

JANUARY

# THE ATLAS

704TH EN CO NEWSLETTER



**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM XIII**

SPC Louis Bollasina and SPC Jason Harper ready to roll.





3RD PLATOON  
SOLDIERS STAND  
AT THE READY  
DURING FORC  
(Fundamentals Of  
Route Clearance)  
Training

## BOOTS ON THE GROUND

704th Soldiers hit the ground running in Afghanistan

By CPT Joshua Yarbrough - Assassin 6

Shindand (22 January 2013) – The experience of Afghanistan is one to certainly make a lifetime. The terrain, environment, landscape and even people are unique and beautiful. While it certainly is not America, it is an environment that is as rewarding as it is harsh. The Soldiers and I are learning new things every day. I've already had the adventures of breaking bread with the Spanish and Italians, drinking/sipping 'coffee' (espresso in a shot glass size cup loaded with sugar) while discussing future operations with our Coalition partners. I've also experienced the hospitality of the Afghan people and drank chai tea with my ANA counterparts. Everything here is about soaking up the experience, building lasting relationships and executing promises.

I am proud of how they have integrated themselves with the 510<sup>th</sup> Soldiers and successfully completed our RIP. Their motivation and pride

at being Soldiers inspires me. The future of the company looks very positive and the deployment is off to a great start.

As we move forward, I urge everyone to stay positive and to make the most of the deployment experience. For family members and Soldiers alike, this can be a huge struggle. Ultimately, it is our attitudes and perceptions that make or break the experience. We often do not get to make decisions in life on what will be handed to us, but we do make a choice – to embrace the challenge or to succumb. Roman General Scipio Africanus once said "I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it." I leave it to you to determine the end result. For my family and me, we are dedicated to embracing the challenge, enduring and becoming stronger because of the experience.

Take care of yourselves and your loved ones. Show support – whether

it's letter, packages, e-mails or Facebook. Thank you for all you do on the home front. We truly appreciate all the support and I cannot thank you enough personally.



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L: SGTs Zach Williams and Jay Witt ready to go. Yarbrough, and CPT Benjamin Weaver with their Afghan counterparts.



## The XO's Desk

life on a battlefield

By 1LT Chris Scott

(25 January 2013) - The first month of deployment is almost complete. The sights and sounds of Afghanistan permeate our days and nights. Rarely a moment goes by without the buzz of helicopters or the methodic drum of diesel engines permeating our lives. The dusty and dry air swirls about our every step. This is high desert country, and far off in any direction craggy mountain peaks and broken hills consume the horizon. Far off to the north snow covered summits remind me of my favorite stomping grounds in the Rockies. This is a land of austere and dangerous beauty, and it summons a measure of respect for the people here who have lived hard-scrabble, war-torn lives.

The company has put boots on the ground here at Shindand after making a long start stop journey around the world. The road here opened the eyes and minds of all the Soldiers. From the windy deserts of west Texas, to the snowy

night in Maine, to the bizarre sights and smells of Germany, to the cold mountains of Kyrgyzstan, and finally to the flat arid plains of southern Afghanistan, each and every Soldier saw something new, saw something for the first time.

And now the battle begins, the fight that we have trained for, the mission that asked for volunteers. The war is upon us. Each and every Soldier in the company is at a place where they are being asked to look inside themselves, to test their individual mettle, to test their patience with one another, their patience with the unknown.

I know that your prayers have not stopped, but I ask now that you renew your efforts, and think of us often. We will not fail.

"There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested." -Eugene Peterson



# FIRST PLATOON

**“a hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer.” -ralph waldo emerson**

**By SGT Joshua Barnes**

(20 January 2013) - I believe a wiser man than I once said, “life is a journey, not a destination.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson.) So here we are in Afghanistan. We have made it at last to our new home at Shindand Air Base. As I write this I am reminded of Emerson’s quote, and I know that the 704th’s journey is just beginning.

We departed Arkansas for Fort Bliss, TX. While there we received some of the best training I have ever been a part of in my military career. The training continued right up until our final departure for theater. All of the training and transitions have been made a lot easier with the support and planning from not only our command, but a wonderful AGR team made up of hard working individuals. In this little bit of time, our company has grown and come together. Couple that with the outstanding training, and we have all been given the confidence to be able to rely on one another and work as a team.

Now in Afghanistan the days are long and hard, but our morale and spirits are always high due to the amazing living conditions. We have all the amenities one could ask for, especially in this environment.

Warm Showers, great food, wifi in our tents, and yes even a Green Bean (Afghan equivalent to Starbucks.) What I think makes it even easier is the love and support that every Soldier receives from home. Every letter sent is like Christmas to that waiting Soldier, so know that each one that you take the time

**“What I think makes it even easier is the love and support that every Soldier receives from home..”**

to write is received with excitement and given the Soldiers complete attention.

One of the many things I enjoy about the Army is the constant training. Even though we have arrived at our destination, we are always training. When we put boots on the ground here at Shindand we have been training with our counterparts, the 510 Clearance Company. They have done nothing but set us up for success. We will continue to fight the mission at hand, making sure that we are safe, but also that our time in Afghanistan is a step in the right direction for the country, and that we continue strengthening our partnerships with the ANA and the Afghan people.

If life is a journey and not a destination, I can say that this deployment thus far is a journey that I am proud and privileged to be a part of.

*Sgt Joshua Barnes is a prior service member of the USMC, where he attained the rank of sergeant. He deployed with the Marines twice to Iraq. He joined the 704th in August of this year, and currently serves as a Squad Leader in 1st Platoon.*

1st Platoon on patrol in the high deserts of Western Afghanistan.



Second Platoon Soldiers getting ready for the flight in on a C-17.



## SECOND PLATOON let's roll!

By SPC Kyle Cox

(22 January 2013) - It seems like forever has gone by, but we are finally in Afghanistan. Our days have been busy since the moment NTC (National Training Center) kicked off. NTC ended and launched into a summer of classes and schools and Fort Leonard Wood and elsewhere. Then we had drills at Camp Robinson, more classes and yellow ribbon in Little Rock. Finally with a month to go before mobilization the entire unit headed back to Fort Leonard Wood for more training. Then we all got a plane and headed to Fort Bliss, TX. More training and a little break for Christmas and at last after, 7 months, 5 states (we were in New Mexico for

a while,) 100s of hours of training we got on a plane for Afghanistan.

It seems like everyone has settled in well. Since we arrived we spent most of our time getting our trucks ready for mission, and learning about the latest tactics from the company we are replacing. They have taught us a lot about what is happening in the area, and what to expect when we are out on route. The whole platoon is taking in everything they have to say and working hard to replace them without a gap in effort or performance. As a platoon we look forward to sharing our stories and pictures with everyone back home. Until then, God Bless!



# THIRD PLATOON

## around the world in 8 days?

By SSG Michael Wilbanks

(22 January 2013) - Hello Family, Friends, and a few in between. A lot has changed since the last newsletter was published. We have traveled the world and had delays at every stop, Maine, Germany, Kyrgyzstan. We arrived at Manas, near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the platoon immediately got into a snow ball fight. Its good to always work on your tactics! The weather there was cold but manageable. We stayed there for a couple of days until we made our first movement into Afghanistan. We were headed for famed Camp Leatherneck.

Camp Leatherneck was nice, in a dry, dirty, Marine kind of way. We had good training for our upcoming endeavors. While at Camp Leatherneck, we found this neat thing called a Bazaar. They sell everything under the sun. Wheeling and dealing everything that they sell. Some of the guys bought a lot of stuff, and some just enjoyed the atmosphere. After several delays, we final arrived at Shindand Air Base (SAB.) Our first night at SAB it snowed on us. The snow might have followed us from Manas?

**“We arrived at Manas, near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the platoon immediately got into a snow ball fight.”**

It was not enough snow to cover the ground but it was very cold.

Getting out on mission, we were finally exposed to the local culture and found out they will drive anything with wheels. We saw a big beat up truck, it had had flipped and crushed the cab at some point, but all that did was add some free air conditioning. The truck driver was still driving the truck with his head out of the window.

So far the morale is high and all the guys are doing well. Thanks for all the packages and letters, keep ‘em coming!

L-R: 1LT Omar Fuentes and SSG Jarrod Stroud, these jokers love to take lots of pictures of themselves.



## FMT more than just a monkey wrench!

By SFC Toney Bussey

(25January2013) - Despite a long journey away from their loved ones and faced with an enormous task; the 704th Maintenance Team continues to be fulfill their promise to be motivated, professional, and charismatic. All their training has finally ended and now the true test has been revealed.

During these few weeks of the arrival in Afghanistan, FMT has been already been working hard to accomplish the tasks set before them, Not only is their work in motor pool fulfilling the needs of the Company, but the Soldiers performance on missions has been nothing short of outstanding. We have all hit the ground running.

Maintenance is a mission critical asset, and all the experiences of the Soldiers are paying huge dividends. Past deployments, civilian job skills, education, are all playing a role in the overall excellence of the Field Maintenance Team. As we go forward, new and seasoned Soldiers will learn from each other and band together to ensure the mission success of the 704th. Maintenance will not stop until the job is done!



L: RG31 ready to roll.



489 EN BN Alpha Company Guidon. Alpha Company was deployed to Iraq in 2003-04, and was deactivated in 2007 and the 704th EN CO was reactivated. The A CO guidon currently hangs in CPT Ys office.

## HEADQUARTERS Howdy from HQ!!!

By SSG George Tackett

(25January2013) - We are all getting along just fine. CPT Yarbrough (CDR) has us all hopping from the moment go. He's a hard taskmaster, but we love him. (Don't we, gang?!) 1LT Scott (XO) keeps us on our toes and physically fit, and is outstanding at ensuring our Commander has no worries.

If you look up "Secret Squirrel Intelligence Expert" in an encyclopedia you'll probably find 1LT Schoen's (CoIST) picture there. His mission analysis crew provides the best INTEL one could ask for, and his action summaries read like an Umberto Eco novel: very in depth and entertaining.

1SG Elmore (1SG) is being his lovable grumpy self and keeping his NCOs in line. He's taken SPC Drennon under his wing and won't let him go though. (Poor Drennon...)

SFC Harner (S-3) has the OPS streamlined, as always, and is right on top of any issues that crop up, ready with an answer when the XO asks. SSG Weathers (S-4) has our logistical issues on his mind every minute and solves all of our supply problems like he plays X-Box. He keeps SPC Wade and SPC Fryar running around so much they have to change their uniforms twice a day. Right, Wade? (And Wade says, "Yeaahh!")

SGT Knott (MEDICAL) runs his department like he thinks he works at a hospital. (Oh, wait! He does work at a hospital! No wonder he has the best medical team in the Army!) He's bored right now, though, taking care of sniffles, in-grown toenails, and insanity. We hope he stays bored! SGT Witt (S-6) is a wonder with his radios and satellites. If it doesn't work before he gets hold of it, it works after he gives it back, that's for darn sure. We miss you all back home, take care!



# Soldiers being Soldiers

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS NOW

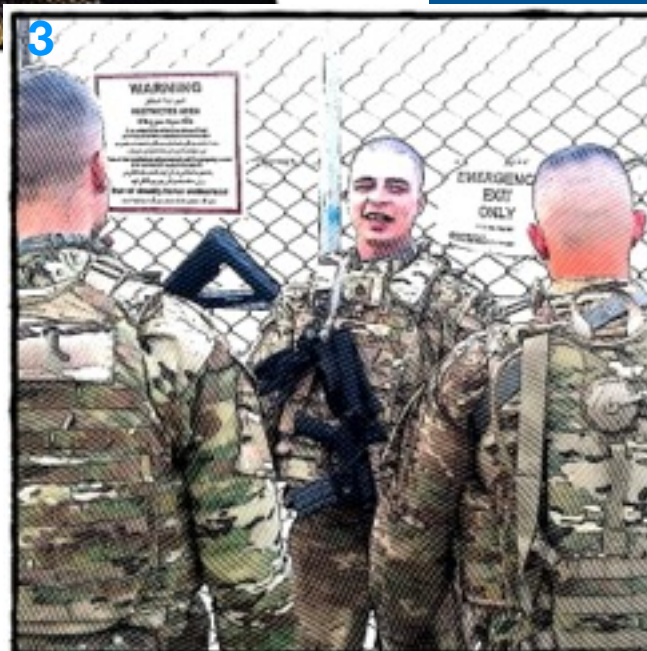


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- (1)SPC Jake Thomas with his game face on.
- (2)SSG Keith Olson, securing his mustache for one last plane ride in to country.
- (3)SSG Brian Weathers instructing the LTs on supply, war, and life in general.



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# Soldiers being Soldiers

THE JOURNEY BEGINS NOW



- (1) 3rd Platoon joking in the tents.
- (2) CPL Roy Wade, waiting for the bus at Shindand Air Base.
- (3) PFC Jason Roberts and the breakfast of champions!



# Soldiers being Soldiers

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS NOW



(1) (L-R) PFC Andrew Blain, CPL Travis Dobbins, SPC Antonio Waters, SPC Jake Thomas, SGT Courey Johnson, SPC Javier Chavez Jr. and SPC Stephen Drennon take a break from helping the USO move to a new facility on base.  
(2) SPC Theodore Delmo stands the watch as the sunsets over Shindand.





# AWARDS AND PROMOTIONS

## PROMOTIONS:

### **1LT:**

Adam Mueller

### **SPECIALIST:**

Joshua Crane



One of the first looks at the mountains of western Afghanistan



## TOP's Corner

show me a Soldier, I'll show you someone who needs a haircut

By 1SG Clayton Elmore

(23 January 2013) - I want to let you know that all of your Soldiers are doing well and that their attitudes are very positive. They are taking a lot of pride in turning their barracks into a 'home away from home' and have been very creative. As for support, we can use snack foods like chips, beef jerky, etc. because these items are not readily available for purchase or in the dining facility.

I would like to thank all of you for your support so far and everything that you have provided for us. I've really appreciated all of the pictures and posts from home on Facebook. I look forward to seeing more from the families. These reminders from home help all of us keep everything in perspective.



1SG Clayton Elmore, proudly displaying the company colors.

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