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MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2011

Torn between shooting my camera or my rifle

The Continuing MyArmyReserve series "From Behind the Lens" w/ Army Reserve SFC Mark Burrell, the Army's top Journalist for 2010, and a pretty damn good Soldier too! For more of Mark's photos in this series visit "[From Behind the Lens](#)" on MyArmyReserve's facebook photo stream.

Afghanistan, Mid-March - "Well, I got shot at today. Again. It's an unsettling feeling. I'm normally torn between shooting my camera or my rifle. That wasn't a choice this time.

We were walking up a stretch of mountain trying to surprise the enemy. The platoon that I was with had already climbed about 1,000 feet. We were loaded down with weapons, body armor and packs filled with food, water and extra ammo. The terrain here is unbelievably rocky. Some of the climb, we had to help each other and get on all fours to make the ascent. The sun was beginning to warm up because it has been unusually warm weather the past week. Everybody was beat.



A "Relaxing-Break" - Photo by Mark Burrell

As we approached a rocky outcropping on yet another false peak, they hit us. PKM machine gun fire and AK47 machine gun fire rained down on us from about 150 meters away.

Normally, the Taliban don't like to get this close to us because

we outnumber them with troops and firepower. We caught them by



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- [@heritage](#) foundation-Thxs for opportunity to discuss the #usArmy Reserve's Vision for 2020 today-LTG Jack Stultz [http://ow.ly/4ulPM](#) about 12 hours ago
- [@yavayamdiva](#) thx you for being an advocate of Veteran's services! We'd love for u to be a guest blogger on our blog! [http://ow.ly/4ul2H](#) about 13 hours ago

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surprise.

I quickly turned toward the nearest cover, a tree, and dove. I sort of rolled/fell/scrambled toward the tree. It wasn't pretty. The zings, hisses and snaps were close. It's disturbing that I can tell how close or accurate fire is nowadays. This was pretty close and pretty accurate.

One of the guys I was with later said, "We saw them. They were so close when they started firing, I thought a round about smashed into my face. I thought I'm f@#*ing dead for sure."

I quickly collected myself behind the tree. I was there with an Afghan National Army soldier that looked about 13 except for his scraggly beard. I couldn't see any other Americans around. I knew there were some ahead of me, where the firing was strongest and some behind. Our machine guns echoed the Taliban fire.

What seemed like hours was only a minute or two. The valley played a symphony of this vs. that. I didn't have any good shots of the action with my camera, so I resorted to my weapon. After a few moments, I remembered my audio recorder and quickly



All was well- Just a little dehydration Photo by Mark Burrell

turned it on to get at least some sound from the action. The ANA soldier tried to motion to me to stay low. He really didn't have to.

When the firing slowed down, we moved up into a position occupied solely by about five ANA troops. Great. I pointed at my U.S. flag on my sleeve and asked where everybody else was. It seems the little Pashtu I have learned, "How are you?" and "Thank you" didn't really help me in this situation. They motioned for me to get low. They really didn't have to.

Next, they pointed over the rocks they (enemy) were behind to tell me where the firing was coming from. Once again, they really didn't have to.

Just then, the firing came to a lull and I heard the fire support officer yelling at the other guy on the end of the radio. He was trying to call for artillery on the enemy's position. I was relieved. He was about ten feet from me, behind some bushes. I quickly got up and ran over there with probably a strange smile on my face. I was pretty happy to see him. He was hunkered down with a few ANA soldiers too.

The ANA soldiers there saw me and pointed where the firing was coming from. They then motioned for me to stay down. After a few more short bursts, the Taliban cleared out. We're not sure if we hit any with bullets or artillery, but it's most likely.



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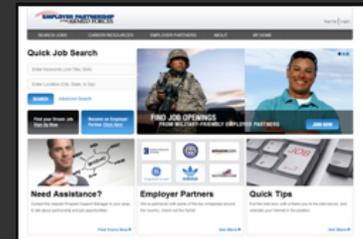
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Throughout the next eight hours or so of walking, we had Apache and Kiowa helicopters buzzing our every move. It was the toughest walk I have ever had to make. My feet are blistered and bloody. My back aches. My knees buckle at every step. I saw soldiers puke without stopping while marching up and down the numerous valleys and peaks. Straight-line distance was about six kilometers. The commander told me afterward that the terrain was a little rougher than they anticipated. He really didn't have to." - by **SFC Mark Burrell**



Returning from a long-day's Patro- Photo by Mark Burrell

Questions of what it's like to be a Combat Journalist w/ the Army Reserve, ask Mark on the From [Behind the Lens facebook link](#), or ask them here. SFC Burrell continues his year long mission in Afghanistan bringing you the Soldier stories only he can so stay tuned for more "From Behind the Lens".

at 11:17 AM

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