

'Keeping Tabs'

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27th Brigade Combat Team --- Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VII

Forward Operating Base Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan

Life as mentors for the Afghan National Police

CAMP AIRBORNE, WARDAK PROVINCE -- Like their brothers assigned to Embedded Training Teams for the Afghan National Army, members of CJTF-Phoenix serving on Police Mentoring Teams face enormous challenges under dangerous conditions and often operate from small bases in remote areas of Afghanistan.

"The ETTs and PMTs are the main push, no question about it," said task force Command Sergeant Major David Piwowarski, from Buffalo, NY. "The strategic objective is to develop this country's security forces so that they can conduct counter insurgency operations. It will be ETTs and PMTs who will help them at the province and district levels where they are most needed."

"'Mount up, and roll out' and the sounds of engines cranking and up armored doors slamming is just part of our day," said Staff Sergeant Frederick Goldacker from



'Down range' soldiers

Lewiston, NY. He and fellow New Yorkers Corporal Wesley Burgess from Oswego and Specialist Matthew Kew from Buffalo are Security force troops attached to a PMT in Wardak province.

Team mates include Master Sergeant Richard Wood, from Livingston, MT and Sergeant Joseph Baragwanath, from Brockton, MA. Master Sergeant Wood is the team's assistant NCO in charge. With 24-years service and a tour in Iraq, he brings a lot of experience to the team.

"I am proud that we are from all over the country," he said. "Our age and experience are working for us. The ingenuity we used to set our vehicles up, the speed we mount up and just the way we do business – this is a really good team," he said.

Sergeant Goldacker, Corporal Burgess and Specialist Kew often run weapons training for the Afghan Police. "They really like it when we let them try our weapons," said Goldacker. "We enjoy teaching them and they love it."

"There is an un-mistakable screech a rocket makes"

They face a cunning enemy that fights from the shadows Goldacker said. "During every convoy we just pour our thoughts over the headsets about what may await us," he said, reflecting on close calls he had as rocket propelled grenades sailed past him.

The team has been shelled and attacked frequently at FOB Airborne. They have spent many a night inside bunkers with body armor and weapons at the ready.

"There is an un-mistakable screech a rocket makes," said Goldacker. "You feel helpless because you don't know where it will land. You just know it's going to be close." There is a wave of orange sparks after the white

Keeping Tabs –

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Corporal Wesley Burgess from Oswego trains an Afghan National Policeman on his M4 rifle.

flash and a thundering crash, he said. Everyone yells "Incoming" and scrambles like cats for their armor and then dashes to the bunker.

"Our rooms are like mini bunkers, now," said Baragwanath. "We are always doing force protection improvements." After the "all clear," soldiers filter out to survey the damage. "The scarring that is left on the buildings is un-imaginable," he said.

"No way that just happened," we would say to ourselves, and then start laughing," said Goldacker. "Just another fun filled day at the office."