

# Three days dividing on the line

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Ben Navratil, TF Duke, PAO

There was just a glimmer of moonlight to illuminate the landscape as a platoon of Soldiers set off from Combat Outpost Sabari during the early hours of Sept. 9.

The group of about 40 U.S. and Afghan National Army Soldiers marched silently through wadis, farmland and rocky scrubble to reach their target, a hill in Sabari district known as “Little G,” which would be their home for the next three days.

The Soldiers of 3rd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, and their partnered ANA unit, the 3rd Coy, 1st Kandak, set up a patrol base on Little G, to interdict any indirect fire coming from the nearby villages of Majiles and Surwapon Toy, and patrol the area, looking for several terrorist cell leaders and establishing a visible presence there.

## Day 1- The hill

Little G was chosen as the ideal spot to set up a patrol base because it is easily defensible and provided Sol-

diers a view of the surrounding area, said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jordan Weiss, 3rd Platoon leader and native of Parkston, S.D.

Although one of the shorter hills in the vicinity, Little G still towers over the nearby farms and villages. Ellipse-shaped, it has two peaks on its east and west ends, with a slightly lower saddle in the middle. Its steep slopes are covered in loose rocks, making its ascent a precarious climb for the Soldiers carrying enough supplies to last them for several days in addition to their normal combat load of ammunition and body armor.

Weiss and his platoon headquarters element, including his platoon sergeant, a radioman, a medic and a two-man mortar team set up in the central part of the hill, while he sent squads of Soldiers

to cover each peak, in order to provide security against threats coming from any direction. As with all U.S. operations here, all teams of U.S. personnel were accompanied by their ANA counterparts.

Once the Soldiers finished setting up their defensive positions, a small security element stayed behind as the majority of the Soldiers set out on their first patrol of the day through southern Majiles. As the Soldiers entered the village and made their way to the Kholbesat Bazaar, small groups of villagers of all ages approached. The troops spoke with many of the villagers they came across about the security situation in the area and other issues affecting their lives.

“You’ve got to develop a relationship [with the locals],” said Weiss, “without that, there’s no trust.”

He also sat down for a while with the village elder to discuss the needs of the local populace, and urge him to attend an upcoming Sabari district shura. It will be the first of its kind since U.S. forces have been operating there.

After the engagement, in which the elder not only promised to attend the shura, but also named others that might come along, the Soldiers returned to their hilltop base to

rest and watch the area for any suspicious



Above: Soldiers of 3rd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, march through a cornfield while returning to their patrol base after a patrol through Majiles village in Sabari District. The U.S. and Afghan National Army patrolled the area around Majiles for local insurgent leaders and contraband.

Opposite: U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jordan Weiss, platoon leader for 3rd Plt., Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, discusses tactics with his Afghan National Army counterpart, Capt. Khair Ghul, during a foot patrol through Majiles village in Sabari District Sept. 9. The partnered forces set themselves up on a nearby hilltop, where they stayed for three days in order to send out local patrols several times a day.

activity.

## Day 2- The North side

The night passed without incident, and the Soldiers were up on their feet again at 3 a.m. the next morning ready to send out another patrol, this time to the more hostile northern section of Majiles and Surwapon Toy.

“[Little G] is the line in the sand for us,” said Weiss, referring to the stark contrast in opinion of U.S. and ANA forces between the people living to the south and north of the hill.

“[North of Little G] is one of the worst parts of our area of operations,” he added. “We take contact virtually every time we go out there.”

This early-morning patrol targeted two homes previously known to be used as safe houses by local leaders within the Haqqani insurgent network. Nothing suspicious was found at either of the initial objectives, so the Soldiers moved on to inspect other sites that had previously been used for weapons caches.

Moving through northern Majiles and Surwapon Toy, the mood of the villagers was noticeably different from the previous day. Here the people seemed more standoffish, and not as willing to approach

the Soldiers.

The first significant activity of the day occurred after the Soldiers finished clearing their final objective, and began the trek to their staging area.

As they paused to rest in a field, there were two explosions near the objective the Soldiers had just finished clearing minutes earlier. The troops took up defensive positions and prepared for an attack, but nothing further occurred. Weiss quickly made the call to get his guys out of the open and head back to the patrol base.

That wasn’t the only excitement during the mission though. Later that night, as the moon was hidden behind clouds and the platoon stood guard over their hilltop base, a pair of indirect rounds were fired at the hill as well as a barrage of small arms fire.

Almost simultaneously, machine gun fire from both peaks zeroed in on the origin of the attack as reports crackled over the radio with descriptions from the fire teams scattered around the hill.

“My Soldiers’ response to the attack was text book,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Jonathan Soto, 3rd Platoon sergeant from Long Island, N.Y., adding that they immediately took cover, scanned their fire sectors and sent up the proper reports as soon as they had all the information they needed.

The barrage was brief though, and after the guns silenced from their initial response, they remained that way through the night.

## Day 3- Night and day

The final day began, again well before sunrise, as the Soldiers made their way back down the hill and crossed through the fields from which the previous night’s gunfire had come from.

Their objective was again a residence known to be frequented by a local Haqqani cell leader. After weaving their way through narrow alleys in the village, they finally came to the suspected home. Upon searching the premises, the Soldiers this time found illegal weapons, and identified a man who might be the one they were looking for. He was detained, and two AK-47’s and 10 full magazines were confiscated.

The patrol was cut short after searching one final home, in order to rendezvous with 1st Platoon, Company B, who took the confiscated weapons and the detainee to COP Sabari.

The rest of the day passed without incident, and the Soldiers finally broke camp and trudged back across the countryside late that night, this time under the light of a full moon, in order to get some well-earned rest.

“My Soldiers conducted themselves well under the conditions,” said Soto. “It was really hot, and we had some long movements, covering 30 kilometers over three days.”

As to their partnership, both the U.S. and ANA forces agreed that vast improvements have been made by the 3rd Coy since they began working alongside 3rd Platoon.

“I have been working with 3rd platoon for around nine months,” said ANA Capt. Khair Ghul, the 3rd Coy’s commander. “Our Soldiers were good before, and now they are even better.”

Weiss agreed, describing the improvements he’s seen in the ANA soldiers as “night and day.”

And even though the three-day mission only yielded one detainee and a few weapons, the importance of the Soldiers’ presence in the area was not lost on Weiss.

“We’ve alerted the bad guys that we’re looking for them,” said Weiss. “We’re letting them know that we’ll be at their doorstep every day.”

