

62nd Engineers establish combat outpost in Southern Afghanistan

BY AIR FORCE TECH. SGT. JILL LAVOIE
2-2 Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. PAO

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - To maintain a consistent presence to the southeast of Forward Operating Base Ramrod in southern Afghanistan, 36th Engineer Brigade Soldiers attached to 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, recently secured a piece of desert to build Combat Outpost Terminator.

Within six hours of arriving, Soldiers assigned to Company B, 62nd Engineer Battalion, 36th Eng. Bde., had built a protective berm.

Less than 48 hours later, the engineers had constructed more than 1,000 meters of an 11-foot Hesco barrier to encircle the new combat outpost.

"We can establish a (forward operating base) to a greater extent than infantry setting up concertina wire and foxholes," Sgt. 1st Class Arnold Amador, a platoon sergeant, said. "We allow for a more secure area with Hesco (walls), berms and a tank ditch - quickly."

The original plan allowed 22 days for the engineers to establish the combat outpost, but they managed to knock out the required elements in nine days. After 14 days of being on the ground, they had completed a "full up" outpost, including tents, gravel roads and a fuel point.

"I think we were able to accomplish so much so quickly because of the soldiers' motivation and experience," Amador said. "They have been doing this for over a year, so they are on point."

Sgt. Bryan Walters, a heavy-equipment operator, said the unit has improved or established eight bases - and put up about 35 miles of Hesco walls - throughout Afghanistan over the past year.

The engineers do more than put up perimeters. They also bring life-support systems such as heat, cooling and power.

Amador said the engineers have been able to do so much at Combat Outpost Terminator because they have a strong relationship with the unit.

"They let us do what we needed to do, while providing us with what we needed," he said. "We had a great communications atmosphere. At every step, if we needed their support, they gave it."



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jill LaVoie, 2-2 Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.

Spc. Eric Hesler, Co. B, 62nd Eng. Bn., 36th Eng. Bde., builds a tent floor. The company has built several forward operating bases during its year-long deployment in Afghanistan.

1st Cav Soldiers provide mortar training for Iraqis

BY CAPT. KEVIN WOLF

1st Cav. Div.'s 2-7th Cav. Regt., 4th BCT

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GARRYOWEN, Iraq - Soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division's 4th Brigade Combat Team conducted mortar-familiarization training Feb. 9 for troops from the 10th Iraqi Army Division's 38th Brigade at FOB Garryowen.

"Every day we are learning (new skills) about the mortar indirect-fire system and how to read a map," said Cpl. Ali Huthoof of the Iraqi brigade's mortar battery.

The two-week course focused on map reading and the fundamentals of mortar-indirect fire accuracy on enemy targets.

The Iraqi soldiers also learned how to handle and load munitions into a mortar weapon system. The students identified hills, valleys and other terrain features on a military map, and demonstrated their ability to determine the distance between those terrain features, which helps to ensure accuracy.

"The Iraqi soldiers participated 'vigorously and enthusiastically' in the classes, said Spc. Clifford Stringfellow, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, who facilitated the training. "They always ask questions and ultimately demonstrate tactical and technical proficiency."

Iraqi army officials said the mortar training will prepare their unit to display their new skills during a combined arms live-fire exercise Feb. 22. The Iraqi soldiers will demonstrate their ability to engage an enemy target in a short period of time by firing a combination of indirect and air-delivered munitions on a simulated village to demonstrate how effectively their firepower can destroy enemy targets.

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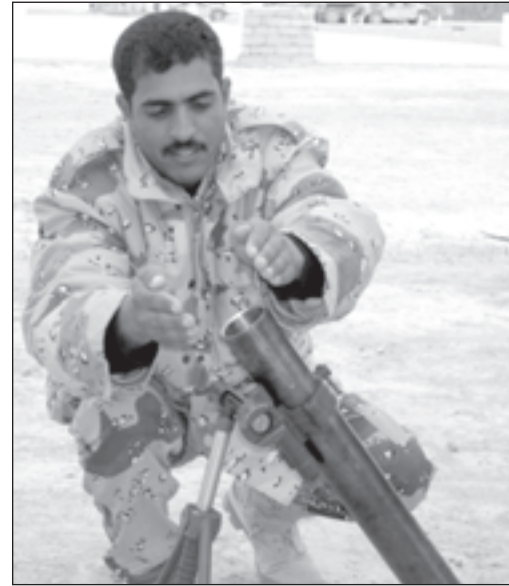


Photo by Capt. Kevin Wolf 2-7th Cav. Regt., 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

An Iraqi soldier demonstrates the proper way to insert a 60 mm mortar round into an indirect-fire weapon system during a familiarization training class.

Uncasing ceremony marks return home for 1-26 Infantry

BY STAFF SGT. DAVID HOPKINS

3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div., PAO

JALALABAD AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - During an uncasing ceremony Feb. 4, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, officially took over responsibility of a region along the Pakistan border in northeastern Afghanistan from Fort Hood's 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, which has conducted counterinsurgency operations in the area since June 2008.

The 1-32 Inf. Regt. was nicknamed the Chosin Battalion after the Chosin Valley in South Korea.

"The battalion has a great history in the Army and a great history right here in the Konar province and Afghanistan," Col. John Spitzer, 3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. commander, said. "They are ready to go and I have great confidence in them."

The territory 1-32 Inf. Regt. is taking over is not unfamiliar to the

battalion.

They were deployed in the region during Operation Enduring Freedom VII and spent 16 months in operations in the province.

"(Bringing us back to this spot) was one of the smartest decisions our leaders have done," Command Sgt. Maj. James Carabello, 1-32 Inf. Regt. command sergeant major, said. "We are familiar with the area, we have relationships with the people, with the government and with the elders. The people remember us. The people who walk around on the streets remember us and that it important to our success."

The 1-26 Inf. Regt. will be moving to a different area where their skills will be better utilized in the overall mission.

"They (1-26 Inf.) did a phenomenal job here over the past six months," Maj. Kendall Clark, executive officer for 1-26 Inf. Regt., said.

The regiment will take over where the 1-26 Inf. Regt. left off as they continue to put pressure on the enemy and their movements

and activities in the region.

"We hope to integrate quickly with Task Force Duke and have success along the border," Army Lt. Col. Mark O'Donnell, 1-32 Inf. Regt. commander, said. "We want to be able to deny enemy routes, deny them access to their safe havens, force them out of our AO; we want to make movement hard on them."

The leadership of 1-32 Inf. Regt. saw the progress that has been made since they redeployed from the area at the end of their last deployment, and they are ready to create more progress.

"The units that followed us took a lot of our efforts, energies and plans for the people and have taken that forward," Carabello said. The people's lives are better. They have a new road and more construction. We have seen a tremendous amount of growth."

Even though the 1-32 Inf. Regt. is familiar with the region and the work done over the past seven months, they needed to be brought up to speed on the specifics of



Photo by Staff Sgt. David Hopkins, 3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. PAO

Lt. Col. Mark O'Donnell, commander of the 1-32 Inf. Regt., 10th Mtn. Div., and Command Sgt. Maj. James Carabello, 1-32 Inf. Regt. senior enlisted leader, uncasing the unit colors Feb. 1 during the Transfer of Authority ceremony.

recent operations through a Relief in Place, which is a process that includes the outgoing unit doing hands-on training with the incoming unit.

"The relief in place started in mid-January and we are continuing to work with them until we pull out of the area and let them take over," Clark said.

The 1-32 Inf. Regt. is happy to

be back in the region and is ready to help the people.

"This is one of the most beautiful places I've been," Carabello said. "The people are very cordial. We respect them and I believe they respect us."

"We provide a glimmer of hope so they can provide food for their families. I love this place and am happy to be back."

Fort Hood's 41st Fires Bde improves security in Iraqi province

BY JIM GARAMONE

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - The security situation in Iraq's Wasit province is stable, but still brittle, the commander of American troops in the area said Monday.

"Things are stable, but there are still some bad people out there," Col. Richard Francey, commander of Fort Hood's 41st Fires Brigade, told Pentagon reporters in a video teleconference. "And we continue to work to kill or capture them every single day. It's an ongoing condition."

The province, home to about a million Iraqis, runs south of Baghdad to the Iranian border.

Security conditions in the province, where Iraqi Security Forces have been in control since Oct. 29, continues to improve, Francey said. The American and Iraqi forces work well together, the colonel said, but more importantly, "the people of Wasit rightfully have confidence in their security forces."

The successful Jan. 31 provincial elections are the latest indication things are headed in the right direction, he said. "The security was planned, rehearsed and executed by the Iraqi Security Forces," he pointed out.

The election went smoothly and professionally, and the people believe the election was safe, secure and legitimate, Francey said.

"Conditions as a whole are good," he added. "Security is stable; essential services improving. And with day-to-day freedoms of democracy recognized, a new normal is being embraced."

Iraqi soldiers and police have handled security in their own way, the colonel said. "It's not real pretty," he said. "They still have some weaknesses. We continue to work on their logistics, and simultaneously we're moving our provincial reconstruction teams around."

The U.S. military will continue to provide security for the teams, Francey said, but the progress may mean fewer U.S. troops will be needed in the province.

"I think we're moving to a point to where we can start downsizing in my area," he said. "I still think there (are) partnership requirements, but at a smaller scale." The brigade has a battalion covering an area that once needed a brigade, he noted.

Reconstruction efforts have led to improvements in the lives of the people of Wasit. "The results were a population within Wasit that started tasting freedoms that they had never tasted before," he said. "And they enjoy those freedoms."

Now, when undesirables - terrorists or just plain thugs - show up, the people don't want to return to the way it was, Francey said. "They are calling on the tip line, they're coming to the front gate, and they're saying, 'so-and-so is back. Follow me. I will lead you to them,'" he said. "It's exciting to watch it."

More needs to happen on the reconstruction front, Francey acknowledged. Some communities lack pure drinking water, and trash and sewage continue to be problems. "You see some of the projects ongoing," he said. "Do I think there are enough? No."

The colonel said he believes the Iraqi government can do more, and that he encourages officials to exert themselves.

"We saw some movement over the last three to four months," Francey said. "(I) don't know if it was tied as part of their electoral process, but we have seen quite a few projects over the last three or four months. Hopefully that will continue once we seat the new provincial governments as well."

The province has a fairly high unemployment rate, Francey said, and needs to put more young men to work. Agriculture is the main industry in the region, he said, and that has been decimated by 30 years of war.

"So I have a province full of farmers that can't farm right now, so they're unemployed," Francey said. "We need to turn around the agriculture within Wasit. And that is, again, one of the ongoing talking points whenever I get anybody visiting from Baghdad on the (Iraqi government) side."