also proud of the work they are doing.

"This is a good thing, it's a good mission," VanGorder said. "I'll tell you, the ultimate reward is to have guys come back and say 'thanks. I feel better about what's going on.' I really like to see the guys drive outside the wire with armor."

Sgt. Adrian Schulte

L3 Vertex Aerospace mechanics work to remove the cab off a 5-ton tactical vehicle to make way for a new up-armored cab at Forward Operating Base Salerno Sept. 26.

The mechanics take their jobs seriously and will work through the night in many cases to fit a mission-bound vehicle with armor.

"I'm only 21 and most of the Soldiers out here are my age," said Michael Lavender, a wheeled mechanic for L3 Vertex Aerospace. "I feel kind of bad for not joining the military and serving my country but coming out here doing this makes me feel really good, because yeah I'm making good money but my motivation comes out of the fact that in each one of these cabs Soldiers' lives are protected."

The L3 Vertex Aerospace mechanics will be in Afghanistan until November to finish their mission. At that time the job will be passed on to another contractor.

TF White Devil helps mosques

By Sgt.Chuck D. Meseke
Editor

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan- Islam is an important part of Afghan society. It can be observed through the strict customs and traditions Afghans follow as well as hearing the frequent calls to prayer echoing from numerous minarets that populate cities such as Kabul or Jalalabad.

This prominence of the religion of Afghan society is what makes Task Force White Devil's projects of helping to rebuild 12 local mosques so important, said Capt. Jeff Hembree, White Devil's chief civil military operations officer.

Since arriving in country in April paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 504th

See "Mosques" page 8

Contributed Photo

Spc. Mario Escobedo (left) and Spc. Maxwell Beaton (right) stand in front of the Khowst Grand Mosque, one of many mosques Task Force White Devil is helping to refurbish in the area.

Marines donate school supplies

By Sgt. Robert M. Storm
2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment

NANGALAM, Afghanistan- On Oct. 3, Marines and Sailors of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Camp Blessing handed out over 600 school outfits to local village children. The Marines and Sailors recently set forth on a campaign to bring clothing, toys and school supplies to the children in the neighboring village of Nangalam.

"I got the idea because I used to run the Toys-4-Tots in Moscow; I did a tour over there as a Marine Security Guard," said Sgt. Eric J. Rinda, infantryman, from Centennial, Colo. "I thought about doing it as soon as we arrived when I saw how poor the kids were."

The Marines and Sailors wrote home to parents and friends asking for help with donations. The objectives of the Marines and sailors were the same overall as those of the Toys-4-Tots program - to help the children throughout Nangalam feel the enjoyment of new clothes and toys. Packages arrived from all over the United States almost immediately coming from as far west as California and as far east as New Jersey.

"I even contacted the National Football League, and they sent us boxes of tote bags," said 1st Lt. Matt D. Bartels, officer-in-charge Camp Blessing, from Minneapolis, Minn. "We have so much stuff that we're running out of room to put it all. We've filled up a quadcon (shipping container), and we still have more stuff coming."

The school house that teaches over 600 students is nothing more than an empty building with 10 separate rooms. The school lacks even the most basic amenities. The children do not have heat in the winter or fans in the summer. The school does not contain any restrooms, and the rooms lack windows. After seeing the condition of the school, the Marines attacked the project with a passion. The Marines share stories about how enthusiastic most families were to contribute, especially when they heard how little the children have in Afghanistan.

"I have a brother that's a school teacher in Pennsylvania, and once he talked to the principal about it, they managed to get boxes for donations put up in every school in the district," said Rinda. "I expect to be receiving packages until the day that we leave Afghanistan."

One of the biggest accomplishments of the drive is the new school outfits for the children. Using donations from families and a collection from the Marines and Sailors of Camp Blessing, new clothes were purchased for each student.

"It was kind of a big deal when we handed out the new outfits. Many of the children haven't had new clothes in over a year," said Bartels.

"We thank the Marines and everyone back in United States who have given. They've done a great thing; it is a great help to our village children," said Muhammad Abas, school principal, Nangalam.

Sgt. Robert M. Storm

Lt. Robert L. Long, scout sniper platoon commander, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment from Berkley Heights, N.J. hands village girls new school outfits. Over 600 girls were given new clothes to wear to school.

Mosques from page 7

Parachute Infantry Regiment, and Soldiers from the Khowst Provincial Reconstruction Team have been helping to improve the conditions of local buildings that are used not only for prayer and religious services but also as a meeting place for issues concerning the community.

"Much like the early history of the United States where churches were the center of towns, the mosque is similar," Hembree said.

Although renovating mosques may not seem like an important part of the war on terror, Hembree maintains that projects like this one help the paratroopers conduct their mission of killing or capturing enemy forces.

"Most importantly it helps maintain support from the local population for the Government of Afghanistan and Coalition efforts," said Hembree. "It also dispels any preconceived ideas that this war is about attacking their religion."

So far each mosque has been given thousands of dollars in repairs.

As the Soldiers from the PRT work with local officials and clerics the paratroopers often find themselves providing security, a much different mission for troops who are normally hunting down terrorists with the Afghan National Army.

"Some of them don't understand how it fits into the mission, but most of them do when it comes to maintaining the popular support and it can be a nice break from normal missions," Hembree said.

With projects completed in Nadir Shah Kot, Sabari, and Matun Districts the mission to refurbish mosques in the Khowst Province shows no signs of slowing down. White Devil paratroopers and Soldiers from the Khowst PRT continue to operate in and around Khowst to improve the lives of Afghans and make the area more secure.

> "It helps maintain support from the local population for the Government of Afghanistan and Coalition efforts."
>
> -Capt. Jeff Hembree, Task Force White Devil

Adaptation from page 5

was actually the safe-house they were looking for.

The next day, after loading the three detained enemy onto a Chinook for transport to a secure location, the company moved out on a punishing hike through the mountains to the town of Gardeneh. The sun beat down mercilessly as they trudged along, sliding on the shale-covered hillsides and getting snagged in tangled thorn thickets. It was only a two-mile hike, but with the heat and the altitude, it felt more like 20.

The village lay on top of a hill at the foot of a cluster of immense boulders. A search of the homes failed to turn up any evidence of Taliban presence, but one old man did inform the paratroopers that approximately 50 Taliban fighters had recently moved through the area. Shaw had his men set up an observation point at the old man's house in hopes that the enemy might pass by again that night.

While they waited for night to fall, another problem presented itself - The paratroopers were almost entirely out of food and water. They would have to live off the land. They paid the old man to butcher one of his goats and drank water from his well after purifying it with iodine tablets. Late that night they sat around the fire eating broiled goat meat with their hands and drinking sweet Chai tea.

"What part is this?" asked one paratrooper warily as he fished a hunk of goat meat out of the pot.

"Don't ask. Just eat," someone answered.

Later, when most of his men were in their sleeping bags or on guard, Shaw went to sit by the old man's side to thank him for the hospitality. Knowing the Taliban would harm the old man if they knew he had helped U.S. forces, Shaw asked the man for a strange favor.

"I want you to lie to them. Don't tell them you helped us," he said.

In the morning the company hiked several miles further out to search another compound, then circled back and made the journey all the way back to their base in Lwar Kowndalan to await re-supply.

From the roof of their compound, the paratroopers saw the C-130 fly over and crates of food and water attached to green parachutes came tumbling out of the plane. Sheppard's squad was dispatched to retrieve the supplies. Hours later, he came riding back into the compound on the back of a donkey, leading the rest of his improvised convoy behind him.

"Cool! War donkeys!" exclaimed Pvt. Adam Richter.

The re-supply had also included humanitarian aid supplies for the local people. All afternoon and into the evening the villagers filed into the compound one by one to receive rice, beans, sugar, tools, radios, and other supplies. The paratroopers did their best to distribute the material according to need, but everyone seemed to be equally needy.

"Ask him how many people are in his family," 1st Lt. Sean McDonough, the company's executive officer, told his interpreter as one boy approached to receive his portion of the supplies.

"He says he has five brothers and five sisters," the interpreter said.

"Oh brother," sighed McDonough.

Operations continued the next day as the platoon discovered another abandoned safehouse and several caves that had been used as shelters or staging points for ambushes. Using mortar fire, M136 anti-tank missiles, and hand grenades, the paratroopers destroyed them all.

A Co. was due to fly out by Chinook helicopters just after sunrise Oct. 5. But before they could leave, there was one last piece of unfinished business - the compound they had been living in. Rather than leave it intact for the Taliban to use, Shaw gave the order to destroy the building and the remaining supplies in it with claymore mines.

Staff Sgt. Richard Eldridge emplaced the mines, setting one inside a room in which someone had scrawled some fitting graffiti: "Up Yours Taliban," it read.

When everything was set, Eldridge crouched down just outside the gates of the compound and detonated the mines. There was a tremendous blast and then a cloud of smoke and dust came drifting out of the gates. Poking his head inside, Eldridge saw that the explosion had split the main building straight down the middle. The compound's days as a safe haven for Taliban fighters were over.

The paratroopers moved out to the pickup zone. Soon they heard the WHUPWHUPWHUP of the incoming Chinooks, and less than 45 minutes later they were back at Kandahar Airfield, looking forward to a well-earned day of hot chow, hot showers, and sleep on comfortable mattresses. And no more donkeys.

Spc. Mike Pryor

Spc. Ronald Turner of A Co, 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, searches caves near Mianashin, Afghnaistan for signs of Taliban presence Oct. 4

Spc. Mike Pryor

Sgt. Aaron Sanchez of A Co, 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, uses an AT4 rocket launcher to destroy an abandoned Taliban Safehouse in Koshk Kowl, Afghanistan Oct. 4

Up Front & Centered: Healthy body, healthy mind

By Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter
Combined Task Force Devil PAO

It seems that every two weeks, just about this time, I have a recurring elevation on my stress meter. It goes something like this: SGT Meseke, Desert Devil Dispatch editor, comes into my office, asking if my column for the next newsletter is done yet.

Me: "Didn't I just give it to you?"

He: "Yes ... for the last issue. That was then, this is now."

Me (thinking frantically): No problem. I can handle this. Excuse me. Hold my calls. Close the door on your way out. Let me crank up the volume on my music ... I've just got to focus ... just focus....

In all seriousness, stress is no laughing matter.

According to counselor Kenneth Matheny, PhD, stress results from the perception that demands exceed one's resources for coping with them. In other words, if you think or believe that you can't handle some problem or situation, then you could think yourself sick.

He points out that signs of a stressful arousal include dilation of pupils, heart and breathing rate increases, elevated blood sugar levels, muscle tension and sweating. Not a pretty picture.

Stress also affects your behavior by causing sleeplessness, restlessness, tremors, avoidance of challenging situations and performance failures. Now your emotions are affected by self-preoccupation, irritability, anxiousness and depression. Sustained high levels of stress also inhibit learning and memory.

> "Excercise is one of the best stress relievers out there."
>
> -Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter
> *Combined Task Force Devil PAO*

Now that I have you totally depressed, worried and otherwise stressed out over your stress levels, let me point out that stress can be easily managed. And effective stress management helps you stay centered and focused.

Exercise is one of the best stress relievers out there. That's why the Army's Physical Fitness Program is so important for you to maintain. If you haven't been following a regular fitness training program while deployed then you can be assured that at the next APFT your stress levels will be going wild.

Dr. Matheny says that a good diet also helps you control levels of stress by keeping you healthy and at a good weight level. Here is where I'm challenged. I'd prefer to exercise twice as much so I don't have to give up foods I like. That isn't the right solution.

The proper balance for most people is small meals 3 or 4 times a day along with a regular training program. This allows your body to adjust and get into a regular pattern of hunger, sleep and exercise.

Remember, if you want to counter stressful thinking there are several changes you need to make on your road to getting ahead. One, resist the tendency to exaggerate the seriousness of the situation and consequences of failing to cope successfully with it. Two, fight hurry sickness by allotting more generous time periods for self-imposed tasks. Three, reduce impatience when forced to wait by having fall-back activities. Four, deal with frustration by identifying alternate goals.

Those are Dr. Matheny's suggestions. My suggestion to you is that no job or situation is worth getting sick over. Chill out!

We want to hear from you

Are you an aspiring writer or photographer? We want to use your stories and photos in the Desert Devil Dispatch to highlight the great things the men and women of Regional Command-East are doing. For more information, e-mail Master Sgt. Geoffrey Carter at carterg@cjtf76.centcom.mil.

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Preston said. The media focuses that tiny straw hole of a view on sensationalist events such as improvised explosive devices or suicide bombers.

"It is important for people back home to hear your story about the good things you have done," Preston said.

In conclusion, Preston stressed the importance of being safe after redeployment as accidents in the U.S. still account for a significant loss of the Army's manpower.

"I need all your help in making our Army safer," said Preston upon reflection of the sad irony that many troops killed in accidents had recently returned from deployments where they survived the dangers of combat.

Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston adresses paratroopers from Combinted Task Force Devil Oct. 11, during a visit to Forward Operating Base Salerno.