

MAY

THE ATLAS

704TH EN CO NEWSLETTER



HALFWAY HOME!

SPC Patrick Delcour making things happen.

THE UPHILL BATTLE HOME

Soldiers, Values, Actions

By CPT Joshua Yarbrough (ASSASSIN 6)

15MAY2013 - May brings many tidings and all of them positive. As a company, we have accomplished many phenomenal tasks and have continued to excel across the board operationally. The commitment of our Soldiers stepping up to become Leaders and setting a new standard for excellence. It is both encouraging and inspiring.

I think that this speaks in large part to our ability to engage these young men at the lowest level to accomplish at the highest level. Constantly striving to match our actions with our values is key to this. It is certainly a challenge and one that we continue to meet with vigor and energy. Bringing together Soldiers from across our Nation to form a team has been daunting. Taking junior and senior leaders from around our battalion and our command and molding them into an effective leadership team continues to take work. Our forward progress continues to be rewarded.

Our Soldiers understand this more than most as they bear the brunt of the burden. They have done exceptionally well building relationships and platoon integrity. I've personally been able to observe how they have formed cohesive teams that focus on mission accomplishment. They focus on taking care of each other and supporting their brothers in arms. From nightly joking sessions in Shewan to sitting in the motor pool at Tobruk, the guys always find a way to lighten the mood and ease the stress of being deployed.

My challenge this month to everyone is figuring out how we

reinforce those values that made us strong as an organization. I believe the first is to increase our communication across the board. We've done great things at the team, squad, and platoon level, but have not managed to bridge the gap between platoons and headquarters. How do we do a better job of supporting each other? It starts with listening with open minds - accepting both feedback and suggestions from every level.

“The battle of life is, in most cases, fought uphill; and to win it without a struggle were perhaps to win it without honor. If there were no difficulties there would be no success; if there were nothing to struggle for, there would be nothing to be achieved.”
-Samuel Smiles

We must continue to develop our Soldiers, and better yet, empower them to be Leaders. I have firsthand knowledge that each and every single



CPT Joshua Yarbrough takes aim.

one of them know their job. Now is the time to trust them and empower them to be great. The road forward to continue building our team is no doubt a challenge. Leaders must continue to step up and earn the respect of those they mentor and lead. Soldiers must be willing to accept change and work together as one Company to accomplish the greater good. Standards must be recognized and enforced. Not for the sake of complying with rules, but with the interest of the entire Company at heart.

The start is simple, as Harry Kramer Jr. recommends - “Do the right thing and the best you can. The rest will take care of itself.”

Assassin 6

“CLEAR THE WAY!”

TOP'S CORNER

word's of wisdom from Assassin 7

by 1SG Clayton Elmore

16MAY2013 - This is our fifth newsletter in country, number seven if you count our time at Fort Bliss (I know I do.) The Soldiers are all working hard at their jobs, and making a big difference everyday. I have been able to roll out on mission with a number of the platoons over the past month. What an experience! I went out with second platoon, RCP 68, on one of their missions and I loved it. I started out in one truck and the AC broke before we ever left the motor pool. I shuffled around and tried to fit inside one of the other tiny trucks, and well that's not going to work out for an NCO of my stature. Thankfully SSG Corey Lewis rescued me and slotted me in the 916 (its kind of like a big rig.) I had a little more room to maneuver and that made all the difference for me.

Being on mission, clearing routes, going on patrol requires you to be focused all the time. It seems like the simplest thing, but at times it is the hardest to do. These missions can last for 8 to 10 hours a day, or more, and that all depends what is going on in front of you, behind you, or around you. Things can change quickly.

One of the places we stopped at was FOB Tobruk. Its a little Italian place, but not like the little Italian place in your town back home. The guys spend the night here all the time, so they are used to it, and have a great relationship with the Italian Soldiers there. The platoon leader, 1LT Adam Mueller, and a bunch of his Soldiers started joking around while they set up there sleep areas. The guys talked non-stop about their trucks, and who had the best lift kits, The conversation chased rabbits all over the place, touching on unions, guns, knives, and all the rest that Soldiers talk about. I just enjoyed listening to them, and listening to Soldiers who had become close friends.

The biggest benefit to staying at FOB Tobruk is the food. The Italian Soldiers have managed to build a brick oven for firing fresh baked pizzas. You cannot beat fresh pizza in Afghanistan. We got invited over, and the next thing I knew I was having a pizza party in the middle of a war. A bunch of the guys joined me, SPCs Clark, Welch, Roush, Delmo and a bunch of other guys all sat with me and we talked and ate fresh pizza. It was great. Maybe the best part of my job is being able to talk with Soldiers, and listen to them, or teach them new things.

We returned from the road a few days later, but I am pretty sure this old First Sergeant is going to find his way back out there, with his Soldiers.

“A soldier doesn't fight because he hates the enemy in from of him; he fights because he loves what he left behind them, Live for something rather than die for nothing.”

– Anonymous



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1LT Bennett Adams, SGT John Oxford, SFC Billy Harner & CPL
Brandon Jackson, with some of their Afghan Counterparts.



FIRST PLATOON

Route Clearance Patrol 35

By SPC Ryan Anthony

18MAY2013 - After driving for the better of a day the sight of the observation balloon located above FOB Tobruk is a welcome sight. Tobruk is the halfway point between Farah and Deleram, or Farah and Shindand. Upon arrival at Tobruk the priorities of the platoon are to fill up our trucks with fuel and begin setting up our makeshift man camp. We set up on the gravel and concrete that serves as the helicopter landing zone at Tobruk. Its really not to bad until an unexpected CH-47Chinook decides to come flying in. Dust, rocks, and water blow across our sleeping area.

Tobruk offers an opportunity to get a different type of food from what is available at Shindand, and a chance to interact with people of a different country. The Italians at Tobruk are wonderful hosts and always make us feel welcome. Many of the Italians speak English well and they enjoy learning about the US Military as well as getting to know about our culture back home.

The Italian Soldiers rely on the US Military for many different things. The Italian Soldiers are unable to receive mail from Italy. They really appreciate when we are able to let their family members ship packages and letters to us, and then we take them from Shindand to Tobruk. The Italians also appreciate whenever we can spare a box of MREs (Meals Ready to Eat.)

The Italians have a coffee drink called mocha, which they drink several times a day. They are always inviting us to join them for a cup of mocha. It is amazing that they can drink the mocha just minutes before going to bed. They find it funny when we (Americans) turn it down for the same reason.

One windy afternoon at Tobruk, the Soldiers from first platoon were going to fly our PUMA. Its a remote contral aerial observation platform. We fly it to conduct reconnaissance and see if we can spot any enemy activity. After putting the PUMA together our platoon leader, 1LT Adams, decided he wanted to launch it. He ran and jumped and threw the PUMA as hard as he could. The result.... 50 feet of flight. Needless to say the platoon has decided 1LT Adams cannot be the quarterback whenever we play football.

SECOND PLATOON

Route Clearance Patrol 68

By SPC Theodore Delmo

15MAY2013 - It all depends on the day, some are longer than the rest and some are shorter than the rest. On mission day its simple drive, drive, and drive some more, slowly while scanning for IEDs. It isn't all so bad though it helps time fly when things are going slow. I get to pretty much chit chat with my truck and talk about so many things. We talk about our past, things we want for our future, also memories we still remember. Its crazy to imagine that the people who were once strangers in your life now know pretty much all there is to know about you.

As relaxed as some days are a few are really stressful. Drives may turn into over night trips. Missions may last between 4-16 hours of time on the road, many things can happen to make trips for such a long time including vehicles breaking down or just being told by people who are in charge. Nothing you can do but follow orders to the best of your abilities. But its all worth it after the mission we sit around and hangout as a platoon, joking around and telling stories. Its nice to after a long day just take all your gear off and sit around pretty much. If the sun is still out maybe a game of football or frisbee, all depends on the group mood. Depending on where we end up we may have a night full of pasta, or just a hot meal. If we end up sleeping out in the desert its MREs or snacks you brought. The guard shift is what I look forward to. Stars shine a little brighter out here for some reason, and it really makes me appreciate everything in life prior to being here.

On a non mission day its life in the motor pool. Making sure that my truck is up and running as it should be is my main priority. Of course another priority is restocking with food and water for the next mission so we don't go hungry or thirsty. Also non mission days give me a chance to call home, write letters, pick up mail, and just escape for a little while and forget the stress. Nothing is better than hearing from back home, its just nice to know that people still think of me and care for me even though I am half way around the world. That is my life here in Afghanistan and thats how it has been, just put it all in repeat and we'll be back soon.

SPC Kyle Striplin keeps a look out.



THIRD PLATOON

Route Clearance Patrol 57

By SSG Zachary Rostan

15MAY2013 - We normally wake up at 0400, at least on mission days. I normally schedule our first formation around 0445. Once I ensure that everyone is awake and accounted for its time to get to work. At 0500 its time to begin mission prep and get the vehicles ready to roll out. Squad Leaders are conducting pre-combat checks and ensuring our Soldiers have the proper gear and most importantly that everything works.

Thirty minutes before we roll out the Platoon Leader, 2LT Smith, and I give a patrol brief outlining the mission, our expectations, and the latest intelligence. Depending on the mission, we could be on the road between four and twelve hours. Some days are definitely longer than others.

Upon completion of our mission we return to base. Sometimes that base is Shindand, but more often it is Farah. The Squad Leaders get everybody going again after the mission, conducting maintenance and regeneration. After the maintenance is complete we cut the guys loose, hopefully to relax and get some sleep. Most of the guys rush over to the gym to blow off some steam they accumulated during the mission. Around 1900 I brief the Squad Leaders on the tasks and timeline for the next day. At some point everyone beds down and its time for some much needed sleep.

Sometimes we are not so lucky, sleep wise. When we do not return to a FOB (Shindand, Tobruk, Farah) we end up setting up a patrol base out in the desert. Security is our number one priority, and this means that half of the Soldiers are always awake at one time or another keeping everyone safe. The guys will grab a spot in their trucks, fold out a cot, or stretch out in the sand. Some of these guys have even made hammocks. At some point we always end up back at a FOB, and grab some much needed sleep in our beds.

On the days back at Shindand we start our days a little later and our focus is on maintenance. The squad leaders are tasked with ensuring vehicles and paperwork are getting routed wherever they need to go. I get in deep with the Maintenance team tracking vehicles and making sure that we are set up for our upcoming mission.

When the guys are done, I try to get them as much down time as possible. The gym is a lot of the Soldiers favorite place to go, but there is always movies and video games to fill their time. And sleep, lots of sleep.

We have a pretty set schedule most weeks, but the ugly monster named FRAGO comes up every now and then. At that point all the preparations and planning gets compressed from days to hours and its back on the road. All the Soldiers understand this is the nature of the beast. They always respond as the awesome professionals that they are.

SGT James Hunsucker scanning...



Headquarters

Read you Lima Charlie!

By SGT Jay Witt

20MAR2013 - 0530, an alarm sounds from across the hall. Ignoring the alarm, I lay in bed, waiting to hear the "oh" so familiar voice of 1LT Scott, "Witt lets go, get out of bed, what are you a child?" Knowing he just rolled out of bed as well I reply with, "I've been awake, I was waiting on you to get up". I throw on my PT uniform, throw back a pre workout and off to the gym we go.

After an about an hour and half of going full beast mode it's time for me get ready for work. Clean up, shave, drink protein, drink "Creature" (which is a pretty awesome post workout), and off to work...oh wait, don't forget your Doxycycline, I would hate to catch Malaria. I really don't feel like walking to work this morning, hope I can catch a bus. I round the corner and look towards the bus stop, there it is, like an indigenous wild animal hunkering behind cover. I panic and run towards it; it's not moving, almost there, NO...NO... NO... WAIT! DANG! And the bus leaves without me, again. Well, you may have escaped this time, but next time...oohhh you just wait, next time. Ok, I'm not going to wait forever and a day on another bus. Looks like I'm hoofing it. It's not the first time and darn sure won't be the last. Half way there, low and behold, a bus, but it's not going to stop... well maybe, nope ever mind.

Finally get to the TOC, go to my office to check my... hey... where's my chair? Ok, found my chair. Night shift moved it. Yes, you know who you are, and you know that I know who you are. HA! No worries, but seriously, don't touch my chair! Just kidding, or am I? Where was I, oh yeah, checking my email and boom, phone call:

ME: "704TH SGT Witt"

THEM: "Hey SGT Witt this is the helpdesk, we were just wanting to follow up on the ticket you submitted"

ME: "Yep everything seems to working properly."

THEM: "Ok great, have a good one."

Me: "You too."

Ok, back to checking my email, and then from the front of the TOC:

THEM: "Hey Witt, why can't I print?"

ME: "Well, let me fix this for you Lt. Schoen." (With a click of the mouse and a shake of my leg, BAM...fixed.)

THEM aka LT Schoen: Thanks Witt.

ME: No problem.

SPC Munyon should be here by now. He probably missed the bus as well...or maybe, a long pause, SkyNet? Could he have possibly....what was that noise? Probably just the sound of a distant plane, right? For those of you that don't know what SkyNet is, SkyNet is the evil computer overlord from the Terminator movies, and I'm pretty sure SPC Munyon is building it. Other than that he is doing great things for the 704TH Engineer Company as the Signal Support Systems Specialist.

Noon creeps up on me out of now where. Along with it comes, what seems like, tornado equivalent winds. I half expect to see flying livestock and a green witch riding a broom as I walk out the door to go to lunch, but I'm not that lucky. If so I would be in Munchkin Land kicking it with the Lollipop Guild dancing in a circle singing songs. Heck, I would even go as far as to wearing the red slippers and clicking my heals together if it got me home to my family any sooner. I'm sure we all would, I look good in red though.

After lunch I return to the TOC and along with SPC Munyon we continue troubleshooting, fixing, and sometimes breaking, whatever communication system is having issues. The breaking part is not intentional of course but good for experience. I try to stay out of the office as much as I can especially on these windy days. The sound of the wind thrashing at our tent is enough to drive a man's shadow away. The end of the day is here and thankfully nothing came up last minute. Now it's time to grab some chow, head to the tent, chat with my wife, see my baby girl, and hit the sack so I can fall asleep to the lullaby of low flying aircrafts only to wake up and repeat the day.



SGT Jay Witt rucking around.

SPC Manuel Huizar and SPC Juan Tierradentro are left wondering "how does this stuff



FMT

a couple of screws loose

By SPC William Shnaekel

15MAY2013 - During the past month maintenance has done many things to support the Company. Our key role is to and make sure that the RCP's are good to roll out and to fix any last minute issues that need to be fixed. We have torn apart a Max-pro Recovery Vehicle, to replace wires that caused an electrical short in the battery box. We have completed the easy part of the removal of the bad wires and are just awaiting parts to come in so that we can finish the project. We also replaced numerous gunner hatch canopies on the RG31's to help the gunners stay a little cooler from the blazing hot sun. Our shop tent is fully operational for repairs on vehicles, so now we do as many repairs as we can.

Our Regen process (a check over the vehicles after they come back from mission) has also merged with the other company we share with whom we share the motor pool. The 595th is an active duty unit from New Mexico, and are very easy to work with as we combine efforts to work with and help each other out. Recovery continues to be a major part of the Route Clearance Platoons. The drivers are first to understand what happened to a vehicle and help explain situations a lot better. We are starting to recover vehicles pretty often, mostly due to rough terrain on the routes that are being cleared. All the guys efforts really show how much they care about what they are doing, and that they go the extra mile every single day to keep our mission successful.

We enjoyed a company wide grill and competition day on May 14TH. The competitions included volleyball, basketball, a Husky pull, and other events. It was great being with all the Soldiers and letting ourselves have a little fun.

We have many activities to partake in when we have down time; movies, T.V. shows, and video games in our rooms. Some of us go to the USO they provide fun games like Texas Hold'em Poker, Corn hole, and Spades. The base also has a decent shopping mall area with some of the local nationals that run the shops. Everything there is pretty cheap and affordable. They have all the new movies and latest episodes to any T.V. show.

SPC Brandon Babcock helping out with the REGEN process.



Soldiers being Soldiers

ON MISSION, FIGHTING THE FIGHT

SPC Jason Harper and SPC Terry Roark
in a Corn Hole Battle



Company Morale Patch!!!



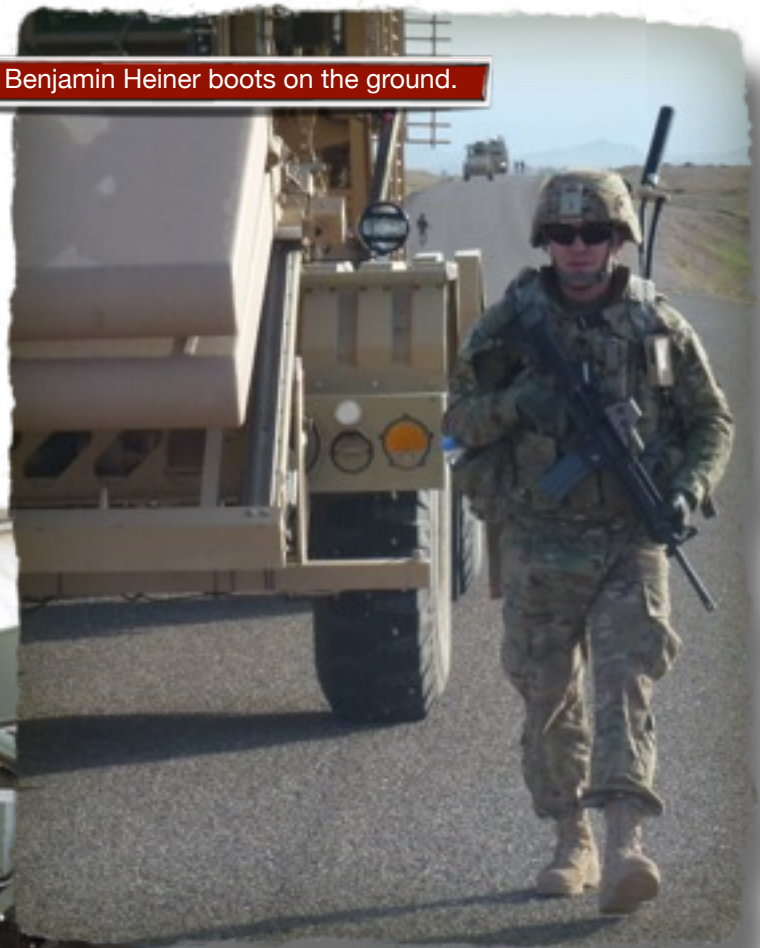
SPC Ben Ibarra and SGT Ricky Jones, survey the
Corn Hole competition



Soldiers being Soldiers

ON MISSION, FIGHTING THE FIGHT

SPC Benjamin Heiner boots on the ground.



SPC William Shnaekel and his forklift



SPC James Whitley gets promoted.



Soldiers being Soldiers

ON MISSION, FIGHTING THE FIGHT



SPC Jason Rich, SPC Phillip Reeves & SPC Kevin Tischer hanging out.



2nd PLT gets ready to fly their PUMA



SPC Juan Tierradentro, SPC Antonio Waters, SPC Hunter Graves, SGT Channing Brumfield, SPC Joshua Williams & SPC Nathan Drebenstedt victorious!

Soldiers being Soldiers

ON MISSION, FIGHTING THE FIGHT

Best Friends!



SPC Benjamin Dickman and CPL Chris Ammon readying a security position



CPL Richard Scroggins staying fit while on patrol.

AWARDS AND PROMOTIONS

AWARDS:

HERO of the BATTLE:

(recognized each week by the Company)

1LT Jared Schoen

CPL Andrew Newlon- selected 307th Engineer Battalion Hero of the Battle

SPC Samuel Poley

SPC Phillip Reeves

SPC Benjamin Ibarra

PROMOTIONS:

Sergeant:

Andrew Newlon

Private First Class:

James Whitley

RE-ENLISTMENTS:

SSG Jarrod Stroud



SSG Jarrod Stroud swears his oath of re-enlistment to 1LT Adam Mueller

XO's Desk

its all downhill from here

By 1LT Chris Scott

20MAY2013 - Its official. We have crossed the halfway point of our time deployed in Afghanistan. I am sure many of you were already keeping track. So for those of you counting at home the Soldiers of the 704th have had boots on the ground for more than 135 days. I think about the the birthdays, and events that I have missed, the movies I really wanted to see, the races I wanted to run, and then I take a minute and realize the great privilege that is being a Soldier. The privilege of putting our Flag on my shoulder and saying, "The United States of America starts here with me." Your loved ones, your Soldiers, and some of you also know this privilege very well. I personally would not trade it for all the movies, birthdays or events in the world. Halfway home, its all downhill from here.



The BUFFALO doing work.

704 EN CO NEWSLETTER