

# THE CASTLE NEWSLETTER



Issue 16

July 2010

## Heraldic Times



(Coat of Arms)



(Insignia)

### Shield:

Gules, a conventionalized castle of Ehrenbreitstein with ramp or on mount proper, bedruised by a bendlet argent bearing two ribbons of the field and azure with seventeen mullets of the last. A sinister canton bendy of eight ermine and of the field.

### Crest:

On a wreath of the colors, or and gules, a mount argent garnished vert, bearing a linden leaf proper charged with a fleur-de-lis argent.

### Motto:

In Time of Peace Prepare for War.

### Symbolism:

The field of the shield is red, the artillery color. The principal charge is the castle of Ehrenbreitstein bedruised by a bendlet carrying the American colors and seventeen stars, to signify the occupation of the castle by the 17th Field Artillery. The canton alludes to the arms of the 8th Field Artillery from which men were transferred to organize the 17th Field Artillery. The crest commemorates the two most noteworthy battle incidents. The White Mountain is for Blanc Mont. The leaf is taken from Verte Feuille Farm, on of the positions occupied by the regiment in the Soissons offensive; the linden leaf was chosen as being very common in that region. The fleur-de-lis is from the arms of Soissons.

### DISTINCTIVE INSIGNIA

The distinctive insignia is the shield of the coat of arms.

## **President's Comments:**

By Thomas R. Kurtz  
kurtz\_t@comcast.net

We welcome home the soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, who have returned from Afghanistan to their home base at Joint Base Lewis-McCord, Washington. The 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division has scheduled their welcome home ceremony for July 22 and, at which time, the brigade will be re-designated as the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. The 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment is also scheduled to be re-designated as the 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment on October 17 of this year.

I would like to thank LTC Dennis C. Smith for providing the articles written by soldiers of the 3rd Battalion on their experiences, as they served in Afghanistan. The articles have previously appeared on-line or have been published in the local newspapers around Fort Lewis and they have been reprinted in this edition of "The Castle". For those 17th veterans who live in the area of Joint Base Lewis-McCord, Washington, the 3rd Battalion's Change of Command for LTC Smith is scheduled for September 9, 2010.

As the 3rd Battalion comes home our prayers, thoughts and best wishes turn to the 1st Battalion as they depart for their first deployment in support of the International Security Force Afghanistan (ISFA) for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). I'm sure we wish all members of the battalion the best of luck and for a safe return home next year.

Many thanks to Jack Stroud and all of the members of the 2010 Scholarship Selection Committee for their personal time that they devoted in selection of this year's scholarship grant winners. Since 2004 the association has awarded seventeen grants for a total of \$18,000. The association scholarship grants are made possible by the membership of the association, without this support the scholarship program would not happen.

The association's 2010 annual reunion is just a couple of months away, if you have not made plans on attending

now is the time to do so. This will be the twelfth reunion held by the association. There are plenty of sights and shows to be seen in Pigeon Forge, so make sure you bring your family and friends. The reunion notice mailed out in January 2010 had an incorrect street address for the Country Cascades; the correct street address is: **204 Sharon Drive**. I'm looking forward to this year's reunion and hope all 17th Artillery veterans who can attend will be there.

**2010 Scholarship Grants**

**Jackie M. Stroud Chairman Scholarship Committee**

During the association's annual general membership meeting held at the 2009 reunion, three scholarship grants for 2010 were voted on and authorized; one grant for one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1500) and two grants for one thousand dollars (\$1000) each.

There were fourteen requests for scholarship application packets received and eight applicants returned a completed packet.

Each returned application was reviewed independently by the voting members of the committee and awarded points based on their best judgment using the information contained in the packet.

Once each voting members scoring form was returned to me, I established an Order of Merit List (OML) based on totaling the points awarded by all voting members. The 2010 voting committee members consisted of volunteers from our last reunion:

**Gilbert A. Bernabe  
Larry W. Lovejoy  
Terry Wallace**

**Donald L. Brooks  
John C. Melasecca Jr**

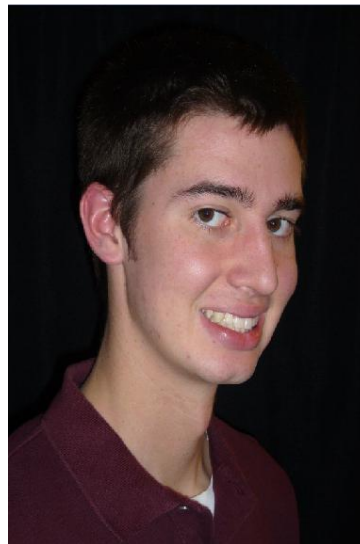
**The 2010 winners of the association scholarship grants in order of merit:**



Cody O. Fouts  
Attending  
South Forsyth High  
School  
Atlanta, Georgia  
With a 4.0 GPA

**\$1,500.00**

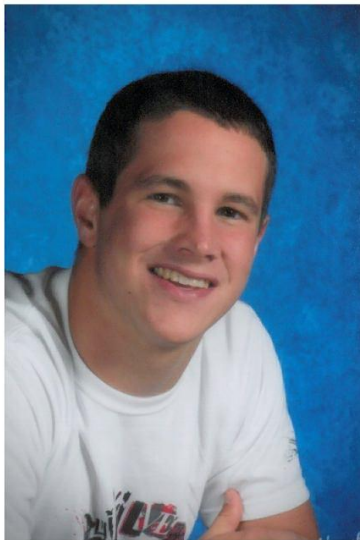
Cody is the son of:  
Neal P. Fouts  
He served with:  
Service 2/17 FA  
Vietnam 1968, and A  
3/17<sup>th</sup> Artillery 1968-  
69 in Germany



Hunter F. Brunwald  
Currently attending  
Eisenhower Senior  
High School  
Lawton, Oklahoma  
With a 4.0 GPA

**\$1,000.00**

Hunter is the son of:  
CSM Philip J.  
Brunwald  
Who is presently  
serving as Command  
Sergeant Major with  
the 1/17<sup>th</sup> FAR at Fort  
Sill.



Hugh G. Lazenberry  
Jr.  
Currently attending  
Friendswood High  
School  
Friendswood, Texas  
With a 4.0 GPA

**\$1,000.00**

Hugh is the grandson  
of:  
Daniel L. Lazenberry  
He served in the 17<sup>th</sup>  
Field Artillery in  
Korea  
1951 - 1952.

Congratulations to our Scholarship winners this year, and a big thank you to our committee who diligently went through all of the applications and scored each and every one of the applications presented to them. The scoring was amazingly close and I was glad I did not have to vote to break any ties in the selection this year. It's great to see we have such intelligent young ones who are aggressively seeking to get to the next level.

Again Congratulation.

Jack Stroud  
Scholarship Chairman  
17th Artillery Regimental Association

## Scholarship winner update:

Dear Mr. Thomas Kurtz and the 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment Association.

*I just wanted to send a quick note to thank you as well as update you. I received a scholarship in the fall of 2006 to attend the University of Colorado at Boulder. I've since graduated and I have a degree in psychology as well as an elementary teaching certificate. I am currently teaching 1<sup>st</sup> Grade in Superior, CO. Thank you very much for awarding me that generous scholarship. It no doubt helped me achieve my dreams of becoming a teacher!*

Katie Bolger

Katie is the daughter of Frank Bolger who served as Motor Sergeant for Headquarters Battery, 2nd Howitzer Battalion, 17th Artillery, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and in An Khe, South Vietnam, from January 1965-September 1966.

## A Few Words From The Treasurer

As always, the best part of my job as Treasurer is to give away money for Scholarships and support for our troops. In the first six months of 2010, the 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment Association has been privileged to give out three Scholarships for a total of \$3,500 to the children or grandchildren of 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery veterans. We also donated \$1,000 for the 3/17<sup>th</sup> FA Homecoming.

Currently, the Association has a total of \$8,975.79 in the bank; \$6,635.687 in the Scholarship Fund and \$2340.11 in the General Fund.

Our 12<sup>th</sup> Reunion is coming up in a couple of months in Pigeon Forge, TN. I hope to see all of there.

Rich Siebe  
Treasurer  
17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment Association

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

I hope everyone is having a great summer so far. Seems the older we get the quicker the seasons pass by and soon it's Christmas

**Our condolences go out to the families of Terry James (see below addresses) and retired 1Sgt. Antonio Lopez. The Lopez family has made a request that anyone who served with 1SG Lopez or his son Tony, they would like to be contacted. Please forward a pictures or info to either of the families at the addresses below. I'm sure that Mrs. Joanie James would probably like the same also pertain to her late**

**husband Terry. Both of these men were Viet Nam veterans. Please keep these families in your thoughts and prayers as well as our troops overseas now.**

**Joanie James, 10694 Berrywood Circle,  
Yucaipa, CA 92399**

**Tony Lopez, 11543 Jonathan Rd, Jacksonville,  
FL 32225**

Sometimes our lives seem to carry more burdens than other times. We see news stories about earthquakes killing 100,000 people in another country. We hear about ethnic cleansing, starvation, religious wars, unemployment rate so high, and a family member in the hospital. I think you can get the picture.

These are times that we must not look at what we DON'T have but what we DO have! This is also a time when we need to pray for our fellow man. Most of us know very well how your life can change in a split second. The bottom line to this is the word "FAITH."

In Hebrews 13:5 God says, "Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you." This is a powerful statement. Hebrews Chapter 11 is filled with many stories of people and their faith along with what they overcame.

Several years ago I made a challenge to myself to read one chapter a day of the New Testament. It takes at the most two-six minutes. After almost a year I completed my challenge. I was so thrilled to tell my late grandfather of my accomplishment. I'll never forget his reply.

"That's good. Now go back and read it again to see what you missed." After about a dozen times later and a few years I saw the truth in what he said and still do!

I challenge you to try this at one chapter a day for just a few minutes starting either with the Old or New Testament. Trust me, the change will be lifelong!  
God Bless,

Richard A. Smith-Chaplain 17th Artillery Association

## 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment Association Life Members (New)

The following named 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery veterans have become Life Members of the 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment Association, since the January 2010 newsletter.

*Correction to #108 Life Member's name, should read:  
\*108 James A Caiella, Headquarters Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion,  
17<sup>th</sup> Artillery (1969-1970)*

109 Paul V. Shepherd Sr., Battery B, 2d Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery (1969-1970)

110 Leonard A. Eason, Headquarters Battery, 2d Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery (1970-1971)  
 111 Jeffrey S. Wilcox, Battery C, 2d Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery (1969-1970)  
 112 Holice Barton Jr., Battery B, 2d Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery (1968-1969)

The following named 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Veterans have paid their 2010 annual dues.

Dennis Keesling	Bob Lowery
Daniel Blubaugh	Philip Smith
Larry Lovejoy	Stephen Hammer
Stephen Rumnock	Richard Wynn
James Buford	Gary Steen
George Tanner	Wilferd (Bob) Huston
Robert Labak	James Widener
Michael Squadrille	Robert Bass
James Yore	David Zell
Norman Barton	Toby Swanson
Alvin Popp	Heinz Schiemann
Roger D. Wolfen	Henry J. Dudek
Edwin Ahonen	Charles Lankford
James Kasaback	William Selis
Stephen Gerhardt	James E. Will
Jerry Luker	Curtis Collier
Raymond (Doug) Runice	Jon Johnson
Buddy Armstrong	James Deno
Marvin Rogers	John Strapac
Victor Robinson Sr.	Victor Guardo
Richard (Dick) Stanton	Doyle Watters
Ray Comeaux	Tom Jones
Leroy Lida	Vincent Falter
Don Arceneaux	Walter Torres Jr.
Roger Nadeau	John Tracy
Marcel Simonet	Frank Bolger
*Deborah Colgan	

## CANNONS FORWARD

By: CPT Eric Livengood, 1st BN, 17<sup>th</sup> IN, Battalion Fire Support Officer

When one thinks of a fire base typically, images of a lone hilltop in Vietnam come to mind, cannoneers slinging empty canisters while packing the breach with powder bags to send another round out in support of their infantry brethren in the valleys below. Fast forward to 2010 Afghanistan, where C Battery 3-17 FA, who provides 155mm indirect fire support to 1-17 Infantry Regiment, recently occupied Fire Base Baghtu. The new fire base is located where the wide desert of the Zahri Plain gives way to the rugged mountains of central Afghanistan. The fire base is 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's northernmost outpost. With the assistance of 562<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company, C Battery quickly constructed the force protection requirements, erected tents for the fire direction center and battery command post, dug in the gun positions, and emplaced two M777 howitzers. Within hours of receiving the *in position ready to fire report*, C Company, 1-17

Infantry was requesting 155mm illumination in support of one of their observation posts.

In late January 2010, 1-17 Infantry identified the need for increased indirect fire support. Much of the battalion's northern area could not be ranged from FOB Frontenac. The battalion was tasked with providing freedom of movement for local Afghans, Afghan Security Forces and NATO security forces along a key route. 1-17 had also been tasked to give up one infantry company to support operations in western Kandahar and Helmand provinces, so the force was spread thin over a large area of operations. MAJ Umbrell, the operations officer for 1-17 IN, wanted to "ensure that maneuver elements remained mobile and focused on population centric operations." The commander decided that the fire base would be built in a location that would allow the "redlegs" to overwatch a large portion of the route 1-17 was tasked to secure, leaving the Stryker equipped infantry platoons free to patrol the route and saturate the population centers. Fire Base Baghtu was built in a location far enough north in the area of operations to extend indirect fires coverage to all of 1-17 Infantry, and provide support for Special Operations units operating in some of the most remote areas of Kandahar Province.



(SSG Turic, C Battery, 3-17 FA, helps his platoon fill sandbags for the 155mm ammunition bunker)

The fire base gets its name from the long, lush, narrow valley located just five kilometers to the north. The Baghtu Valley is an historic hotbed of Taliban activity. As recently as last July, convoys traveling through the valley were subject to ambushes and sustained contact from the high ground. The area has since been relatively quiet, due to the new fire base and numerous patrols from 1-17 Infantry. Significant inroads to the population and increased partnered patrols with the Afghan National Police have occurred since the opening of the remote fire base. Fire Base Baghtu may be located far from the larger forward operating bases, however the firebase does not lack the amenities of the larger bases. As of late March, the fire base has undergone numerous improvements. Shower and laundry facilities are in place and the small gym helps the Soldiers pass time between fire missions. Improvements to the sleep tents, aid station and the final guard tower were completed last week.



(M777 howitzer at Fire Base Baghtu)

To date the Soldiers of C Battery 3-17 FA have fired over 1500 rounds in support of 1-17 Infantry. Just last month the battery fired in direct support of the Afghan National Police. Through an interpreter the ANP commander was able to adjust Illumination rounds to support a checkpoint that had just been attacked. Although some unconventional adjustments using terrain association were made, the cannoneers of C battery were happy to assist. As the temperatures begin to climb and operations in Shah Wali Kot continue, C Battery at Fire Base Baghtu will no doubt play a crucial role in the success of 1-17 Infantry's operations this spring. Cannons forward, *King of Battle*.

## **A FIELD ARTILLERY MEDIC'S CONTRIBUTION: ADAPTING TO LIFE AT A NEW FORWARD OPERATING BASE**

By: Spc Brian Briseno

1st Platoon, A Battery, 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, has always excelled at adapting to change. This was particularly evident when the platoon moved from Forward Operating Base Wolverine in Zabul Province, Afghanistan to FOB Price in Helmand Province to support the brigade's new mission providing freedom of movement for the Afghan people along major highways. An advance party of approximately 15 soldiers arrived at FOB Price at the beginning of January. Danish and British troops were already at FOB Price, so Stryker soldiers occupied an area outside of the existing infrastructure and had to establish living facilities. Until they were able to develop their own life support, they borrowed heavily from the Danish and British contingents. Soldiers slept in the British transient tents and were only allowed to eat at the British dining facility once every three days. Conditions weren't perfect but 1st Platoon made do.

The first thing they did was build a firing point and Fire Direction Center (FDC). 1st Platoon has always tried to set the standard whenever possible, so they made the choice to go above and beyond in establishing the position with limited resources and supplies. Four carpenters from the platoon erected the FDC shelter with scavenged wood

and build a well-constructed, professional looking structure. The rest of the advance party filled sandbags and stood up seven-foot Hesco barriers around the firing point perimeter. In about a week they had two outstanding firing positions and a fully functional FDC before they were at full strength as a platoon. They were in position, ready to provide indirect fire support with an established firing point infrastructure before they had their own sleep tents or dining facility.

Once the rest of the platoon arrived and were able to function as an artillery unit I was able to determine what medical resources were available to us. There was a Danish medical center already at FOB Price and I took the opportunity to introduce myself. I was apparently the first American to make the attempt of working with them. After getting to know them they taught me their procedures which included my first experience with an IO (an IV done through the bone).

The time I worked with them was on ANA Soldier who was shot in the leg. I was partnered with a Danish soldier named Jakab while they were treating the injury. Together they exposed the leg, replaced the tourniquet, packed the wound and stabilized the leg. The treatment was similar to the live tissue training I had done at Fort Lewis which made the procedure incredibly easy. Everything went so smoothly that it wasn't until they moved the patient from the trauma bed to the litter that I noticed they hadn't spoken English throughout the procedure. In the After Action Review, an Army standard assessment of experiences, one of the Dutch medics mentioned he was impressed that I had been able to become part of their team so quickly.

After I had shown I was a capable medic Danish doctors invited me to help them treat local Afghans at the Lindenau clinic. The clinic is run by Special Forces Soldiers and their Civil Affairs team. It was a little odd being a guest of the Danish at an American-run clinic. The clinic is open to local Afghans every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon. The first time I went I had no idea what to expect. I met up with the Danes at 9:30 a.m. to get a quick briefing on how to act and then immediately started treatments. That day there were almost 50 people being treated by only eight providers including myself. Since this was the first time there I didn't know I had to provide my own interpreter so I mainly just assisted the Danish doctors.

After my orientation day the Danish doctors told me if I was able to get my own interpreter that they were comfortable having me treat patients myself. I coordinated with 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 5/2 ID (SBCT) to see if they could spare an interpreter for a few hours every other day. The first interpreter I had didn't last long. His first day there a local child was admitted who had been bitten by a dog. The treatment was straightforward but there was a fair amount of blood enough to make the interpreter almost faint. The next day he didn't show and I went back to assisting the doctors.

Treating local Afghans is an interesting experience. The majority of adults assert they suffer from what sounds like life-threatening diseases, but once examined don't seem to have anything wrong with them. The Danish

taught me that Tylenol often cures them in a matter of minutes. But they all need to be examined thoroughly to find the ones that are truly sick. The children however, are a completely different story.

Most of the children suffer from malnourishment, so every child gets a bottle of vitamins and enriched oatmeal or formula, depending on age. I've had the opportunity to see and treat many different pediatric cases. Because the mission is only to treat the injuries and assist in gaining confidence of the local populace, we have to ignore the child abuse. I do have to commend these kids; they are extremely tough. A nine-year-old boy originally had 3rd degree burns covering his hands and after the initial treatment he had to come back every few days to be treated and reexamined. Part of that involved pulling off the dead skin, something that's done with heavy painkillers in the U.S. The child had no painkillers and barely even winced.

On days I'm not practicing my medical skills with the Danish or at the gun line while we're shooting. I'm in the FDC ready to treat my soldiers. One such day the Special Forces Team Sergeant came into FDC to find out about the possibility of shooting for his team on a mission that night. While he was there I asked if he wanted an extra medic to come along, and he agreed to it. I got a quick tour of their compound, talked to their medic about procedures and my role in this mission and was told to get approval from my chain of command while he did the same. Once we both got approval I was told to meet back up at 10:30 p.m. so that we could leave the compound at midnight.

The mission was to eliminate a Taliban group that had been harassing a British patrol. To do this the main team was going to drive to a nearby village with 20 Afghan National Police that they had trained, then foot march six kilometers to the target. The British were going to move out and draw fire. The team sergeant, another member of the team, a few ANP and I would pull over-watch in case the team needed heavy weapons reinforcements. I spent that night rotating with one of the support soldiers as gunner on the Common Remotely Operated Weapon station mounted with an Mk 19 Grenade Launcher until the mission kicked off. I can't talk about what happened during the mission but I can say that no one died.

What 1st Platoon achieved demonstrates the capability to adapt and overcome. By applying that same platoon work ethic to my own job I was able to contribute not only to our mission success but also to the efforts of our U.S. and Coalition counterparts.

## **THE GUNS, THE GUNS, THANK GOD FOR THE GUNS!**

By Staff Sergeant Peter C. Bazo

As the sun settles into the west signaling the end of yet another day, the cool, gentle, northerly breeze begins to pick up and add a chill to the already cool day. Unabated, work continues on the ever-busy gun line. With nightfall approaching quickly and units from 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division still on patrol, vigilance is the watchword. This nether time, between sunset and nightfall, gives the enemy his greatest advantage to initiate an attack from hidden positions in the

darkening shadows of dusk. The vigilance continues until all patrols have returned to Forward Operating Base Spin Boldak. Even then the crews of 1st Platoon, Bravo Battery, 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment are just a moment away from placing accurate fire upon any threat or target.

FOB Spin Boldak is a small base located on the southeastern border of Afghanistan, within eyesight of the town of Chaman in northwestern Pakistan. Surrounded by distant mountains and rock formations jutting upwards from the desert floor into endless blue sky, the FOB is home to a battalion of Cavalry troopers from Fort Lewis, Washington. This area, known for its prolific smuggling operations, from cars to opium, has long been crucial to enemy forces as a source of finance and infiltration into Afghanistan from their hideouts in Pakistan. Although the frequency of attacks on International Security Assistance Forces has decreased, the recent memory of attacks reminds everyone that the enemy is still watching and waiting for the opportunity to strike again.

On a late, not so distant summer afternoon, Cavalry troopers were conducting a patrol roughly 13 miles from Spin Boldak when the enemy got tired of waiting. As the patrol maneuvered their Strykers through a choke point between the bases of two mountains the enemy chose to attack and test the newly arrived unit. Initiating the attack with an Improvised Explosive Device and disabling a vehicle, the enemy fighters rained down intense fire from multiple directions on the now stationary patrol. The patrol, unable to utilize their greatest advantage -mobility- was fixed into position and fighting to gain an advantage.

With the situation quickly developing, the commanders decided to use orbiting fighter-bombers in an attempt to neutralize the enemy presence and allow the patrol to recover its casualties and damaged equipment. With close air support strafing the enemy positions with every available weapon, it seemed as though the crisis had been averted. As the last of the air assets delivered their munitions and moved into over-watch positions, it became clear that the enemy was still in position and continuing to maneuver around the fixed patrol.

The patrol leader, now with only one option remaining, contacted the command net and calmly stated, "Fire mission."

Thirteen miles away in a dusty tent next to two 155mm M777 Howitzers; the Fire Direction Center received the call for fire. Within seconds, the crew cleared the regional airspace, plotted a firing solution, and sent the warning order to the gun crews.

As the crews loaded and began to raise their tubes to firing positions, a radio call went out, "Troops in contact, Taliban in the open. "Fire for effect!"

With the setting sun silhouetting the howitzers against the blood red sky, both guns fired simultaneously, shooting 100-pound shells at twice the speed of sound towards the enemy. The howitzers' concussion shook the earth and the rocket motors ignited, pushing the round was to its maximum range. The howitzer crews continued to fire round after round, knowing that each round was showering the enemy with steel rain and potentially saving

the life of a comrade. As the last of the rounds exited the tube, an eerie silence settled over the gun line. Tense minutes followed, feeling like hours.

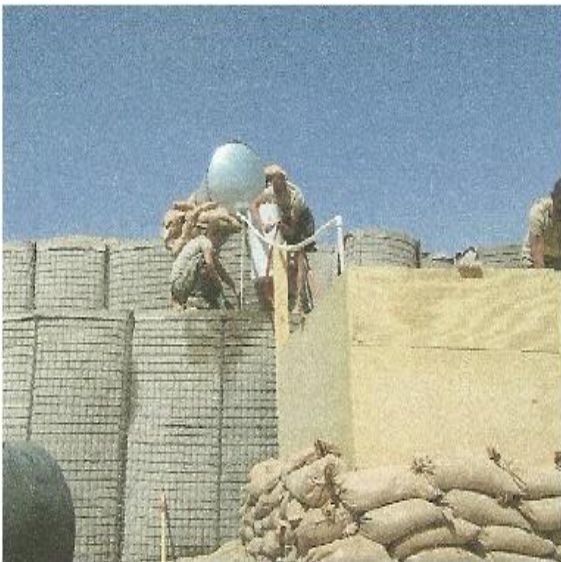
Finally, a single phrase sounded over the radio, bringing relief and pride to the exhausted crews: "All enemy neutralized."

With the enemy threat extinguished, the patrol was able to recover its casualties and equipment, and return to the security of base. After testing themselves against the new unit, the enemy forces quickly retreated to their caves and mud huts. They were unwilling to continue the face-off with powerful ISAF forces directly.

Since this engagement, the region and life for the troopers has stabilized. Their ever present patrols serve to remind the local population that they are free of tyranny as well as to discourage the enemy from attempting to destabilize the region. Although the threat of attack is always very real, comfort can be gained from the knowledge that just over the horizon the men from 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Bravo Battery stand ready to deliver fires, on the second, to anyone who needs their help.

## PERSEVERANCE

By Pvt. Kyle Vandenplas – 13B Cannoneer



*Soldiers from 3/A/3-17 FA install a water heater for their make shift shower at Fire Base Gator (SGT Juan Eulloqui)*

Adapting and overcoming are two central themes to everyday life in the Army. One does not join up to take the easy path. The 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment's deployment to Afghanistan has repeatedly reinforced these truisms. However, there is a distinct feeling of pride gained from rising to the challenge. It is significant to see what one can accomplish with sheer will power, minimal resources, and team work.

In January 2009, we realized everything was going to be different for 3-17 FA. After a grueling one and half year train up for Iraq, the 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team was dealt a change of mission, from Iraq to Afghanistan.

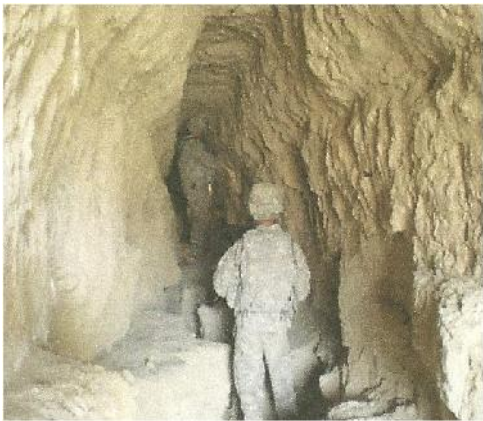
This was no minor alteration. Having trained as an Infantry unit all the way through company evaluation and live fire exercises at Yakima Training Center, we were more than prepared for urban warfare. Afghanistan, however, is an entirely different war, involving distinct tactics and another culture. The battlefield was now going to be located in mountains and wastelands, with villages scattered throughout. Afghanistan also meant we were reverting back to our core competencies as Artillerymen. Even though the extensive training for Iraq did not call for us to shoot the big guns, we had maintained our proficiencies. We were more than ready to provide accurate indirect fire support for the brigade.

After our return from the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, in March 2009 we were tasked with fielding the military's latest and greatest howitzer system, the M777A2. Up to this point we had been shooting the M198. Even though both are towed 155mm howitzers, they are two completely different animals, each with unique characteristics. After a crash, two-week training session we packed up our new toys and sent them overseas, pre positioning them for the big move. The next time we would see them would be four months later at Kandahar Air Field (KAF), Afghanistan.

My unit, 1st Platoon, A Battery, 3-17<sup>th</sup> FA, was split into platoons after arriving on KAF and knocking out two weeks of staging and accountability. Then we began the process of pushing out to forward operating bases across Southern Afghanistan. One by one, the battery's platoons received word about which FOB or combat out-post they would be occupying. When we finally received our march orders they were Spartan at best-grid coordinates and a brief verbal description of the COP. No matter, away we went. After traveling for a few hours on Highway 1we pulled into a small area surrounded by Hesco barriers and concertina wire. Aside from 30 soldiers from the Afghan National Army and buildings they were occupying, there was nothing there. We immediately emplaced the guns and took up a defensive position. That was Day 1 at Fire Base Gator.

Setting up the first week was an arduous task with a lot of moving pieces. We began position improvement with minimal tools at our disposal. We filled countless sand bags, made shelters out of abandoned 20-foot shipping containers, and began putting up parachutes to provide much-needed shelter from the blistering Afghan sun. It was too hot for our tents and they did not provided any more protection than the parachutes. All of this went on while the ANA sat atop a hill staring down at what must have been an entertaining spectacle. Slowly, things began to come together as we carved our names into a remote COP in a desolate part of the country.

Daily life was rough. The only water was bottled and the majority of it was required for drinking. Showers were rationed to one every three days, nine bottles of water per shower. Many of my brethren began to smell a little ripe but that was a small inconvenience.



*Soldiers from 3/A/3-17 FA inspect a cave while on patrol outside of Fire base Gator (SGT Juan Eulloqui)*

A bigger problem was that we had only five fuel cans. Everything on our side of the COP ran off the five-kilowatt generator, so there was constant fear that we would run out of fuel. We had the fueller truck top off our three Medium Tactical Vehicles trucks when the logistical patrol came, and then we would siphon fuel from the MTVs throughout the week; two out of the three MTVs were dead anyway. Then, inexplicably, the five -kw generator died. Some of my fellow Artillerymen rose to the challenge. Working with pieces that would leave MacGyver in tears, the Soldiers were able to breathe life back into the generator, allowing us to stay capable of firing in support of other combat units.

Within two months we were no longer living underneath parachutes and out of shipping containers. The supplies requested had come in, and we build floors and walls for the tents, barriers for the entrance to the compound and a tent to store our food and eat when the weather was bad. Working through local contractors, more Hesco barriers were put up, electrical wiring installed for generators, and a well was dug to provide us with water. I could barely recognize the place.

Still, there were many shortcomings. Dealing with the local national contractors was a nightmare. An agreement would be made on a price for a particular project, like creating an ammunition holding area or connecting the shower trailer to the generators, and the contactor would promise to come the following day. A few days would pass with the contractors in sight. Eventually they would show up, do a little bit of work, and ask for payment. In order to actually see the tasks get finished, it would have to be discussed two or three more times, and always they would ask for more money.

Electricity was another problem. Being so far out from major FOBs limited our access to professional support, it was almost impossible to get Kellogg, Brown and Root electricians to come to the COP, and the Army engineers were tied up with other projects. That left local contractors, with only one drawback, the local nationals had no idea how to properly wire a generator.

One of the contractors brought what he called an electrician, and had him begin work. The “electrician” grabbed the instructions manual, written in English, and began looking through the pictures. We all knew we were

in trouble at that point. Another “electrician”, who seemed to have a better grasp on the matter, also gave it a shot. While wiring the shower trailer I heard a loud, strange sound. Having no clue as to what it was I ran around the corner, only to see a giant electrical ball of flame bursting from the wires. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Finally, we came upon some US contractors who were familiar with conservative wiring techniques. They squared us away.



*Soldiers from 3/A/3-17 FA support a clearing operation in Northern Zabal Province with illumination fire (SGT Juan Eulloqui)*

As enemy activity increased in the area, so did our efforts to provide COP security and force protection. Although we were undermanned – R and R leave and tasking constantly drained manpower-we still pulled guard shifts and patrolled the area surrounding the COP. We did this all while maintaining our primary mission focus; our gun crews were always ready to deliver accurate firepower, on time and on target. Even after patrolling some of us inevitably had to rotate right into a multiple-hour guard rotation. Those conditions were not ideal but the isolation of our position required us to rely first and foremost on our defense capabilities.

Now we have another challenge, though it is the same challenge that soldiers have always faced-pack up your gear, it’s time to move. We recently received word that we are jumping to another location from which to base our operations. It is hard to look around and see the effort that has gone into making Fire Base Gator “home”, and to think about starting over. I hope that another unit inherits Fire Base Gator, and can benefit from the struggles we fought through.

We are prepared for whatever comes next though. Switching from an Infantry to an Artillery mission on a short notice, using a new howitzer system, and everyday struggles that come with surviving far from the supply chain have show us all that we can persevere under any circumstances. Life is an ever changing process here for



the Soldiers of 3-17 FA, but we are making the best of it, and every day we are a little closer to being home.



*Soldiers from 3/A/3-17 FA patrol the high ground outside Fire Base Gator (SGT Juan Eulloqui)*

## **EXCALIBUR SHOOT**

By: Corporal Matthew Axford

It was a pleasant evening at Jelawur Strong Point, the kind of evening that makes you forget that home is thousands of miles away and that you are in the Arghandab River Valley of Kandahar Province in southern Afghanistan. The temperature had cooled nicely and we had just finished up another platoon barbecue consisting of some mystery Afghan meat (possibly beef, most likely goat), nann, and fresh salsa.

Then it came across the radio – intelligence assets had picked up traffic stating that 100 Taliban fighters were crossing the nearby river, OH-58 scout helicopters and various Unmanned Aerial Vehicles were immediately dispatched to the area to get eyes-on. The guard towers were reinforced and the soldiers of the 2nd Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division got their game faces on. We knew that with a force that large, our 155mm M777 Howitzers were an ideal choice to eliminate this insurgent threat.

After orienting our guns in the general direction of the river there was little else to do but monitor the radio traffic, hoping to get a grid, a target. But it wasn't long before it became apparent that a force of 100 Taliban fighters had indeed formed and moved across the river then they had since disbanded. A smaller enemy element was spotted north of the river and was engaged and destroyed with Hellfire rockets. Then it happened. The Fire Effects Coordination Center of 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment called us up on our secure phone and gave us exactly what we have been waiting impatiently for; a target.

Several men had been seen by our eyes in the sky coming out of a building carrying what appeared to be

large bags. The men proceeded to bury the bags in a culvert on a road frequently used by International Security Assistance Forces. That was all we needed. A grape hut in the middle of a vineyard was now our target. Description: enemy safe house, possible weapons cache and Improvised Explosive Device production facility. Given the nature of the target and the presence of civilian buildings in close proximity, the best way to engage this target was with the most sophisticated round ever fielded by an artillery unit – XM982 Excalibur, a GPS-Guided precision munition with a six-figure price tag. All were waiting on was for the insurgents to reoccupy the structure. Fire Direction NCO Staff Sgt. George Norris started working a firing solution with his FDC while Sgt. George Holmes, gun chief for 1st Section, 2nd Platoon prepared his howitzer and round for employment.

When the order to fire the mission came it took a second for it to register. This was going to be the first time an artillery unit from Ft. Lewis fired Excalibur in Afghanistan and we all knew it. The moment passed quickly, however, and we focused on the mission at hand. We rechecked our data one last time and sent the mission down to the howitzer. Second later we heard the unmistakable boom of the cannon. Fingers were crossed as we counted down the seconds of the estimated two minutes time of flight. Our fire direction officer, 1LT Liam Keys, was on the phone with 1-17's FECC the entire time. They were monitoring the target via UAV video feed and the audible yelling and cheering our FDO heard over the phone let him know when the round impacted.

We had done it. We had successfully fired the Excalibur round for the 5th SBCT. But more importantly, we had neutralized an insurgent threat. The battle damage assessment consisted of five enemy dead, one enemy safe house destroyed, one weapons cache destroyed, and one enemy motorcycle destroyed. A solid night's work for us. But we still had troops out there, so we maintained our readiness through the night.

The Excalibur turned out to be our only mission and no group of 100 insurgents was ever located. But that mission has proved to be a highlight of our time in Afghanistan so far. In a deployment thus far filled with illumination and high-explosive missions that come tantalizing close to happening, that one Excalibur round is our one claim to fame. But with nine months left, there's plenty of time left for us to get more action...we can't wait.

## PFC David Madrid Jr.



## Citation for 1-17 FA Valorous Unit Award (VUA)

The Department of the Army General Order 2009-08 awards the Valorous Unit Award (VUA) for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. The battalion was attached to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division during the cited period. Department of the Army, Permanent Orders 301-03, dated 28 October 2009 has the citation for the Valorous Unit Award (VUA) for HHC, 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry and its subordinate units. Thanks to SFC Throckmorton, 1-17 BN SR HR Sgt. for providing a copy of the permanent order to the association. The citation reads as follows:

*For extraordinary heroism action against an armed enemy. During the period 24 April 2003 to 22 March 2004. Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division and its subordinate units displayed extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The unit performed mobility, counter-mobility, force protection, and humanitarian operations that greatly benefited both Coalition Forces and Iraqi citizens. Task Force Pathfinder, the unit's route clearance mission, utilized vehicle mounted mine detector equipment and undoubtedly saved countless coalition lives while maintaining freedom of movement throughout central Iraq. In addition, the unit provided outstanding engineer support throughout its deployment. Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division's outstanding performance of duty is in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflects distinct credit upon the unit and the United States Army.*

PFC David Madrid Jr. served with Battery C, 17<sup>th</sup> Artillery Battalion during World War II. David enlisted in 1941 and was discharged in August 1945. His job title was: Medium Artillery Crewman. David's pictures were provided to the association historian, by his granddaughter Judy Ramirez. Judy sent a total of 44 pictures. Thanks to Judy for the information and pictures about her grandfather.



*(PFC Madrid is in the center playing the accordion)*

## 17th Field Artillery Gear

(25% of all donations for association's gear are placed in the scholarship fund.)

The caps have the 17th Artillery Crest embroidered on it. The Cap is black and has an adjustable strap.



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To help defray the rising cost of postage and printing of the association's newsletter. Sign up to receive the "The Castle" by email. Your computer will need the "Microsoft Word" program.

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We will continue to mail the newsletter to anyone who does not have Internet access or a program to open Microsoft Word program

### Association Officers 2010

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The Castle newsletter is published in the interest of the members and veterans of the 17th Artillery Regiment Association and has been approved by the board of directors."

Any articles for the January 2011 newsletter must be submitted to the association secretary by December 31, 2010.

/s/Thomas R. Kurtz  
Thomas R. Kurtz  
Association President