



DEPLOYED TIMES

First Time For Everything

2009 July 03: *My first patrol through the Narwa bazaar*



Finally, an opportunity to leave our compound and check out the community that surrounds us. When I left home, I was sure that I would have no desire to go on patrols, due to their inherent danger and a level of exposure I would rather avoid since I have a wife and daughter to whom I need report back home. However, since our major push, the area around our Patrol Base has been

incredibly quiet, with the exception of normal agricultural activities - the oddest being the tractors that run at night because of the extreme heat of the day.

With that in mind, I was actually excited to go on patrol. I was happy to get out of my 15' x 25' workspace that we call the Command Operations Center (COC). There's a lot of exciting stuff going down **CONT'D PG 2**

Quick Update

It's 31 July, as I write this, and we haven't heard any enemy activity in our vicinity since 2 July. For 1st BN, 5th MAR, Operation Khanjar has been very successful. We have suffered incredibly few injuries and no deaths. We find and detonate more IED's (Improvised Explosive Devices) than our men hit. Our Mine Resistant vehicles, MRAP's, are working VERY well. Additionally, the market is far busier than it was when we arrived and we have assisted the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the hosting of two shurahs (town hall meetings).

At this point, 1/5 is living up to its distinguished heritage.



STANDING POST, STAYING SANE... 2009 JUL 11 2010

I've been on post now for 10 minutes, and I'm already bored out of my gourd. That's 10 minutes through a 4 hour post. I'm in trouble.

My mindset is dulled because nothing happens at night...nothing. This slow farming community is asleep, sound asleep. A daytime post can be interesting,



because their are shepherds & their flocks, kids playing, farmers farming, shoppers shopping, hell...there are walkers walking. The point...there are people and something happens. By now, the residents have gone home. Only a few tractors remain, and they will shut off shortly, as the dusk settles into darkness. **CONT'D PG 4**



FIRST TIME.....FROM PG 1



in the COC, but the place becomes very routine after a while, and that routine becomes almost mind numbing. Not to mention, as a Data Marine, I end up fielding the most horribly stupid computer requests from our users. A walk had to be more fun.

Leaving the wire, it was -100°F. Our combat load (flak jacket, weapon system, kevlar helmet, 7 full magazines, and water) weighs in the neighborhood of 70 lbs. Fortunately, we left at 1700 (5pm), which meant that it could only get cooler.

Friday Night in a Muslim Bazaar

We left with a mission, to win the hearts and minds of local nationals through our Civil Affairs campaign. We were to meet with

several folks regarding events in the area. We were to assist and protect a british civilian that has been assigned to assist the provincial government, as it rebuilds and creates its fledgling system of governance.

It was Friday, a holy day for Muslims, so we did not expect to see many folks strolling about. Shortly after we left, we expected to hear a call to prayer and several other messages from the mosques.

Our total patrol would take only a couple hours, but would cover less than 5 kilometers (~3 miles). The vast majority of our time would be spend in the city center, or bazaar, meeting with shop owners and local figureheads.

For me, that meant that I would be standing around...a lot.

And, stand I did. We made liaison with everyone we needed to meet. We walked, and we talked. We followed up on a damage claim and paid accordingly. We handed out hard candies to kids, and gave away several pens - apparently they like to draw, just like American kids.

Then, we walked home, unscathed. Mission accomplished.



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**Pics From Patrol
AFGHAN NATL ARMY**



LOCAL NATL ON BIKE



ME, IN THE BAZAAR



**SHOPS CLOSED BY
INSURGENTS**





INDEPENDENCE DAY IN AFGHANISTAN: MY TURN TO SET SOMEONE FREE



Top: Our Operations Officer slaughters our sheep.

Bottom: My office, so to speak...

I'm in a war zone for the 4th of July, while my wife and child are at a BBQ with friends back home. Our 2nd anniversary was yesterday, and I'm really missing the home life, right now.

In order to celebrate our independence from the Brits, oddly, we broke bread with them, this evening. More appropriately, we broke nan (naan - flat bread) with them. A bunch of us pitched in and bought a sheep from a local shepherd, along with veggies from the bazaar. After our second in charge slaughtered our sheep, apparently a tradition, our Afghan National Army counterparts cooked up the animal in a delicious stew. In all, we had rice, nan, a cucumber/tomato mix, potatoes, and sheep. While it wasn't a good old fashioned BBQ, it was a cook out on the 4th of July.

Most surprising to you, the reader, is that you likely heard far more explosions than we did. The day happened to be incredibly peaceful. Here, we heard no gunfire, no IED blasts, and only 2 weapons caches exploding under controlled detonation. Odd to think that the average US citizen heard nearly an hour more concussive activity than we did, here in a war zone.

Maira emailed me about her night with our friends, and I was horribly jealous. Many thanks to Eliot and Belinda for taking care of my girls. I can't wait to enjoy your poolside cookouts when I get home.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." - 'The Barnstorm Effect'

Kurt Vonnegut, JR.

GROWING MARKETS, 2009 JUL 17 0730

People have literally been coming out of the woodwork of this land, today. I took my post at 0600, when the first farmers started making their way to market, with all variety of things - animal, mineral, or vegetable. A steady flow of livestock and families have continued emerging, from the western tree-line ever since - the same tree-line that concealed our enemy the day we arrived.

This morning is beautiful! First, because of the critical mass of market goers heading to the district center. Second, because of the wide cast of winged characters flitting about the field, below me. An ornithologist would be in heaven right now. My untrained eye has distinguished no less than 12 species of bird, in my 2,000 m radial view; one of which is the most glorious teal, tan & black combination I've ever seen - truly beautiful. The soundtrack is straight out of a new age book store, with 'world' beat of Pashto favorites, the chorus of chirps, and cooing of mourning doves and pigeons, in the background.

This day is just so peaceful. I couldn't be happier to see the progress that we've made possible, by pushing the Taliban out of this area. The Taliban had decimated the district center marketplace/bazaar, but our efforts have made it safe for the villagers to return, en masse, to buy, sell, and barter freely without fear of wrathful retribution, in the name of shari'ah law. Today, more than any moment in my Marine Corps career, I know we are doing the right thing. Now, if I just had a fresh cup of coffee to wash it all down, as I enjoy my bird watching.

Today, is Sequoia's 6 month birthday. As much as I wish I could be with her for the occasion, I hope in her future that the efforts of service members in Afghanistan create a lasting peace, so she can grow up with no concept of fanatical Islam. As I watch these parents bringing their children to market, I hope they understand what we sacrifice, in order to provide protection for their families, just as I hope families back home realize what they gain through our sacrifice.



STAYING SANE, CONT'D FROM PG 1

The moon hasn't risen. So, I'm staring off into a monochromatic landscape, where the heavens are only slightly lighter than all things earthly. It's a hazy night and I'm doubtful the Milky Way will come out to play, tonight. I imagine we'll only see Jupiter - low in the eastern sky & Saturn - low in the western sky, tonight.



What I like least about this nothingness post is that I have time and quiet, with nothing to do. Nothing to do but think, think about what I'm doing here, how I got here, what I'm missing back home, and myriad other thoughts crashing through my synaptic gaps. As a man, one of the best aspects of the military has been the lack of time/space for introspection. With no introspection, life is easy; one just hops from one task or activity to the next, never having to work through the mud of being human. Now, I'm left with no excuses, just dumbfounded by this, my reality.

The haze is lifting off the eastern (desert) horizon and the stars are making their presence known.

It's 2053 (8:53 p.m.), and I can hear the call to prayer echoing across the fields, a tinny din above the rickety tractor to my west. I'm sharing my post with a member of the ANA (Afghan National Army); he showed up in sandals, no flack jacket, and no kevlar helmet...wait, no night vision or any of our usual accoutrements. He makes no move to pray. Apparently, most local nationals are not as devout as one might be led to believe by the language and cultural 'convictions.'

It's 2106 (9:06 p.m.) and I can hear the prayers carry on the warm southern wind, which

brings with it the stench and headache from all the burning plastic water bottles in our trash pit.

ASIDE: Two days ago, my mother told me she was appalled that we were running out of water, apparently a preferred news story, as the Michael Jackson story waned. I promptly took a picture of our pyramid of water, which I had been cursing as helo, after helo dropped pallet, after pallet...after pallet - all of which had to be hand carried 150 yds, in the middle of the night by a crew of 10-15 Marines - OBNOXIOUS!!! I'd rather filter or boil well water.

I wish I owned a Babelfish (a mythical creature from *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which gets placed in one's ear and allows the carrier to translate any spoken language in the universe). An new ANA service member just came to my post to say he was leaving the wire to get a bucket of water, but he should be right back. He will flash his red & blue flashlight, so I don't shoot him. Or, at least I think that's what his hand gestures meant. We'll see...

It's 2158 (9:58 p.m.) and the moon is waking steadily from its dusty slumber. I have two hours left in my head. This is the most time I've had to myself, since being in country.

At 2245 (10:45 p.m.), a british helo landed and dropped off something. Now, at 2305 (11:05 p.m.) I'm left to deduce that the local governor, newly appointed, and his entourage were the cargo, as they've just left my gate, with a large Marine security force to escort him the 75 yds 'home.' It will now be my responsibility to let them back into our compound, in a timely fashion.





GOING POSTAL, AGAIN

2009 JUL 28 0830

Adobe guard posts and Afghan flags dot the landscape, as wind from the south kicks up a desert haze and creates a medieval ambience of national pride. I question if I'm going to see Luke Skywalker emerge from the muddy huts in the blazing sun, or if King Arthur and the court of Camelot will stride forth from the dingy dens.

To say that this place is backwards would not be accurate. Rather, it's like the movie *Evil Dead*. I see hints of technology in a setting otherwise devoid of modern living. The ANA guards seemingly practice yoga, during silly attempts to get signal on their cell phones, while in the background an old, shoeless man moves mud around, in order to flood different plots of his field - old-school irrigation. Little boys run down dirt paths with stick and tire, while taxi vans bring distant farmers to market. Mud shop front, after mud shop front sells age-old goods on tables of lashed together bamboo and tree limbs, only to be diametrically opposed with techno trinkets & prepaid cellphone cards.

I recorded the Provincial Governor on my MacBook, while his compound cow stared me



down THROUGH the window - yes, her head was inside the meeting room. The local government is run from a compound with two sheep, a cow, a calf and random barnyard creatures running about. One guard feeds the sheep and cows, servants serve tea to our PMT (Police Mentor Team), as they meet with the corrupt Police Chief, and the Governor waxes of a community conversation with our LtCol, listening intently to the rhetoric.

We all rise from the floor of the 'boardroom', exchange handshakes & hugs, then return to our command center, chocked full of computers and communications technology. The stark difference of the oral culture & our written culture is driven home, as I work with 'terps' (interpreters) to get a translated transcription of the Governor's speech. Upon completion, I exported the recording to iTunes, added it to our public playlist, and 2 hrs after our departure we were broadcasting the Governor's musings to his people, through the radio station that I run. Your bound to be envisioning a DJ booth and fancy equipment. Alas, we have a laptop, running iTunes, hooked into a RIAB (Radio In A Box). I manipulate daily playlists to include news updates that I record from our 'terps'. We now broadcast news, music, religious programming, and BBC

health messages, throughout the Nawa region of Helmand Province. Where these folks had a void of information being filled by the Taliban, they now have a resource to hear directly from their elected representatives - a boon for any Republic. I'm



happy to see a positive use of technology resources, in support of the ancient oral traditions of the Afghan people.

As I scan the landscape, I'm cognizant of the positive changes we are making possible. We are putting the people back in touch with their government, something all too often taken for granted back in the States. We are rebuilding the local marketplace, to allow farmers to venture up Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We are rebuilding the local schoolhouse - potentially affording these children the opportunity to go to university in the nearby Lashkar Gah, or the capital city of Kabul. We are rebuilding the foundation of empowerment. I view an empowered people, as a potentially invested people. And, vested citizens are more likely to care for their vested interest. Only time & the continued freedom from fear will allow the Afghan people to take full ownership of their country.



IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE MILITARY..



I know that some portion of my readers are not fans of the American military. I beg you to remember that most service members want nothing more than to help our country and those we visit, and to get home as safely and soon as possible. Then, I want them to consider our system of governance. It's imperative to remember, the military is nothing more than a tool in the kit of politicians. We do their bidding. If you don't like what they make the military do, then get off your bum & change the government with your voice and your vote.

IMAGE GALLERY



PIMP MY AK

AK-47's from the governor's compound. You just gotta love that green.



GOVERNOR'S CRIB

Lovely green doors and trim to match the AK-47's guarding the compound.



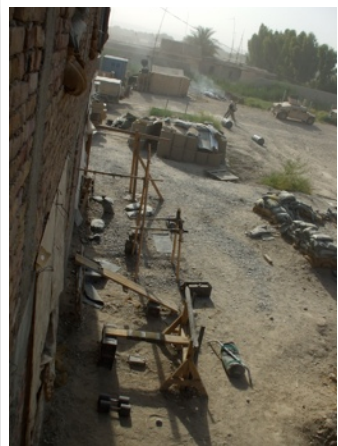
HAPPY LIKE CALI COWS?

...Doubt it. However, this cow wears good luck prayer beads. Does Allah look after your cheeseburger? I liked the wall to the right; it just looked neat.



NOT A WALGREEN'S

This sign was as malnourished as the bazaar. I can't say that I'd want to purchase any over the counter from a shop like that. To the right, I'm with local nationals in the marketplace, 13 July before significant rebuilding.



GYM RATS, REJOICE!

Our makeshift bamboo gym can be seen to the left. I try to take a break every couple of hours for some pull-ups.



HYGIENE AREA

We use the tables, to the right, to shave & brush our teeth. We use well water and dump the dirty water in the rocks below the table. Ahh...cesspool. Our showers take place in one of two stalls, below a 275G water container. We have 'solar shower' shower-head attachments rigged to piping from the container, to provide our low flow cleansing relief.



Aquaponics In Afghanistan... Yes I Can!



Aquaponics: The marriage of aquaculture and hydroponics, with the drawbacks of neither. A highly sustainable growing method for fish and crops.

I have a dream..., that one day, little Sunni boys & girls and little Shiite boys & girls will play and grow food together. They will swap stories about their catfish and tilapia. They will all complain

that their parents make them pump the water into the header tank in the morning. But, they will be in peace, because their parents, parents were taught a new farming method by a group of Marines that wanted nothing more than to ensure that they had food independence for the remainder of their days, freeing them up to play and learn, and creating new opportunities for business and enterprise.

This is my dream. And, I am very close to having my first system permitted. Thank you to my wife and all the Brits & folks back home that have supported me.

Calendar

4 July, 2009

Independence Day

21 July, 2009

Uncle Charlie's Birthday

21 July, 2009

Lindsay Levkoff's Birthday (congrats on the UC Boulder post)

26 July, 2009

Parents Day (my first)

27 July, 2009

Uncle Bob's Birthday

28 July, 2009

Lisa O'Brien's Birthday

