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NEWS

Key coalition leaders meet with Helmand Ulema

Story and photos by Army Spc. Chelsea Russell



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan - A dark teal aircraft hovered above the gravel of the landing pad, kicking up dust and scattering rocks. The rear hatch opened and revealed a group of well-dressed figures draped in white. The Ulema of Helmand province had arrived to speak with key coalition leaders for the first time since the transfer of authority a few months ago. Members of the Ulema consist of educated legal scholars who have completed years of training and thoroughly studied Islam. Many of the members of Helmand province's Ulema are also part of the Helmand Provincial Peace Counsel. Patrick Carroll, the cultural and governance advisor for Regional Command (Southwest), said the Ulema is a council of 72 religious scholars. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

UK bomb disposal specialists train Afghan soldiers

U.K. Defence News

Members of the UK's Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Search Task Force in Helmand are stepping back from their front line role to develop the Afghan National Army's bomb disposal capability. British advisors have been deployed to train, mentor and 'authorise-for-action' Afghan National Army Explosive Hazard Reduction Teams. The Afghan National Army soldiers complete an initial four-week course provided by US forces before graduating onto the advanced training given by British specialists. They are put through their paces by an experienced instructor pairing from EOD and Search to ensure they are confident, methodical, professional and aware of current threats. To complete the course soldiers have to pass three assessed tasks either in camp or 'live' on patrol before they can be utilised as a team. British EOD specialists Warrant Officer Class 2 Andrew Willoughby and Lance Corporal 'Ash' Ashfield have been in theatre over a month and are getting to grips with their training role and the mindset needed to be effective instructors. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Marines, Afghan police patrol in Musa Qa'leh

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Kenneth Jasik



MUSA QA'LEH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – Marines with Police Advisor Team 2, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, conducted a partnered patrol with the Afghan National Police, May 2. “Our main purpose of the patrol was to get atmospherics of the bazaar and also to identify issues at the district headquarters,” said Gunnery Sgt. Tyrone T. Judge II, senior enlisted member of PAT 2. “We were looking for ... anything out of the norm.” The patrol had a mix of Afghan National Security Forces and U.S. Forces. The partnership is mutually beneficial. The Marines teach the Afghans tactics and military operations, and the Afghan police teach the Marines about the local culture. “I love going out on patrol with ANSF,” said Judge, 33, from Clarkton N.C. “They are really smart when it comes to what we need to avoid, they know where (improvised explosive devices) are, and they let us know when things are not normal.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Faces of Transition: A Little Pashto Goes A Long Way

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Reece Lodder

This is the fourth installment in an ongoing series featuring members of the Afghan National Security Forces, and Marines and sailors serving with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, during their 2011-2012 deployment to Afghanistan's Helmand province. Many are infantrymen, others are combat support, but each is the face of a historic transition in the making. They are the unique ingredients in a melting pot of service members devoted to preparing the ANSF to assume lead security responsibility in Garmsir district. SAFAR, Afghanistan — The meeting was ordinary but the conversation unusual. Seated on opposite sides of a stuffy room inside an Afghan elder's dirt-walled compound, a pair of Marines and their interpreter relax among friends, sprawling out on decorative black pillows and conversing with their hosts. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Jiu Jitsu moves female Marines

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Monique LaRouche



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Jiu Jitsu means the “gentle art” and brought from Japan to Brazil by Professor Mitsuyo Maeda. Now, Jiu Jitsu is being practiced in Afghanistan. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Christopher Diem, Regional Command (Southwest) Joint Prosecution and Exploitation Center, Criminal Investigation Department officer in charge, teaches the art of Jiu Jitsu to anyone willing to learn. Diem, who has been practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu since 2005, began his formal training of the art during 2007 at a school in Alexandria, Va. He was the director of the Miramar Submission Grappling Club from 2009 through 2011 and is currently a member of Primal Jiu Jitsu in San Diego. “When I arrived at Camp Leatherneck, I found a group and began teaching BJJ,” said Diem. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Afghans learn marksmanship from Scout Snipers

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GERONIMO, Afghanistan - Afghan soldiers will add a new weapon to their arsenal, when recent graduates from a marksmanship course return to their bases. The newly trained soldiers will carry a M24 sniper rifle, a weapon recently acquired by the local kandak. The weeklong marksmanship course, taught by a Marine scout sniper team, covered maintenance of the M24 sniper rifle, firing the rifle at a distance of 450 meters, memory and observation tests. The tests require soldiers to scan a field and identify as many hidden military objects as possible, in a 30-minute time limit. "I had never used this rifle before and was excited to fire the [weapon] at the longer distances," said Afghan National Army Gunnery Sgt. Mohammad Hasan, an academy instructor with 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Afghan artillerymen conduct illumination shoot

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Anthony Ward Jr



COMBAT OUTPOST FIDDLER'S GREEN, Afghanistan - As the transition toward Afghan-led security continues, coalition forces in southern Helmand province are focusing their advising efforts on developing the Afghan National Army's combat support capabilities. The Combat Support Advisory Team, comprised mainly of Marines from 11th Marine Regiment, are tasked with mentoring the ANA's 4th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, in basic infantry skills and specialty areas like medical, combat engineering and artillery. "We lucked out, Capt. Erskine's team who was our predecessor did a great job with their time here," said Capt. Brian Sargent, officer in charge of the CSAT. "Most of the sections in the 4th Kandak were pretty much provisional infantry" [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Marines reduce footprint in Marjah

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Michael Cifuentes

Marines here are making big moves for the future of Afghanistan. Combat engineers in Marjah in direct support of 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, began demilitarizing bases in order to reduce their footprint from military operations here. The battalion is currently manning 17 outposts in the Marjah area, but is planning to cut that number down to three posts to include Camp Hanson. CAMP HANSON, Afghanistan - First Lt. John Winslow, Engineers Platoon commander serving with 2nd Bn., 9th Marines, said his Marines are preparing for the arrival of their replacement units who'll man the three posts in Marjah. The Afghan National Security Forces here will operate the remaining outpost. "We've spent a lot of time tearing outposts down completely or making them smaller to turn them over to the Afghan forces," said Winslow, a Sacramento native. "We've been lucky in Marjah because there's a huge ANSF presence here." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Pendleton Marines prepare to transfer patrol base to Afghans

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Kenneth Jasik



PATROL BASE HABIB, Afghanistan – Marines with Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, are leaving the place they've called home for the past two months to head to Camp Leatherneck, the main base of operations for Marines in Helmand province. Afghan National Security Forces will be taking on the security role for the area. The Marines, who've spent the past two months advising and training the ANSF, say the Afghans are ready to handle the mission on their own. For about two years, different Marine units have been at Patrol Base Habib, which is just north of Musa Qa'leh District Center, and have built a strong relationship with the locals and Afghan National Army. "In this general area, the people definitely don't want us to leave," said Staff Sgt. Justin M. Rettenberger, platoon sergeant, 1st Platoon, Golf Co. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Marines Practice Fire Safety Downrange

Story and photos by Army Sgt. Laura Bonano

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan — Marines from I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (Forward) took part in a fire drill exercise on Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, April 12, working with the fire department to complete vital training. The fire department, made up of contracted civilians from different countries such as Kosovo, Turkey, The United Kingdom and the United States, responded to a mock emergency call at I MHG (Fwd). A fire and two unaccounted for personnel were reported to fire dispatch. Within five minutes of the distress call, rescuers arrived and began to stretch 950 feet of fire hose to attack the fire. Gregory M. Proctor, the assistant fire chief at Camp Leatherneck, said the main objective of the exercise was to ensure the continued readiness of fire-fighters to combat fires and rescue personnel. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Humboldt Marine strives to be top dog

Story and photos by Army Spc. Chelsea Russell



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - Dark green containers sprawl across the soft dirt of the Motor Transportation Pool here as members of the embarkation section for I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (Forward) load equipment onto a pallet. Gusts of dry wind occasionally kick up miniature tornadoes of dust that storm across the sun-baked lot. The sweaty, dust-covered Marines take a momentary break to drink some water before they resume their hard work. Pfc. Kimberly Mulligan, an embarkation specialist with I MHG (Fwd) stationed at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, from Humboldt, Iowa, joined the military because she loves the sense of camaraderie she shares with her fellow service members. "I wanted to get more out of life," she said. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

One patrol at a time: Security with compassion

Story and photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Duran

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan - The soldiers of Company A, 31st Georgian Light Infantry Battalion are making their mark on Helmand province one patrol at a time. Alpha Company's mission is providing security around Patrol Base Eredvi and Route Red, which is the main link from Camp Leatherneck and Marines to the north. It is a major supply route that is traveled frequently. "We're 100 percent in control of this road. Everyone can travel safely," said 1st Sgt. Zura Nioradze, with Company A. But, they take the mission further than just controlling the road. "We are helping the local people," said Nioradze, from Tbilisi, Georgia. "We came here to bring security." Nioradze said that travel is important to the local population, as there is no local bazaar or medical facilities. Food supplies can also be an issue. "They only have a small garden and that's all. With this road, they can go to the bazaar and they can go to the hospital," he added. The support for the Afghans and Afghan National Security Forces is what matters for Nioradze. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

HEROES

Marines gather to celebrate life, mourn loss of fellow Marine

Story and photos by Marine Master Sgt. Brenda Varnadore



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Servicemembers gathered May 5 to celebrate the life and mourn the loss of Master Sgt. Scott Pruitt during a memorial service at the Camp Leatherneck chapel. Pruitt was killed in action during an improvised explosive device attack in Zaranj, Nimruz province, Afghanistan, April 28. Assigned to Regional Command Southwest's governance section, Pruitt served as the Commander's Emergency Response Program Fiscal Chief. A comptroller by trade, he was mourned not only by his small community of approximately 400, but every servicemember he met. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Grant Murphy, RC (SW) Financial Management Resource Officer, became friends with Pruitt while they were both stationed at the Financial Management School, Camp Johnson, N.C. Serving as instructors, they developed a close bond. Murphy read a letter during the memorial he wrote for Pruitt after his death to reconcile his grief and share the dynamic personality of Pruitt. "Your mere presence in a room, the office, a social gathering, or a meeting improved the mood," read Murphy. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Steak Team Mission grills Afghanistan

Story and photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Monique LaRouche

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DULUTH, Afghanistan – The Steak Team Mission is at it again. After 10 years of serving steaks to troops across the world, STM, a Texas-based nonprofit organization, is back in Afghanistan. The team of eleven arrived early in the week for preparation to serve 2,000 meals to troops at forward operating bases throughout Afghanistan. They flew from Texas with all the supplies it takes to serve that many people. The grills, large enough for 40 steaks at a time, were welded together by the engineers at the combat battalions. They were either flown on the plane with the team or set up ahead of time before the crew arrived. To make this mission possible, the charcoal was brought in from Kuwait, the steaks are from Texas and the teams were men from all regions of the United States. The objective was to divide into two teams to reach six FOBs in three days. Logistically, the coordination took months to plan and the Marines from billeting and food service stepped onboard to execute the cuisine success. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



RAF Regiment gunners return from Camp Bastion

U.K. Defence News



Gunners from 2 Squadron RAF Regiment returned home last week from a six-month Afghanistan deployment to an emotional reunion with friends and family. The gunners, who are the RAF's ground-fighting force, were stationed at Camp Bastion in Helmand province, the UK forces' main base in Afghanistan, and provided it with protection from attack. The returning troops entered their home base of RAF Honington in Suffolk by formally marching into the hangar where friends

and family were waiting. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

CLS students taught to save lives

Story and photos by Army Spc. Chelsea Russell

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - The gentle whir of the air conditioners was barely perceptible over the confident voices of the Marines as they reviewed the written test portion of the Combat Lifesaver Course held at Camp Leatherneck, April 18 and 19. Petty Officer 2nd Class Isaiah Bowen, a hospital corpsman and the assistant lead petty officer for I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (Forward), has been teaching CLS since 2006. Although the class content may change every few years, he explained it's still pretty much the same course he taught when he first started teaching. The curriculum for the class is standardized across all services. Every two years the administrators of the CLS course get together and re-evaluate the information contained within the course because medicine is always changing. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



VIGNETTES

Marines' blood saves Afghan soldier's life

Story and photos by Marine Staff Sgt. Brian Buckwalter



FORWARD OPERATING BASE DELARAM II, Afghanistan – Navy corpsmen anxiously waited for the blood flowing from Lance Cpl. Meng Lu's arm to fill the bag near his feet. Waiting in the next room was a dying Afghan National Army soldier. Lu's blood would save his life. Earlier Tuesday morning, May 8, the soldier stepped on a pressure plate while on patrol, setting off an improvised explosive device that nearly killed him. The soldier would've died had it not been for the response of the Navy healthcare team at FOB Delaram II's Shock Trauma Platoon and the generosity of Lu and three other blood donors. The ANA soldier arrived with almost no blood left said Navy critical care nurse Lt. Cmdr. Phillip Boyer, STP assistant officer in charge. "We replaced essentially his whole blood volume." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Female Marines bond with Afghan women, children

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Kenneth Jasik

MUSA QA'LEH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – It's common in Afghan culture for men to refrain from talking to women they aren't related to. To respect Afghan culture, female Marines have risen to the task of communicating with an otherwise unreachable part of the population. Marines with Female Engagement Team 1, 1st Marine Division (Forward) talk to Afghans in the Musa Qa'leh district, and learn about local perspectives on International Security Assistance Forces. "We help get a better understanding of the area and help influence the population," said Cpl. Mallory R. Ortiz, a FET member with Team 1. The FET opens up more opportunities to gain support of the population. "Being a female, the biggest advantage is instead of having access to only 50 percent of the population, as males do, we have access to 100 percent," said Ortiz, 22, from Medford, Mass. "We can talk to males, females and children. With cultural sensitivities, males cannot approach females and sometimes children." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



North Attleboro native keeps watch at the front lines in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. James Mercure



FORWARD OPERATING BASE ZEEBRUGGE, Afghanistan – At the front lines in Helmand province, a man and his best friend keep watch over the Marines protecting the Kajaki Dam. Lance Cpl. Richard Bissett, an improvised explosive device detection dog handler with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, and his faithful canine companion, Camo, help keep their Marines safe during patrols by verifying if an IED is close by. “The Marine Corps is more on the frontline, and Camo does her job so we can do ours,” says Bissett, from North Attleboro, Mass. “I wanted to be up close and personal with the enemy, and out here you are.” Bissett graduated from North Attleboro High School and joined the Marine Corps as an infantryman in 2009. He is deployed to Afghanistan for the second time and has gained an appreciation for the austere conditions the

Marines often find themselves in. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Quick on his feet: Marine treats Afghan partner with improvised tourniquet

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Anthony Ward Jr

CAMP GARMSIR, Afghanistan – A loud and familiar crack echoed throughout the confines of Camp Garmsir. The sound, akin to that of a short burst from a small arms weapon, put Staff Sgt. Yobany Flores and the rest of his team on alert. “We were conducting a class on the maintenance lot,” said Flores, the motor transport maintenance advisor to Afghan National Army’s 5th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps with the Embedded Partnering Team, Combat Logistics Battalion 5. “On the road that runs parallel to it, there were three ANA soldiers walking toward their compound.” As the soldiers continued to walk, something out of the ordinary occurred. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Female Engagement Team interacts with local children during Shura

Courtesy Story



FORWARD OPERATING BASE GEORGETOWN, Afghanistan - The sound of laughter filled the air as children from nearby villages gathered around the 12.1 Female Engagement Team 3 at Patrol Base Georgetown, Afghanistan, May 3. Eagerly awaiting an English lesson, dozens of boys and girls crowded around the FET as the team members used cartoon flashcards to illustrate common words. Through interaction with the Afghan population, the FET aims to build community relationships, increase women's governance, and also learn about the community's health, education, security and economic development in the areas they visit. In support of 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 6, the FET accompanies in daily patrols around Forward Operating Base Whitehouse as well as weekly shuras, where local Afghans and Marines meet together. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Junior Marines ready for more responsibilities in rifle platoon

Story and photos by Marine Sgt. Michael Cifuentes

CAMP HANSON, Afghanistan - Lance Cpl. Taylor Adkins has been a Marine for nearly a year and a half and is already taking advantage of leadership opportunities. The 20-year-old rifleman said he knows that roles of being in charge of Marines or equipment isn't something that's handed out; rather it's something Marines his rank are striving for. He's currently serving with 1st Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, in Marjah, Afghanistan, and Marines here are beginning to show excitement about the deployment's upcoming culmination. Some senior Marines serving in leadership positions in rifle platoons, mostly non-commissioned officers, said they're ready for new duty assignments in the Marine Corps. Others say they're ready to get back to the civilian world and go to college. No matter where they go, Adkins said they're mentoring when necessary and leaving behind opportunities for junior Marines to step up and take their place. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



A Marine's perspective on progress in Helmand province

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Reece Lodder



GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan — Over the past seven months, I've seen and experienced progress in Afghanistan most Americans will never hear about from mainstream media. Serving as a Marine combat correspondent with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment in Helmand province's Garmsir district, I've been blessed with the unique opportunity of telling the stories of our Marines, sailors and counterparts with the Afghan National Security Forces. While most of my fellow Marines operated from the same position with the same group of men, my duties as a writer and photographer allowed me to travel throughout our 80-kilometer long area of operations to cover all five of our infantry and headquarters companies. In recent years, Garmsir's green zone — the fertile, populated area surrounding the Helmand River and forming the shape of a snake — had been the scene of heavy fighting between insurgents and coalition forces. **(Read the STORY)**

Marines in Khan Neshin near end of successful deployment

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan – First Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion's Echo Company arrived in southern Helmand on October 2011. Since their arrival, they have been charged with conducting counterinsurgency operations throughout Khan Neshin district, patrolling various routes along the Helmand River. By conducting vehicle checkpoints, dismounted patrols and targeted interdiction operations, Echo's Marines and sailors have successfully mitigated threats to the local population with the help of Afghan National Security Forces. "We started out partnering with the Afghan Border Police," said 1st Lt. Andrew Klawier, Echo's Red Platoon commander. "Now we're unpartnered, and we're here to provide security for the locals and support any missions that the ABP are conducting." The company's main position lies at Combat Outpost South Station, but due to the high operational tempo dictated by their mission, most of the Echo Marines live out of their mine resistant ambush protected vehicles. **(Read the STORY)**



3D MAW (FWD) explores the use of unmanned helicopters

Story and photos by Marine Cpl. Isaac Lamberth



HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Improvised explosive devices have changed the way the Marine Corps engages hostile forces. The need has risen for supplies to reach the most remote parts of Afghanistan quickly, reliably and safely. Late last year, the Corps began experimenting with the K-MAX - an unmanned helicopter, able to transport large amounts of cargo and reduce the need for convoys. With troops spread across a desolate country with few paved roads, steep mountains, rocky terrain and abrasive weather, the K-MAX has arrived to help deliver supplies across the harsh lands of Afghanistan. Presently, convoys are exposed to many potential dangers, such as improvised explosive

devices and ambushes. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Another year, another country for Clifton native

Story and photos by Army Spc. Chelsea Russell

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - When Cpl. Erica Adams decided to join the Marine Corps Feb. 7, 2010, she knew she wanted to be a motor transportation mechanic. Although it's a choice most people might question, especially for a female, Adams is passionate about her job. "Growing up my dad would show me how to fix my own car," said the candid Clifton, Ill., native. "I was a tomboy. I did all the dirty work and the yard work." When she made the choice to enlist she knew exactly what she wanted to do for the next four years. She proudly described her job and said she's always busy fixing trucks, which helps makes the time go by faster. The camaraderie she shares with her fellow mechanics is invaluable. Adams, who is attached to I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (Forward) at Camp Leatherneck, never planned on joining the Marine Corps – it just kind of happened. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



From Hemet to Helmand, Marine Finds Focus

Story and photos by Army Sgt. Christine Samples



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Four years ago he was walking around Hemet, Calif. sporting tattoos and gauges in his ears and wondering what to do with his life. Today, he's in Helmand province, Afghanistan providing security for Leatherneck through foot patrols and convoys. Corporal Douglas Smith, 24, with 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, explained that everyone in Hemet had tattoos and piercings; it was the thing to do. However, he decided he wanted to look and be something different once he turned 20. That's when Smith decided to follow in his father's footsteps and join the military. His father, who wouldn't speak to him for a week after he pierced his ears, served in the Army. Smith said he went with the Marines just to be a little different. The tattoos remain, but Smith got rid of the earrings. The Marines wouldn't let him join until he lost the ear adornment and had the holes they left behind sewn shut. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

VIDEOS

Junior Marines Ready for More Responsibilities in Rifle Platoon

Video by Marine Sgt. Michael Cifuentes

Lance Cpl. Taylor Adkins has been a Marine for nearly a year and a half and is already taking advantage of leadership opportunities. The 20-year-old rifleman said he knows that roles of being in charge of Marines or equipment isn't something that's handed out; rather it's something Marines his rank are striving for. He's currently serving with 1st Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, in Marjah, Afghanistan, and Marines here are beginning to show excitement about the deployment's upcoming culmination. Some senior Marines serving in leadership positions in rifle platoons, mostly noncommissioned officers, said they're ready for new duty assignments in the Marine Corps. Others say they're ready to get back to the civilian world and go to college. No matter where they go, Adkins said they're mentoring when necessary and leaving behind opportunities for junior Marines to step up and take their place. Soundbites include Lance Cpl. Taylor Adkins - Rifleman; Staff Sgt. Josef Vanhof - Platoon Sergeant and 1st Lt. Brian Anderson - Platoon Commander (**Watch the VIDEO**)



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