



Task Force patrols border, villages

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Jeff Troth

Soldiers of Task Force 1-501st PIR descended on the mountain passes of the Afghanistan/Pakistan border like a snow storm—like an avalanche. For two weeks the soldiers manned checkpoints, searched villages and examined caves for caches of weapons.

Operation Avalanche was designed to impede the enemies of Afghanistan from using the months prior to the snow fall to move weapons and supplies across the border and stage them for their spring offensive.

“We are helping to ensure that the Afghanistan government stays in control,” said Capt. William Kilgore, task force intelligence officer. “We are doing this by keeping the enemies of Afghanistan from creating a logistical center within the country to stage terrorist activities.”



Capt. Brent Morrow uses an interpreter to tell villagers they have 20 minutes to bring out all weapons before his soldiers start their search during a village assessment.



The first lift of Company A soldiers board CH-47 Chinooks at dawn. These paratroopers were let off on the high ground to provide security for the second lift which performed a village assessment for weapons of war and intel on the Taliban.

To accomplish this the task force sent two companies to separate passes, one overtly, the other covertly.

Company C arrived in broad daylight via CH-47 Chinooks and set up a check point. The plan – those transporting arms would take a different route – the one that Company A went to in the middle of the night.

From a distance the hills and mountains that Company

A had to ruck up and down looked like gentle hills, but the soldiers making the trek quickly found out differently.

“At the time, the rucking sucked. There is just something about climbing a 60 degree hill with a 75 pound ruck that is not fun,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Ashley Thweatt, a joint terminal attack controller attached to the 501st. “Looking back now though – it was great. It gave me, an Air Force JTAC the opportunity to meld with my Army comrades.”

Word about the checkpoints quickly traveled and the companies spent their days searching people traveling between villages or who journeyed to

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Salerno Happenings

Comedy Show

A USO comedy show stops at Salerno Dec. 21. Comic relief will be provided by Mike Schwartz and Dwayne Perkins in the expansion area. A barbeque will provide refreshments. Pull up a piece of earth or BYOC (bring your own chair). Time to be determined.

Numbers Grow

Troop strength at the FOB will increase in January with the addition of 200 coalition soldiers.

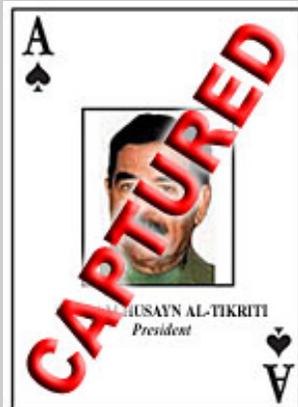
Movie Night

The chaplain is hosting a movie night Fridays starting at 1400. Keep an eye open for the flyer on what movies will be shown Dec. 19.

The World

Hussein Captured

On the basis of a tip from a local resident, soldiers from 4th Infantry Division conducted a raid in the town of Adwar, which is about 15 kilometers south of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown. The former Iraqi dictator, who was found in a cellar, looked thinner, had unkempt hair and had a long black -and-grey beard.



Loya Jirga

Some 500 Afghanistan delegates began the loya jirga to hammer out a new constitution. Among the issues they are expected to decide on is the role of Afghan women, Islam's place in politics and the sharing of power in a nation accustomed to fighting over it.

White wins Heisman

A year after knee surgery, Oklahoma's Jason White awarded the Heisman Trophy. White threw 40 touchdown passes and led the third-ranked Sooners to 12 straight wins.

FOB faces

What is your lasting memory of Operation Avalanche?



Knowing that all the drills we have done in training have paid off during this real world operation.
Spec. Fulgencio Marquez
E Battery

Falling asleep at 1500 and then artillery rounds going off an hour later.

Pfc. Shane Slack
HQ Company



Getting out and doing missions instead of sitting around at the FOB.
Spec. Patrie Pancho
Forward Support Company

Lt. Anazagasty saying that "there is just one more hill, one more klick to go."

Staff Sgt. Rick Bashore
Company A



Injuries expected to drop with new parachute

By Pfc. Eliamar Castanon
Fort Benning PAO

FORT BENNING, Ga. — Airborne Soldiers should expect to see a new parachute system in the next few years that will replace the T-10 model that has been in use since the 1950s.

The Advanced Tactical Parachute System is expected to decrease the landing impact velocity for jumpers, provide a more reliable reserve system than the Modified Improved Reserve Parachute System of the T-10 and improve the harness.

“We were looking for a parachute that will lower the rate of descent and lessen the impact with the hopes and expectations that this would result in a reduction in injuries,” said Joe Jones, combat development specialist with the Directorate of Combat Developments.

Rate of descent is the speed at which jumpers fall to the ground.

The T-10 has been modified a number of times but has reached the limits of its growth. A new approach had to be taken, Jones said, resulting in an entirely different design.

The ATPS canopy is not circular in shape, as the T-10 is. It is a highly modified cross-shaped canopy with an inflated diameter 14 percent greater than that of the T-10, with 28 percent more surface area.

The reserve unit is a cone-shaped, center-pull deployment system. It includes apex scoop pockets at the top of the canopy and skirt assist lines at the system’s hem to promote fast opening during low-speed malfunctions.

The main container bag is made of Cordura, an abrasion- and water-resistant fabric.

Both the ATPS main and reserve canopies are made of low-porosity ripstop nylon with Teflon-coated suspension lines.

The entire system weighs 51.2 pounds, compared to the T-10’s 44

pounds.

The 14-percent weight increase earns jumpers a 25-percent reduction in rate of descent. The T-10’s rate of descent is 22 to 24 feet per second, causing a strong landing impact.

The ATPS’ rate of descent is 16 feet per second, reducing the landing impact by 53 percent.

The T-10 parachute system was designed when the total weight of a jumper and equipment averaged 300 pounds.

During Operation Just Cause, more than 4 percent of Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion,

75th Ranger Regiment, suffered jump-related injuries - 28 Rangers and their equipment weighed between 350 and 435 pounds.

“The T-10 was originally intended for jumpers who didn’t weigh what Soldiers weigh today and wasn’t intended to carry the loads that Soldiers carry today,” Jones said.

Other advantages of ATPS are the reserve system and the harness, said Jones. The ATPS reserve offers improved reliability, he said.

“The ATPS has a reliability of .95, compared to the .75 to .80 of the T-10,” he said.

The reserve is also equipped with enhanced deployment techniques, which equal low opening shocks. It may be deployed using either hand, offers a soft loop closure and has a rate of descent of approximately 26 feet per second with low oscillation.

The biggest advantage in the improvements of the harness is the attaching point of the reserve parachute system, said Jones.

When a T-10 reserve is activated, the opening forces are located in the waist area; essentially, this bows the jumper, he said. ATPS reserve risers



The Advanced Tactical Parachute System.

connect to the harness in the shoulder area. Now when the reserve canopy opens, the opening forces are passed down through the long axes of the body, minimizing the bow effect.

The harness is also fully adjustable and is compatible with the current and future battlefield equipment.

The T-10 and ATPS are mass tactical parachute canopies, meaning they are not steerable. Because these are not steerable, distribution is managed by exit sequences and timing, aircraft altitude and speed, wind and canopy drift characteristics, Jones said.

Because ATPS is not a steerable parachute, test developers are still trying to increase the obstacle avoidance variable while in the sky or on the ground, said Maj. Jason Craft, assistant program manager of personal airdrop systems at the Natick Research Laboratories in Natick, Mass.

“The bottom line is that ATPS reduces jump injuries to airborne Soldiers so they’re in better condition to go into combat operations,” Craft said.

The ATPS is being tested at Yuma Proving Grounds in Yuma, Ariz., and will be fielded between 2005 and 2006.



Spec. Andrew Wolfe, Headquarters Company, adds bite to the ribeye steaks that were served when the companies finished their night missions away from the PAA. For the remainder of the operation day missions were done from the PAA. The meal also included crab legs, mashed potatoes and gravy, macaroni and cheese, and soda.



Gun 5, Battery E, 319th Field Artillery sends a round down range during registration of their 105mm howitzer.

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Pakistan for business or medical reasons. Both companies had a female soldier from the Forward Support Company with them to search the female travelers.

“For the most part the people we searched were cooperative,” said Sgt. Chad Kair, Co. C. “They were taken back that we were there

until the word got out about the checkpoint.”

Before the Comanches set foot at the checkpoint the Headquarters Company scouts had already had eyes on that location for a couple days.

“We were there to confirm or deny enemy routes into and out of Pakistan,” said Spec. Joshua Ebhart, sniper with HQ Co. scouts. “We were successful on getting eyes on the objectives and ensuring the area was safe for the rest of the task

force to come in.”

For each company they not only had their own soldiers pulling security on the high ground around their checkpoints, but also a platoon from Delta Detachment with their armored HMMWVs on each end of the checkpoint.

Also attached to the companies were interpreters and Afghanistan Militia Force soldiers to assist with the searches and to let the locals know what was happening.

“They are very helpful in letting us know what is right and what is wrong,” Kilgore said. “They know the local customs and if someone is not using the correct dialect for that region.”

Although not at the checkpoints with the companies other elements of the task force were staged at a position area for artillery to give assistance.

Within the objective area a tactical operation center had command and control over the operation, Battery E, 319th Field Artillery and



A Detachment D armored HMMWV pulls security on a hilltop as Company A soldiers search for a suspected weapons cache.



A CH-47 Chinook releases a sling load resupply at the PAA.

Battery B, 3rd Battalion, 6 Field Artillery, 10th Infantry Division (Mountain) provided indirect fire support and illumination rounds and the FSC had mechanics on hand to fix the vehicles that took a pounding on the rough Afghan roads.

“Every mission that has come down we have been

able to execute on target and on time,” said Spec. Patrick Foard, Bat. E. “When the rest of the task force were out on mission our guns were able to cover their positions..”

Once the checkpoints proved their worth, Co. A’s mission switched from checkpoints to village assessments.

During this new mission the soldiers talked with the Afghans

and found out about them and any Taliban activity in the area. The soldiers also collected and destroyed any weapons of war they found in the houses. Each adult male was allowed to keep one rifle and two magazines for personal defense.

“In the villages we found grenades and parts for rockets and mines. One family was even using the top of a mine as a plate,” said Spec. Chad Cuccaro, a sapper with HQ Company. “When we found an IED (ordnance) we put it in a ravine and blew it in place.”

Much to the relief of the soldiers, their mode of transportation also changed. Instead of rucking over the mountains they rode in FSC vehicles to the villages, this added to the work load of the mechanics.

“Mechanics will always have a job in wartime,” said Spec. Anthony Peak, a mechanic with the FSC, “because they (soldiers) love to drive and push their vehicles to the limit.”

The soldiers on the ground were not alone. The operation was supported not only by the Army Chinooks, but also Marine Super Cobas and UH-1 Huey Gunships, and Air Force A-10 Warthogs and B-1 bombers. These aircraft not only provided eyes and guns in the sky, but also a quick resupply method for the troops in their fire bases and the PAA.

The Co. G, 104th Aviation Regiment (Penn./Conn. National Guard) Chinooks sling loaded nine vehicles, two water buffalos and 16,000 gallons of fuel. They also transported around 60,000 pounds of cargo to the field.

“The operation has been a success,” said Maj. Val Keaveny, task force operations officer. “We have spent two weeks flooding the border region with paratroopers and gathering our own intel. We have learned a lot about the enemy and shown them that we can be anywhere, anytime with the capability to destroy them.”



Pfc. Ryan Edmonson, Company C, searches an Afghanistan at a checkpoint.



Sgt. Dan Beasley, Forward Support Company works on a HMMWV during Operation Avalanche at the PAA.



ASK MSG NORDSTROM

If you have a question for MSG Nordstrom, drop it off at the ALOC.

Dear MSG Nordstrom,
I couldn't help but notice the increasing depth of the slit trench while coming and going from the PAA. I'll admit that by the end there, I was actually afraid of getting too close and falling in. Why would any 1SG create such an unsafe area?
Signed, Bombs Away

Dear Mad Bomber,
Quit squatting over the pickets and start clearing your drop zone a little better or I'll have 1SG Rebel dig it even deeper. Use your flashlight, Meathead!
MSG N

Dear MSG Nordstrom,
Why do you insist on getting everyone up before first light? I'd like to get a little more shut eye, but I can't ignore your yelling at folks so early in the morning. Can you please consider a 0200Z wake-up? Thanks.
Sincerely, Sleeping In

S1 and S4, First Call!
If my days were as "busy" as yours, I'd be able to sleep in, too. As far as the pre-dawn wake-ups, they are often just bad flash backs to the days when the French and Indians would attack at first light. I

just can't seem to shake the memories. Take cover; get in your hole; here they come again!
MSG N

Dear MSG Nordstrom,
I began to think that all Afghanistan had was rocks but then I noticed the hundreds of Jewels cigar butts beneath the trailers and vehicles at the BOC/CTCP. Are those naturally grown here or imported?
Sincerely, CSM Police Call

Dear CSM,
Just because I bought \$2500 worth of cigars at Manas doesn't make me suspect. I did, however, notice the same thing and had the RTOs water the butts in hopes that they might grow and replenish my dwindling stock.
MSG N

Dear MSG Nordstrom,
I noticed that there seems to be some battle handoff challenges with the Geronimo 11 element, especially when moving to the night shift. Is our night Battle Captain technically challenged? Is there any professional development scheduled for the RTOs and CHEMO? Hello? Is there anyone out there listening?
Signed, Monitor Your A&L

Dear MYAL,
I will ensure you that they will have no problems battle tracking in the future once they've low crawled from the FTCP to the CTCP to the TAC and then around to each Team CP.
MSG N

ODE TO THE RTO

By Staff Sgt. Jay Schulz

*Listening to command net
Saying "copy that" a hundred times a day.
As I take the message "Delaware 6 SP time now"*

I wonder when I will get to go out and play.

*I know that I am important
As I capture the battle on my log
I can't help but wondering
Why the Battle NCO treats me like a dog.*

*When they say, "Tell so and so this."
While I listen like a hawk
I wonder if their thumb is broken
And can't push the button to talk.*

*I'm not bitter at all
About listening to what is going on
The fact that I sit here day in and day out
Without the hope I'll get to tag along.*

*So, remember me, as you SP from the PAA,
And you operate outside the wire
So we can move your push pin
And get the clearance of fire.*

*I will log your goings on
So you can recap at the commander's brief
This is Geronimo 31, reading you "Lima Charlie"
And waiting anxiously on my relief.*



CHRISTMAS

How many of the following Christmas terms can you locate in the puzzle?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Chestnuts | Ornaments |
| Eggnog | Peace |
| Elves | Presents |
| Jesus | Reindeer |
| Joy | Rudolph |
| Frosty | Santa |
| Goodwill | Scrooge |
| Grinch | Shopping |
| Manger | Stockings |
| Mistletoe | Toys |
| New Years | Tree |