



2nd Marine Division (Forward)

Task Force Leatherneck

Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

October 30, 2011

Weekly News Round-Up

The following content includes the weekly news coverage of 2nd Marine Division (Forward). The division, also known as Task Force Leatherneck, is the ground combat element of Regional Command (Southwest) and is responsible for Helmand and Nimroz provinces, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The content was created by Marine Corps Combat Correspondents and Combat Camera. Feel free to forward our stories to friends, family and those who support our deployed service members.

Conn. native survives volcano eruption, builds new future in Corps

By Cpl. Jeff Drew

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand province, Afghanistan – It was a simple life for Ian Llera growing up in the farmland of central Luzon, an island in the Philippines. If he needed to get anywhere, he walked; if he wanted food, he would help grow what the family needed to survive. He harvested rice and vegetables to grace the dinner table and tended to the ducks, cows and water buffalo to help provide for his family. His father traveled to Los Angeles and his mother to Canada to earn money for their children, leaving primary responsibility of Llera and his two siblings to his older sister. For fourteen years he lived like this, until everything changed one day.

The second largest volcano eruption of this century rocked the small island of Luzon June 15, 1991, setting in motion events that would lead Llera to his destiny.

“It is an experience I will never forget,” said the 33-year-old as his thoughts drifted into the past. “[The eruption] turned noon into midnight. It rained ashes, and mud flows screamed down the mountains. It was raining ashes non-stop for two days. We braved it out trying to clear the roof of our apartment because we had 12 inches of ash.”

Llera lived only 15 miles from the base of the volcano, Mount Pinatubo. After the eruption, he expedited a journey to join his father in the United States, and the 14-year-old boy started a new life in Los Angeles in 1991. He had taken fundamental English classes while growing up, so he had a head start, but Llera said moving from a place where he walked everywhere to L.A., where he needed a car, was difficult. He came from a place where electricity was rare, television and phones uncommon. It was a different world, a dynamic culture shock, but Llera said he was able to adjust.

He travelled to Avon, Conn., in 1996 to live with his cousins and finish his senior year of high school. He worked at a grocery store as a bagger, cashier and assistant



manager while finishing school. He realized, for him, there was no future working there – he wanted more.

A friend who had recently returned from Marine Corps recruit training talked to Llera about the benefits of joining the Marine Corps, and in May 1998, Llera was on a bus headed for the yellow footprints to see if he had what it takes to be a Marine.

“My upbringing definitely set me up for success in the Marine Corps,” said Llera, a 1997 Avon High School graduate. “It gave me a higher appreciation for the things I have now. I grew up on a farm, and we had nothing back then. [Now] I am able to provide for my family, [provide] the things I never had when I was young.”

Since earning the title of United States Marine, Llera has been on four deployments as a Motor Transport operator. He sailed the Pacific with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, traveled to Ramadi, Iraq, and in 2010 he was hand-picked for a humanitarian mission to provide aid for Central American countries.

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Task Force Leatherneck forces Taliban out of Upper Sangin Valley

By Maj. Bradley Gordon

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand province, Afghanistan -- Coalition Forces with Task Force Leatherneck located in Helmand province have kicked off Operation Tofan Sharq (Eastern Storm), a major offensive operation to root out the Taliban-led insurgency in the Upper Sangin Valley region of Kajaki.

After five days of pushing north from Sangin along Route 611, Coalition and Afghan National Security Forces have pushed the insurgency out of Kajaki and secured the road leading to the once-terrorized village.

“We are assisting the Afghan National Army’s 215th Corps to secure the main road between Sangin and Kajaki,” stated



(Click image above to view video story)

Operation Eastern Storm: Marines push through Kajaki Sofla

By Cpl. James Clark

KAJAKI SOFLA DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan – The Marines and sailors of 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, are engaged in Operation Tofan Sharq (Eastern Storm), a major offensive operation to root out the Taliban-led insurgency in the Upper Sangin Valley region of Kajaki.

The battalion is accomplishing its mission to secure Route 611 from

Sangin to Kajaki by moving companies into designated areas across the district and relying on individual platoons and squads to operate independently in heavily vegetated and rough terrain.

The men of 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, inserted by helicopter recently under the cover of darkness and, at first light, began a five day march prior to establishing Patrol Base Pennsylvania.

“Things have been going pretty slow, but good,” said Lance Cpl. Joshua Kennedy, an M240 machine gunner from Prattville, Ala. “We don’t want to go fast. It’s been pretty successful where we’re at right now, nobody’s

Brig. Gen. Lewis Craparotta, commanding general, Task Force Leatherneck. “Senior Taliban commanders have been killed or forced into the northern portion of Helmand. The conditions are being set to encourage families to move back to Kajaki, into their homes in order to allow life to get back to normal. We are giving the people an opportunity to live in peace, something they have not had in years.”

The Taliban was well-anchored in the area surrounding the dam, creating a significant security threat for any contractors willing to work in the area and local residents.

Recent opposition by local tribal leaders had developed toward insurgent activities in the area. This dissension is believed to be from the heavy taxation the Taliban had imposed on local Afghans who used the resources provided by the dam.

The Kajaki Dam is the main power source for Sangin and most of the Upper Sangin Valley. Originally constructed in 1953 as a result of an irrigation project by the United States Agency for International Development, recent reconstruction efforts have been slow and difficult. Security will enable repairs to existing power grids as well as improvements to the irrigation system.

“We have an opportunity to improve the irrigation system for the farmers with limited investment,” said Craparotta. “Security and overall quality of life will change in the coming months.”

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been hurt. We expected it to be way more kinetic, but luckily it hasn’t been too bad so far.”

Carrying all the ammunition, weaponry, food, water and other assorted equipment they could fit into their packs, they travelled roughly three miles amidst infrequent and abrupt ambushes and, at times, rounding corners that put them face-to-face with enemy fighters armed with rocket propelled grenades.

“Everyone’s feeling the pain, everyone’s sore,” said Kennedy. “It’s hard to pick up your feet.”

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Afghan Local Police certified in Garmsir

By Cpl. Colby Brown

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan — The Afghan Local Police were recognized as an official organization of the Afghan Ministry of Interior during a shura held here Oct. 26.

The shura, attended by over 100 local men, was another sign of progress in the development of Afghan National Security Forces in Garmsir.

Marines from 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, have operated an ALP Academy in the district since late August. The battalion has been

working to make the ALP program a reality since arriving in Garmsir in April.

The course is currently on its fifth cycle and has graduated over 100 new members of the ALP. Students currently enrolled, and those already protecting the people of Garmsir, are all natives of the district.

“It’s been a long process, but I am very glad that it has come to fruition,” said Maj. Carlos Gonzalez, the 1/3 ALP coordinator. “The district is ready for this program and has been very supportive.”

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Wisconsin Marine brings spirit of Halloween to Afghanistan

By Lance Cpl. Alfred Lopez

CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan — Homesickness is a common enemy of U.S. Marines in a combat zone. Keepsakes from loved ones and photographs of treasured memories help keep this foe at bay.

But when holidays like Halloween come around, it’s not always enough.

Sergeant Michael A. Kinne, a 27-year-old assistant fires chief with Regimental Combat Team 5, found a unique way to fight this sickness: he carved a Batman-themed Jack-O-

Lantern, in the spirit of his favorite holiday and comic book character.

“One of our officers got a bunch of Styrofoam pumpkins in the mail,” said Kinne, a native of Neenah, Wis. “He came to our team and said, ‘Why don’t we shake up the rut a little bit. Everybody has to find a different design for these pumpkins.’”

Kinne credits “Batman: Arkham Asylum,” a videogame based on the pop culture phenomenon created by D.C. Comics, for his inspiration.

“I played around with a few designs I came up with,” said Kinne. “Then I asked myself, ‘What’s the most gruesome looking Batman symbol I’ve seen yet?’ I thought of Arkham Asylum.”

His love of the Dark Knight grew through television shows, comic books and Halloween costumes over the years.

“Batman’s just a guy. He’s a hero, but he still gets beat up all the time,” said Kinne. “He saw something that needed to be done, knew he had the power, and he went on to fix it.”

“I learned quickly that in the Marine Corps, that’s what you’re supposed to do,” said Kinne. “We’re all supposed to look around and seize things that need to be done, not just turn around and walk away like the average person.”

His emulation of this mindset is clearly visible in the performance of his duties.

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