

## **GI SPECIAL 4F22:**

### **ENOUGH: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



A US soldier from the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, at fortified position in a mountain at Helmand Province, Afghanistan, June 20, 2006. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

# **AFGHANISTAN UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: #1: THE BULLSHIT ROLLS ON**

[FIRST, THE USUAL EMPTY BULLSHIT FROM COMMAND. THEN, FOR REALITY, SEE THE NEXT ARTICLE, ABOUT HOW WELL THE OCCUPATION IS TAKING THE "THREAT OUT OF THOSE AREAS." T]

KABUL: Southern Afghanistan will see “significant fighting” for several months as coalition troops push ahead with a major offensive to crush a resurgent Taliban force, the U.S. military said Wednesday.

“People should expect significant fighting in certain areas of the south over the coming months,” Col. [Tom] Collins said during a press briefing in the capital, Kabul.

**“That’s the whole purpose of Mountain Thrust ... to go into the area where the government doesn’t have a presence right now and take the threat out of those areas,” he said.**

The militants have been maintaining pressure on coalition forces with suicide attacks and ambushes.

“We are seeing the enemy operating in larger groups. They are fighting hard. They are clearly trying to stop our efforts to move into certain areas,” he said.

**MORE:**

## **#2: The Battle Of Mari Ghar**

**Comment: T**

**This is a very long article. However, it gives a detailed picture of what the war in Afghanistan is like, and how it’s going.**

**As you read, please consider:**

**1. It’s a general proposition that the armed force that holds the battlefield at the end of the battle, and controls the terrain where the battle has been fought, has won the battle. What happened here?**

**2. It’s a general proposition that the armed force that leaves the battlefield to the opposition force at the end of the battle, and retires to its base with considerable speed, has lost the battle. What happened here?**

**3. If these two general propositions are true, then why is this article written as if the U.S. occupation force won a battlefield victory?**

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June 26, 2006 By Sean D. Naylor, Army Times staff writer

Kandahar, Afghanistan

The Special Forces noncommissioned officer ducked behind the turret of his M240 machine gun as a pair of A-10s swooped low and loud out of the clear blue Afghan sky.

The first Warthog fired a white phosphorous round, marking its target — a fruit orchard teeming with Taliban fighters exchanging fusillades of automatic weapons fire with the embattled A-team 50 meters away. The second A-10 hurtled in, its nose-mounted Gatling gun spitting flame and 30mm rounds. Tree limbs and enemy bodies splintered as the rounds hit home.

Hunkered down well within “danger close” limits, the NCO, a senior weapons sergeant, saw the devastating impact before he heard the cannon’s rasping burrrrrrp!, audible even above the nonstop hammering of his team’s six machine guns.

“Jesus Christ, that’s awesome!” he said. The entire orchard seemed to have opened up on the five allied vehicles on the road.

It was morning on the second day of what would be a 54-hour battle pitting 12 American and 16 Afghan troops against an estimated 200 Taliban fighters in a series of running gunfights. It was the fourth engagement since they had left the firebase, and the enemy’s numbers had increased at each turn.

Before they returned to their firebase, the small allied ground force, with close-air support, would kill 65 enemy fighters, earn two recommendations for the Distinguished Service Cross and three for the Silver Star. One of those soldiers would die a warrior’s death.

Into the heart of the insurgency

The mission began at 10 a.m. Aug. 7, when the “the Spartans,” an A-team from 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, drove out of its firebase in south-central Afghanistan’s Zabul province and headed west. The plan was to spend the next 24 hours conducting an “armed route reconnaissance” where intelligence had suggested a major Taliban leader might be operating that day.

Even if they didn’t come upon the enemy leader, the Spartans hoped to increase their knowledge of a route they had never driven and to disrupt Taliban activity in the area, which had been quietly growing in strength.

Few A-teams were better suited to the task. The Spartans had stood up in fall 2002 and were already on their third tour in Afghanistan. They regarded their unit as one of the most aggressive and combat-experienced A-teams in the country. But 10 weeks into this deployment, they had yet to make contact with the enemy.

The Taliban were out there.

“They’re constantly watching us from the moment we leave the firebase,” said the Spartans’ medic, a bushy-bearded staff sergeant. But the enemy was lying low in an attempt to persuade U.S. decision-makers that the Taliban insurgency was over and it was safe to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, according to the Spartans’ battalion commander, Lt. Col. Don Bolduc.

The guerrillas used the remote provinces of south-central Afghanistan as a sanctuary. It was the job of the Spartans and the other units in Bolduc’s Task Force 31 to venture into

the heart of that sanctuary, find the Taliban, provoke them into battle and then destroy them.

“I have a very aggressive battalion, I am very aggressive by nature, and I believe the most effective way to separate the insurgent from the populace is to kill him,” Bolduc said.

The Spartans’ small convoy consisted of three Ground Mobility Vehicles — Humvees specially modified for special ops missions — and two pickups carrying the 16 Afghan National Army troops. The weather was hot and clear as the vehicles climbed steadily into the mountains.

6:55 p.m., Aug. 7

Taliban radios squawked to life. “The Americans are coming!” “How many?” “They’ve got three Scorpions (GMVs) and their puppets.”

The first attack came as sunset approached. the team was settling in for the night in rural mountainous terrain. A hidden enemy lashed the Spartans’ site with small-arms fire. The Americans responded with their big guns — each GMV had either a .50-caliber or an M240B machine gun in a turret, and an M240B mounted on the rear — training their fire on likely enemy hiding places. Within 15 minutes, the enemy fire died away.

The Spartans faced a choice: return to the firebase or pursue the enemy fighters they sensed were gathering ahead of them. Their team leader was undaunted. The wiry 30-year-old Athens, Ga., native knew his men had enough food and water for three days. When dawn broke, he decided to continue with the mission.

Driving into the Hazarbaz valley, the team came upon a camp of Kuchi — Pashtun nomads who, the Spartans are convinced, form the Taliban’s “early warning system,” either by serving as scouts for the Pashtun guerrilla force or by allowing the Taliban to “embed” fighters in their camps.

“All the Kuchi tents are spread in positions where they can see multiple avenues of approach,” the team leader said. “It’s pretty well thought out.” As the convoy advanced, the Kuchi struck their tents and hastened out of the valley in the opposite direction.

The team leader compared the experience to “driving up to Barnum & Bailey’s circus”; the convoy moved through a sea of 75 to 100 Kuchis and “hundreds and hundreds” of camels, sheep and donkeys. The Spartans had never seen this many Kuchis in one place and took the hurried departure as an ominous sign.

“The thing going on in the back of your mind is obviously something big is to our front if everybody’s getting out of the area,” the team leader said.

7:54 a.m., Aug. 8

“The Americans are too strong,” the local Taliban commander told his troops. “Only fire if fired upon.”

What happened next “set the stone for the remainder of that day and the next,” the team leader said. The Spartans scanned the hillsides for likely ambush spots and then conducted “limited reconnaissance by fire,” the team leader said.

“The fight has begun,” a Taliban fighter said over the radio.

In a pattern to be repeated several times that day, an estimated 10 to 15 Taliban fighters hidden in the high ground fired a few rounds at the ANA vehicles heading the convoy. Rather than drive through the ambush, the ANA troops dismounted, halting the column’s forward movement.

the Taliban shifted their fire to the Americans, who were advancing from about 150 meters behind to relieve the Afghan soldiers. Taliban combatants raked the gun trucks with automatic-weapons fire and launched rocket-propelled grenades.

The area erupted with the explosive cacophony of combat as the U.S. troops returned fire with truck-mounted machine guns, as well as AT-4 and LAW rockets and a 60mm mortar, all while rounding up the ANA fighters and getting them back on their vehicles.

“They were waiting to be rescued,” said the team’s 34-year-old senior engineer sergeant from Arlington, Va. “They weren’t returning a whole lot of fire,” the team leader added.

The Taliban on the hillsides mistook the mortar fire for close-air support. “The aircraft are on station; get below the rocks,” a Taliban commander ordered.

Once the ANA troops had remounted, and with the Taliban hunkered down or pulling back, the convoy drove on. morale was high among the SF soldiers. The Spartans were receiving constantly updated intelligence reports that allowed them to predict the enemy’s actions.

“They were running; we were chasing them,” the senior weapons sergeant said. “The unofficial motto of this battalion is ‘pursue, pressure and punish,’” the team leader added.

The Spartans were finally gaining access to the heart of the Taliban’s sanctuary.

“That whole area had been like a black hole for us,” said the team’s intelligence NCO, a sergeant first class from Virginia Beach, Va.

10:31 a.m.

The Spartans drove deeper into danger. Roughly two and a half hours after the day’s first firefight, Taliban guerrillas ambushed them again, firing from eight to 10 manning positions among boulders and trees in a bend in the road.

An enemy bullet nearly found its mark, grazing the team leader’s helmet. But the guerrillas made a fatal mistake when they ran directly across the Spartans’ field of fire. The result was four or five dead Taliban, the team leader said. “There were guys going down left and right.”

11:33 a.m.

The column moved on, leaving a wide valley, heading east and moving steadily downhill until the terrain became constricted. Up to now, the Spartans had used a combination of map reconnaissance and intelligence feeds to anticipate the Taliban ambushes. But about 11:30 a.m., 500 meters east of the village of Kuchkay, the enemy finally succeeded in surprising the unit. About 20 to 30 Taliban hidden in an orchard fired a few shots at the ANA vehicles to halt the convoy, then shifted fire onto the Spartans' three gun trucks.

The SF soldiers opened up with all six machine guns. The exchange of fire quickly grew into the team's fiercest battle yet. The intensity and the noise of the fight were incredible.

"If they're going full auto, we're going times two," the team leader said. "Everybody's laying down immense amounts of lead." As the gunners atop the GMVs hammered away at the enemy, "piles and piles and piles of brass" grew around the vehicles. While the other six Americans maneuvered behind the vehicles, firing their M4 assault rifles, the six gunners kept up a nonstop rate of fire, pausing only to reload.

Some Taliban were positioned among the trees, including a few up in the branches. Others were hoisting their rifles over the orchard wall and firing blindly.

"Everywhere you could see there was fire coming from the grove," the intel sergeant said.

Meanwhile, the ANA troops just kept their heads down.

"I don't think the ANA fired a single shot," the team leader said. "They didn't want anything to do with that grove."

Then the A-10s screamed overhead.

"Hide in the trees! Hide in the trees! The enemy can't see us in the trees," a Taliban fighter said over the radio.

But if the Taliban thought they were safe in the orchard, they were wrong. Over the course of half an hour, the A-10s made six to eight gun runs, with each fearsome pass chewing up trees and Taliban. When the aircrews announced that they were "Winchester," or out of ammunition, for cannon and rockets, an eerie stillness settled over the grove. "It got quiet, like crazy quiet," the team leader said.

"Is anyone there?" a Taliban commander elsewhere on the battlefield asked urgently over the radio. There was no answer.

The Spartans decided to take the opportunity to move on.

"Get off your dead asses, get in your f---ing truck or we're leaving you," the Spartans yelled at their Afghan colleagues, according to the senior weapons sergeant. The ANA soldiers jumped up and ran to their vehicles. The convoy was on the move again.

The vehicles stopped in an open area just short of Andar, where the Spartans faced a decision: Go north to Deh Chopan or south to Marah. The team had been to Deh Chopan before and knew it was too big a town for their tiny force.

“It would take a division to clear,” the team leader said. But the Spartans felt good about heading to Marah, a village about 12 kilometers to the southeast, where they expected to find the enemy.

The convoy entered Andar, the first of several villages it would pass through on the mission. “It was a ghost town,” the team leader said. “No kids, no adults. It was like someone had come in and told them to leave.” It started to rain.

Two Taliban commanders were on the radio. One was in Deh Chopan, the other in Marah. “We’ve got the fighters; we’re assembling in Marah,” the latter said. “Marah’s where the fight’s going to be. If they come through Marah, we’ll be ready for them.”

The U.S. team leader got on the radio to Task Force 31 headquarters at Kandahar airfield and discussed the possibility of getting a quick-reaction force sent to Marah, where he was certain the enemy was massing. That message was passed to Task Force Rock, built around 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, and headquartered in Qalat, the Zabul capital about 60 kilometers to the southeast. But by now, the Spartans’ battle was being monitored by the second-highest U.S. military headquarters in Afghanistan — Coalition and Joint Task Force-76 at Bagram air base, 360 kilometers to the northeast.

The message the Spartans’ “repeatedly” sent up the chain was simple, the team leader said: “If the QRF package was going to be sent in, we’d like for them to go to Marah, and we just push the enemy to them.”

As the QRF discussions went back and forth over the radio, the Spartan convoy continued south along a narrow road through rolling valleys dotted by isolated villages.

Taliban units in the mountains, meanwhile, monitored their progress.

The Taliban commander in Marah again spoke over the radio: “Watch the Americans, tell us where they turn, but come meet us in Marah.”

But to the Spartans’ great frustration, at 2:56 p.m., when they had already driven 10 kilometers toward Marah, they received orders passed down from CJTF-76 to return to Andar, where TF Rock was to send a large QRF consisting of four CH-47 Chinooks and two UH-60 Black Hawks carrying an infantry company, plus four AH-64 Apache attack helicopters.

It appeared to the SF soldiers that the Rock staffers had not kept up with events on the battlefield.

“I don’t want to knock our fellow brethren, but they made a decision to land in a place the enemy was not,” the team leader said. However, another officer monitoring events said the decision had been made in the CJTF-76 headquarters at Bagram, not by TF Rock.

Nervous the Taliban would shoot down a helicopter if the QRF was sent to Marah, CJTF-76 ordered the QRF and the Spartans to rendezvous in Andar, the officer said.

“It was the CJTF-76 staff that created the problems, that created the confusion, that created the delay on that day,” he added. A CJTF-76 spokesman declined to comment for this article.

Eating away at the Spartans as they drove back to Andar was the knowledge that the enemy fighters would now have more time to perfect the ambush they were preparing in Marah. The Spartans would later estimate that the additional time allowed the enemy to double or triple the force lying in wait for the convoy.

The Taliban around Andar had no intention of taking on the heliborne QRF.

“The Americans are too great,” a Taliban commander said over the radio. “They have all their mosquitoes [Apache helicopters]. Do not fight; they will shoot. Hide.”

The QRF, which also included the Spartans’ company commander, was surprised to find no enemy in Andar.

“They’re in Marah, like we told you,” the team leader told his company commander. (At no stage was the team leader able to communicate directly with the infantry chain of command). The QRF got back on the helicopters and returned to Qalat. To the team leader, unaware of the machinations at the higher headquarters, the infantry’s departure was infuriating.

“They basically didn’t take my word that there was a larger element waiting in Marah,” he said.

7:16 p.m.

Darkness was closing in as the Spartans headed south again. For the first time that day, the SF soldiers felt they had lost the initiative.

The enemy was indeed waiting — in a huge horseshoe-shaped rock-strewn mountainside position about 500 meters beyond the point the Spartans had reached when they were ordered to turn back. Boulders as big as Volkswagen Beetles were stacked on top of one another 100 to 200 meters from the road, providing cover and concealment.

As the lead ANA pickup drove into the kill zone, the enemy again fired a few rounds to get the ANA troops to stop and dismount. When the first SF gun truck pushed up to see what was going on, the enemy opened up on it. The second and third GMVs advanced until there were 50-meter intervals between the three gun trucks.

The enemy unleashed automatic-weapons and RPG fire so intense that the team leader gave the order to break contact and pull back. But it was too late. Not only had the ANA troops disappeared, but as soon as the gun trucks got ready to move, enemy fighters at each end of the rock pile opened up, boxing in the convoy.

The Spartans realized immediately that this enemy was more skilled than the Taliban fighters in the four previous engagements. They had dispersed into small groups around the boulder field so their fire could encompass the ANA and the SF contingent, “regardless of how far apart we were spread out,” the team leader said.

The GMV gunners swiveled to face the new threat and began to fire. But somewhere in the boulders a sniper put the cross hairs of his rifle scope on Staff Sgt. Christopher Falkel, the .50-cal gunner on the third GMV.

As Falkel, at 22 the youngest member of the team, poured lead into the enemy positions, the sniper pulled the trigger.

A single bullet hit Falkel in the head, penetrating his helmet and killing him instantly. His lifeless body slumped in the turret.

A superb soldier whose professionalism was matched by his sense of humor, Falkel was what is known as an "SF baby," having joined Special Forces straight from civilian life, but he had quickly earned the respect of his teammates.

"Chris was an unbelievable individual, in that he understood the warrior ethos as well as anybody I know," the team leader said. "He died behind his gun, and he was laying waste to the enemy when it happened."

The volume of accurate, single aimed shots directed at the gunners convinced the Spartans that the enemy was not only employing snipers, but also using them to attack the gunners specifically.

"Somebody was deliberately targeting our gunners ... with an accuracy that it could have been nothing other than scoped rifles," the team leader said. The round that killed Falkel "was a deliberate shot," he said.

"It was a head shot. It was taken at an angle that would require more training" (than the average Talib gets). ... "This was not a random grazing. This was one deliberate shot, and he unfortunately connected."

After the firefight, U.S. forces recovered an Arabic translation of a Russian sniper manual from the battlefield, adding to their belief that this ambush was carried out by a much more technically skilled and almost certainly foreign enemy than they had yet encountered.

Falkel's death was a body blow, but the Spartans couldn't pause to reflect on their loss for even a moment.

The five remaining gunners kept up a relentless rate of fire, while the other six U.S. troops ducked and weaved behind the trucks. Whenever one of them took a step beyond the shelter of the vehicles, "you'd see rounds impacting next to your foot," the team leader said.

One round hit the senior weapons sergeant's turret and ignited the tracer rounds inside his ammo can, which set his body armor on fire. But he kept shooting, commenting later that the flames behind him seemed less of an immediate threat than the enemy in front of him.

"There was no choice," he said. "You had to keep shooting, or you were dead."

With the flames “kicking up pretty good,” the team leader finally ordered his senior weapons sergeant down from his turret. Meanwhile, four other SF soldiers removed Falkel’s body from his gun turret, exposing themselves to enemy fire.

The situation did not look promising. The Spartans were pinned down by a much larger enemy force, later estimated at upward of 60 fighters; they had already lost one man, and their Afghan allies were cowering in fear.

Salvation arrived in the shape of two more A-10s overhead, called in by the Spartans’ joint terminal attack controller, an Air Force staff sergeant. The planes made gun run after gun run on the enemy positions. Meanwhile, the senior engineer sergeant located the missing ANA fighters and grouped them in a ditch. The three gun trucks moved forward a few yards at a time, whenever the enemy took cover from the A-10s’ strafing. This worked, after a fashion. But the enemy fighters’ response to the A-10 attacks was different from what the team had observed in earlier fights. The guerrillas kept shooting as the planes barreled in, unless the jets were lined up on their exact locations.

Even when the A-10s hit their positions, if “they weren’t dead, they got right back up and continued to shoot,” one Spartan said.

The A-10s soon ran out of ammo, to be replaced by a second, and then a third, pair of Warthogs. Finally the SF soldiers got the ANA troops back into their trucks, and after about 25 minutes of vicious combat, the convoy moved slowly out of the kill zone. The third pair of A-10s announced that they were “Winchester.”

“You just saved our lives,” the Spartans’ JTAC replied.

It was almost dark, and the team occupied the village of Ragh, about 500 meters beyond the ambush site. The crew of an AC-130 Spectre gunship spotted enemy fighters preparing another ambush site in a grove several hundred meters down the road. About 9 p.m., the gunship pummeled the 20 individuals the aircrew could see occupying the ambush site with 17 105mm howitzer rounds and 32 40mm cannon rounds. The aircrew later reported that it had never engaged a group of enemy fighters that large and seen no one at least trying to escape, the team leader said.

“That’s another reason to believe these guys are well-trained fighters,” he added.

The Spartans spent the night in Ragh without further incident. Early the next morning, the team members spoke with several locals, including a friendly mullah, who gave them plenty of information on the foe they had battled in the boulders. The enemy force was 50 to 60 strong, he said. About 40 were foreigners. Most of the foreign fighters spoke Arabic, but some spoke a language he didn’t recognize.

10:15 a.m., Aug. 9

The Spartans moved out after arranging for another TF 31 A-team from their firebase with an ANA detachment to reinforce them in Marah.

They ran into another ambush before they reached the village, as the convoy snaked around a series of switchbacks that made mutual support impossible. But this time the ANA soldiers were better prepared. The senior engineer sergeant had spent much of the

night explaining to them the importance of fighting through an ambush rather than dismounting in the middle of the kill zone. Although the enemy engaged the vehicles from three directions, the ANA troops kept driving, and the convoy made it through unscathed.

11:32 a.m.

The small force crossed a river and entered the outskirts of Marah. as soon as their first GMV rounded a turn, fire erupted from an adjacent orchard occupied by about 50 fighters. The other A-team arrived in support, and the six gun trucks poured fire into the grove.

“As (the team’s senior commo sergeant) was working the .50, I actually saw a couple of dudes — or parts of dudes — fall out of the trees,” said the Spartans’ junior engineer sergeant.

More A-10s appeared to hammer the orchard as one of the other team’s GMVs was hit by a recoilless rifle, causing a fireball and wounding the team leader and several of his men. The Spartans’ team leader took overall charge of the fight.

One of the Spartans’ GMVs had been hit by a machine gun round and lost its brakes and power steering, and the A-10s were dropping bombs on the orchard when the team leader decided it was time to move out of Marah before he lost any more vehicles.

After the Spartans conducted an ammo resupply with the new team, the entire friendly force limped out of Marah. They made it back to the firebase at 4:05 p.m.

Toll: 65 Taliban

The fate of the Taliban leader for whom the Spartans were searching was unclear.

However, intelligence later indicated that 65 enemy fighters, including one commander, had died in the battle of Mari Ghar, as the Spartans’ 54-hour combat odyssey became known.

“At the tactical level, it’s probably the most significant battle that’s taken place in Afghanistan,” Bolduc said. “And the way the Special Forces soldiers fought this battle demonstrated not only their ability to find the enemy but their understanding of small-unit tactics and their ability to overcome the enemy’s actions — massing on them, ambushing them — throughout all of these engagements. Just incredible.”

The battle of Mari Ghar has the potential to produce more high-level awards than almost any other small-unit action in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. Bolduc recommended that the Spartans’ team leader, senior weapons sergeant, senior engineer sergeant and senior commo sergeant each be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their roles in the fight. Higher headquarters downgraded the recommendations for the senior engineer and commo NCOs to Silver Stars before sending all four to the headquarters of CJTF-76.

There has been no word on the status of the recommendations since early this year.

However, Christopher Falkel has already been awarded a posthumous Silver Star for his actions during the battle. In addition, the Spartans' team sergeant and the team's intelligence NCO were written up for a Silver Star and a Bronze Star with "V" device, respectively, but asked that the paperwork be withdrawn to give other members of the team a greater chance of being recognized.

The Spartans' medic, junior engineer sergeant and Air Force JTAC were awarded Bronze Stars with "V" devices, as was the team's company supply sergeant, a young E-5 who had come along for the ride and found himself fighting for his life and those of his comrades.

Reflecting on the battle several months later, the Spartans credited much of their success to the standard operating procedures they had developed for ambushes, which enabled them to fight through each engagement, rather than merely run from the enemy.

"If you're constantly running from ambushes, the enemy controls the roads," and the enemy has gained the initiative, the team leader said. "We were able to take the fight to them, and we continued to take the fight to them in each engagement."

The Spartans were named after the ancient Greek warriors who, the team leader said, were "a very small number of individuals who were willing to take the fight to the enemy, regardless of the odds. ... If anybody really looks at SF operations, that's it in a nutshell — you go out there against the odds and try to turn the odds in your favor."

These modern-day Spartans did much more than that in the battle of Mari Ghar, said the team's former leader, Capt. Jim Gant. In a speech at Falkel's Aug. 16 memorial service in Centennial, Colo., according to The Denver Post, he told mourners that the soldier died "in a battle that will make the annals of Special Forces history."

More:

**#3: Mortars By Night, Water Shortages By Day: "I'm Pissing Orange And They Want Me To Shave With My Drinking Water. Ain't Gonna Happen"**



US soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division carry water to their mountain post on a stretcher in south Afghanistan, June 22, 2006. U.S. troops had to carry food and water air dropped by plane from the valley floor to the ridge top. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

6/22/2006 By JASON STRAZIUSO, (AP) [Excerpt]

BAGHRAN VALLEY, Afghanistan

By night, the troops brace for Taliban mortar attacks. By day, they carry heavy gear and weapons over rocky ledges in scorching heat, stopping only to rehydrate, sometimes with the help of intravenous drips.

Life with the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment in southern Afghanistan is a battle not only against a stealthy and stubborn enemy but against some of the earth's harshest natural elements.

"I am hungry, thirsty and dirty. Welcome to my world," said Sgt. 1st Class Gonzalo Lassally, 31, of Deltona, Fla.

Lassally is among the scores of U.S. soldiers dug into a sun-bleached peak as part of Operation Mountain Thrust.

The soldiers, part of the 10th Mountain Division based at Fort Drum, N.Y., along with three embedded Associated Press journalists, were dropped by helicopters to the remote hilltop in southern Helmand province several days ago.

Their mission is to block Taliban supply and transport routes.

Taliban forces have long held sway in this vast, inhospitable, rocky brown desert. Little but some small cacti survive in daytime temperatures nearing 110 degrees.

Sweat pours off troops carrying dozens of pounds of gear and weaponry up, down and along rocky ledges as they patrol Baghran Valley.

Spc. David Valdiva is beet red from exertion, soaked in sweat and looking near collapse as he lugs 90 pounds of gear, including a 30-pound machine gun. "It's an honor to carry the gun," he says, uncomplainingly.

**"I'm just not doing too good today because of the minimal food and water," adds Valdiva, of Altaloma, Calif.**

**Too much sun and little water have led some troops to give each other IVs to prevent dehydration.**

"Williams, you got an IV for me? I think I'm delusional," Cpl. Bradley Courson, 22, of Calcium, N.Y., says to a company medic. An IV is the fastest way to rehydrate, said company doctor Capt. Peter Muench, 29, of Silver Spring, Md., but he warned against soldier-administered IVs. "Their sterile techniques aren't the best," he said.

Out of about 120 soldiers in the unit, a half-dozen hydrated with IV drips. Lassally had a friend administer an IV on Tuesday, leaving bloody trails on his arms. He said he felt "refreshed" afterward.

Resupply means more hard work.

**Dozens of soldiers and one donkey, rented for \$10, lugged more than 7,000 pounds of food and water from the valley floor to their mountaintop ridge Thursday. It had been air-dropped by coalition aircraft because no helicopters were available to deliver it closer.**

**The extra supplies mean the troops get 12 bottles of water to drink per day, instead of eking by on five or six as they had been. They also now have two MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) food packs this day, instead of the one they'd been limited to earlier.**

**"I hate this place. You can drop the devil here and he'd hate it," said Staff Sgt. Brian Rice, 39, of Eugene, Ore. "I'm pissing orange and they want me to shave with my drinking water. Ain't gonna happen."**

Company commander Capt. Jared Wilson, 28, of Petaluma, Calif., told the soldiers before they left on their mission to expect hardship.

"Does it suck carrying all that stuff? Roger that," Wilson said Thursday.

**"They don't show that in Hollywood. They don't show you getting dehydrated."**

The senior noncommissioned officer in the company, 1st Sgt. Russell Jacobs of Edgar, Neb., said the Army is a 24/7 job. "You bust your ass from time to time," said Jacobs, 46, who is a 21-year Army veteran. "When you're deployed for a year at a time, it's a hard year."

But despite the lack of water, the heavy labor, extreme heat and constant jokes about craving a cold beer, many soldiers stuck on this mountaintop say they love it.

“As much as the Army sucks, I still love it,” Lassally says. “When you get put into situations like these, you don’t sweat the little stuff anymore.”

Temperatures at night drop only to the 80s, too hot for tents, so the troops sleep under stars that seem particularly bright because of the lack of electricity in the area.

**One night this week, soldiers in the valley came under mortar attack. They responded with tracer fire and mortars, and called in air support that targeted two nearby compounds.**

**The next day, troops trudged down the hill to assess the damage at the compounds, where they believe Taliban militants had removed the bodies of several of their comrades killed in the U.S. counterattack.**

**An elderly couple living in one of the compounds also died from the U.S. fire.**

**Residents said Taliban forces had taken over the settlement and were using it to plan attacks against U.S. troops.**

**On an adobe wall, troops discovered rough sketches of American positions on the hilltop.**

## **WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS**



**A U.S. soldier from the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, laughs next to Gul Ahmad, whose father and mother were killed during an U.S. airstrike attack early Tuesday near a fortified position in a mountain at Helmand Province Afghanistan, June 20, 2006. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)**

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## IRAQ WAR REPORTS

### **North Dakota Guardsman Killed**



North Dakota National Guard Cpl. Paul Beyer, 21, of Jamestown, N.D., was killed June 23, 2006 in Iraq. (AP Photo/North Dakota National Guard)

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### **Texas Marine Sgt. Killed**



Marine Staff Sgt. Benjamin D. Williams of Orange, Texas, was killed in Al Anbar province June 20, 2006. (AP Photo/Williams family)

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# **Blast Outside Patrol Vehicle Kills Rainier Graduate;**

## **“Fourth ID Has Taken A Huge, Huge Hit Since They've Been In Iraq”**



June 25, 2006 By Diane Huber, The Olympian

Sgt. Justin Dean Norton wanted to be in the military since he was 5, following in the footsteps of his grandfathers and stepfather.

He enlisted his senior year at Rainier High School and, in November, he was deployed to Iraq.

Saturday afternoon, his parents got a dreaded phone call.

"I was at work and I got the call from a neighbor that I had to get home because there was somebody there to see me," his stepfather, Gary Warnock, said in a telephone interview from his Rainier home. "I just knew something had happened and I was thinking of the worst and hoping for the best."

A Fort Lewis sergeant told them Norton died when an improvised explosive device went off outside the patrol vehicle he was in about 7 a.m. in the Baghdad area. Warnock said his stepson's unit was fired on, and the soldiers got out to investigate when the IED hit. He did not know if anyone else died or was injured in the explosion.

**Norton, 21, is the third Thurston County resident to die in the war since it began in March 2003.**

Family members described Norton as well liked and a good student who enjoyed spending time with his family and friends.

"My brother, he liked to laugh a lot. He liked to joke around," said Dean Norton, 19. "Me and my brother liked to hang out and have fun. We watched a lot of movies together. We were very close. We liked to do everything together."

During Norton's last visit in February, the two vowed to enroll in South Puget Sound Community College to study criminal justice as soon as Norton completed his tour of duty, Dean Norton said.

Norton, a 2003 graduate of Rainier High, played football and wrestled in high school. Dean Norton said the two would play whiffle ball or basketball outside when they were younger.

He loved movies, and had Austin Powers "down to a science," said Warnock, Thurston County's deputy coroner and a candidate for Thurston County coroner.

When Norton decided to enlist, his parents urged him to be an officer, but he wanted to be a soldier.

"He said he loved doing what he was doing. He felt like he was doing a thing that he should, and he was serving his country, and he was fulfilling a commitment he had made," Dean said.

**He was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Hood, Texas, which worried Warnock.**

**"These guys are out probing for targets. Fourth ID has taken a huge, huge hit since they've been in Iraq," Warnock said.**

Norton didn't say much about his experiences there, but during his last visit, Warnock could tell from a look in his stepson's eyes that being in Iraq was dangerous.

"He looked worried," Warnock said.

**Norton last spoke with his family a couple of weeks ago to tell them his unit was moving to the Baghdad area.**

**"I just knew. That's where it's all happening," Warnock said.**

Norton also is survived by his mother, Chris; his brother, Joshua Warnock; his father and stepmother, Jeff and Sandy Norton, who also live in Rainier; and grandparents in Rainier and Olympia. The family had not yet made arrangements for a memorial service.

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## **Soldier Wanted To Better His Life**

June 10, 2006 By Ivan Moreno, Rocky Mountain News

When Carlos Santos looks at photos of his son, taken before and after he joined the military, he can't help wondering why his boy didn't come home.

"I thought he would be one of the soldiers who would return," Santos said Friday in Spanish in a phone interview from his home in Rialto, Calif.

His son, Spc. Luis D. Santos, 20, died June 8 in Buritz, Iraq, when a roadside bomb detonated near his Humvee, the Department of Defense said Friday. Santos was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson.

"I have no choice but to accept it," Carlos Santos said about his son's death.

Luis Santos joined the Army because he wanted to learn new skills, get a job, and fend for himself, his father said. Looking at pictures of his son at home, the 53-year-old father described one of Santos before the Army, skinny and with long hair, and another after joining the military, more serious, short hair, and a stronger build.

On the Web site Myspace.com, Luis Santos wrote about being in Iraq, his fiancée and why his friends called him "Toast."

He wrote in his profile: "They call me that cause im dark like toast or because its short for Santos, im not really sure which one though.

"besides being away from my friends and family i am having a pretty good time out here working with my fellow soldiers," he wrote. "Dont get me wrong, i still want to go home but there is something about being here that attracts me."

Carlos Santos recalls his son was nervous before he was deployed to Iraq in November.

"He was always a worrier," he said.

But over time, Santos said his son began to enjoy his stay in Iraq, though he was looking forward to coming home.

In one of the last entries in his Myspace blog, Luis Santos wrote about going home.

"Its gonna be a long trip home but it will defanitly be worth it. Can't wait, im so hyped up, just got to stay alive till next month."

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **A Soldier's Family Mourns**

June 21 2006 BY LUIS PEREZ, Newsday Staff Writer

On Father's Day, Evelyn McLeod decided to tell her 6-year-old granddaughter that her soldier-dad had been killed in a faraway land.

McLeod, of Staten Island, started by peppering Jessenya Sanchez with questions: Do you know what a hero is? And did you know that your daddy was one, too?

"Maybe Jesus needs heroes in heaven," McLeod, an Army veteran herself, told the brown-haired girl. It had been a year since Jessenya saw her father, Sgt. Ian Sanchez, who separated from her mother before she was born but remained involved in the girl's life.

The grandmother's questioning after the little girl's first dance recital conveyed the terrible news.

"She collapsed," McLeod said at her home yesterday. "She knew right away. She screamed, 'No, no, no!'"

On Friday, Sanchez, 26, a bomb specialist assigned to the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan, died after his truck struck a roadside bomb in Asadabad, the Defense Department said. Another soldier, 1st Lt. Forrest Ewens, 25, of Washington state, died with him. Both men were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, the military said.

**Their deaths brought the total number of American soldiers killed in Operation Enduring Freedom to 306.**

**"He wanted to be in the NYPD bomb squad," McLeod said of her only son in her Castleton Corners home in the Todt Hill Houses. "Look at what got him - it was one of those damned things."**

She handed a visitor a framed photograph of Sanchez in desert fatigues, an image that captures the way she knew her son for the better part of six years.

Sanchez, a father of two whose mother is Scottish and father Puerto Rican, enlisted in the Army reserves after high school. He was inspired by 9/11, his mother said. He did a tour in South Korea before being sent back to Fort Hood, Texas, and left for Afghanistan last year.

**In the kitchen is a small photograph of Sanchez's cousin, combat medic Greg Smith, 21, who is stationed at Talil Air Base in Iraq. This is another source of grief.**

**McLeod is trying to get Smith flown to the states for his cousin's funeral this week. Smith's request to his superiors was denied, McLeod said.**

**"We just want Greg home for two days," said Sanchez's aunt, June McLeod. "It's devastating to him."**

Rep. Vito Fossella (R-N.Y.) is helping them try to get Smith home. An Army spokeswoman did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

While in the Army, Sanchez married Jennifer, and they had a boy, Marcus, now 18 months.

McLeod, a retired nurse administrator whose emphysema and other ailments keep her at home most of the time, describes her son as her guardian angel. Twice her only son carried her frail body in his arms, once to the hospital, another time to his "quiet place," a nearby chapel.

In a recent Mother's Day card he wrote: "I wish I could make everything better."

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## **WELCOME TO LIBERATED AFGHANISTAN: HAVE A NICE DAY**



**Afghan villagers looking for bodies of people killed during a US airstrike attack near a fortified position in a mountain at Helmand Province, south Afghanistan, June 20, 2006. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)**

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## **Army Soldier From Raynham Killed**

June 23, 2006 RAYNHAM, Mass., Newsday

The Department of Defense confirmed Friday that a soldier from Raynham was killed while on duty in Afghanistan.

Army Sgt. Jared Monti, 30, died Wednesday when his unit came under small arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire in Afghanistan. The fire fight also killed Staff Sgt. Patrick L. Lybert, 28, of Ladysmith, Wis.

Both soldiers fought with the 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), out of Fort Drum, N.Y.

Monti, who was single and had no children, was born in Abington and raised in Raynham, according to his father, Paul Monti of Raynham. "My son loved his country," Paul Monti told the Taunton Daily Gazette, "And he served it with honor and distinction."

The soldier's brother, Tim Monti, said the family sent care packages to Afghanistan, which his brother would give to children. "He carried candy around in his pocket for them, and he would tell us how he would give kids rides in the Humvee because they were scared to walk across town," Tim Monti said,

Monti, a bronze star recipient, had been in the Army for 12 years. He served in Bosnia and twice in South Korea. Next month would have been the seventh month of his second tour in Afghanistan.

"He tried to bring peace to everyone," Paul Monti said.

**At least 10 servicemen from Massachusetts have been killed since 2001 in Afghanistan.**

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## **NO MISSION; HOPELESS WAR: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, in Helmand province, Afghanistan, June 18, 2006 (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

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## **TROOP NEWS**

**THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:  
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



The casket of Sgt. Jose M. Velez is lifted from the hearse June 19, 2006 in New York. Sgt. Velez, originally from the Bronx, New York, was killed during combat operations near Kirkuk in Iraq. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

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## **Migraine Headaches Hit “More Than One-Third Of U.S. Soldiers In Iraq” Headaches “Significantly Impaired The Soldiers’ Ability To Do Their Jobs”**

"The World Health Organization ranked migraine attacks as one of the most disabling conditions known to mankind," said Dr. Stephen Silberstein, director of the Jefferson Headache Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, at the same news conference. "It is equivalent to acute psychosis

**and quadriplegia." "The migraines tended to persist after they got home and, in many cases, became more severe," Theeler said.**

06/22/06 By Amanda Gardner, HealthDay Reporter, (HealthDay News)

**An unexpectedly high number of troops serving in Iraq are suffering from migraine headaches, researchers report.**

**The debilitating headaches are affecting more than one-third of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, or about twice that in the general U.S. population, according to a study being presented at the annual American Headache Society (AHS) meeting now underway in Los Angeles.**

Factors like heat, stress and exhaustion can all raise risks for migraine, experts say, and could be to blame for the high incidence reported.

"Migraines are common among U.S. military personnel in a combat zone -- up to 37 percent of those in Iraq," said study lead author Dr. Brett Theeler, a neurology resident at Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis, Washington, at a Thursday news conference. "This greatly exceeds the prevalence expected for the same age and gender."

**These migraines were also underdiagnosed and undertreated and significantly impaired the soldiers' ability to do their jobs, experts added.**

**"The World Health Organization ranked migraine attacks as one of the most disabling conditions known to mankind," said Dr. Stephen Silberstein, director of the Jefferson Headache Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, at the same news conference. "It is equivalent to acute psychosis and quadriplegia. People have attacks all the time, and they have significant disability."**

Many factors that can contribute to migraines are present in Iraq, Theeler said.

**"We hypothesized that migraines would be common among soldiers in Iraq because they can be linked with physical exhaustion, dehydration, abnormal meal patterns, exposure to fumes and extreme heat, among other things," he said.**

Theeler's study is the first to look at migraines among active-duty soldiers, although there have been case reports and articles from previous conflicts.

Headache questionnaires were completed by 2,697 U.S. soldiers from Fort Lewis, Washington. The questionnaires included questions about symptoms experienced during the last three months of deployment.

Nineteen percent of the soldiers surveyed reported headaches meeting the criteria for migraine, 18 percent reported headaches meeting the criteria for probably migraine and 11 percent reported having non-migraine headaches.

**Only 5 percent had previously been diagnosed with migraine.**

The majority of the respondents (95 percent) were men.

Soldiers with definite migraines had an average of 3.5 attacks every month, lasting an average of five hours per attack, and made a total of 477 sick call visits, Theeler said.

**Only 2 percent of these soldiers were using one of the family of triptan medications, deemed the most effective for this condition.**

The researchers contacted the soldiers again three months after they had returned home.

**"The migraines tended to persist after they got home and, in many cases, became more severe," Theeler said.**

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## **Hell Yes He's Happy: Japan Withdraws All Troops From Iraq NOW!**



**Japan has begun withdrawing from Iraq, five days after deciding to end its military deployment.** (AFP/Ahmad Abdel Razak)

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# **Pentagon Bigots Call Homosexuality A “Mental Disorder” & Spent \$200 Million Getting Rid Of Gay Troops**



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

21 June 2006 BBC NEWS

**US lawmakers are calling on the Pentagon to change a document listing homosexuality as a "mental disorder".**

**Instruction 1332.38 on disabilities in the US military classes being gay under the same heading as mental retardation, personality disorders and alcoholism.**

A group of 10 congressmen have written to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asking that "inadvertent outdated language" be updated.

Marty Meehan, Democratic representative for Massachusetts, and nine other members of the Armed Services Committee sent the letter on Tuesday.

**"It is disappointing that certain Department of Defense instructions include homosexuality as a 'mental disorder' more than 30 years after the mental health community recognised that such a classification was a mistake," Mr Meehan said.**

**"There is no scientific basis for such a classification which leads me to believe that the classification is motivated by something more sinister."**

The letter points out that two other Department of Defense regulations on mental health do not include homosexuality on any lists of psychological disorders.

**It requests that all Pentagon regulations be adapted in keeping with the American Psychiatric Association's stance that "homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities".**

The lawmakers also called for a complete review of the US military's policies and medical regulations, in order to meet the needs of what they estimated to be about 65,000 homosexual and bisexual members of the US armed forces.

Replacing the 10,000 homosexual soldiers forced to leave the US army in the last 10 years has cost \$200 million, according to a report released last year by the US Government Accountability Office.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org). Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

## IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

### GET THE MESSAGE? Marchers Condemn Occupation Home Invasion Arrests



Iraqis demonstrate to demand the release of Jamal al-Din Abdul Karim al-Dabban, after U.S. troops invaded his house in the middle of the night and took him prisoner in Tikrit, June 24, 2006, along with three of his sons. The cleric, who is a religious authority, was released about seven hours later after protests, but the others arrested in his house are

still in prison. Right banner in Arabic reads: 'Fear Allah, release Sheikh al-Dabban immediately.' (AP Photo/Bassim Daham)

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION  
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

**DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK**



Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

## **NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize

resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! ([www.ivaw.net](http://www.ivaw.net))

### GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

GI Special issues are archived at website <http://www.militaryproject.org> .

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

<http://www.williambowles.info/qispecial/2006/index.html>;

[http://robinlea.com/GI\\_Special/](http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/); <http://imagineaworldof.blogspot.com/>; <http://qi-special.iraq-news.de>;

[http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi\\_special/](http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi_special/);

<http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>; <http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/qi-special.htm>

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