

Bobcats patrol, interact with Afghans

Story and photos by
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TARIN KOWT, Afghanistan — A young Afghan boy trots along, trying to stay in stride with the camouflage-clad Soldier walking down the muddy street.

The Soldier is a member of 2nd Platoon, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, on a dismounted patrol through Tarin Kowt in southern Afghanistan's Oruzgan province.

"Through these patrols I've learned that the people here really appreciate the American presence," said Sgt. Joseph Laflair, a 2nd Plt., Co. B, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., team leader.

This is Laflair's third deployment — he has spent time in Kosovo, Iraq, and now, Afghanistan — and he recognizes how vital his experience is to his team.

"Most of my guys are new Soldiers," he said. "My biggest fear is that something will happen to them when we are out on a mission."

But the team has worked closely together, and also knows the area and the people of Tarin Kowt.

"The people of Tarin Kowt know we're not here to harm them. There's a big difference now from when we first arrived here," said Spc. Jorge Herrera, a 2nd Plt., Co. B, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., grenadier.

The 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., "Bobcats" arrived at Tarin Kowt in June. Since then, they have run mounted and dismounted patrols regularly from Forward Operating Base Ripley.

"We usually do dismounted patrols when we need to meet with the local leaders to



discuss business," said 1st Lt. Eric Hong, 2nd Platoon platoon leader.

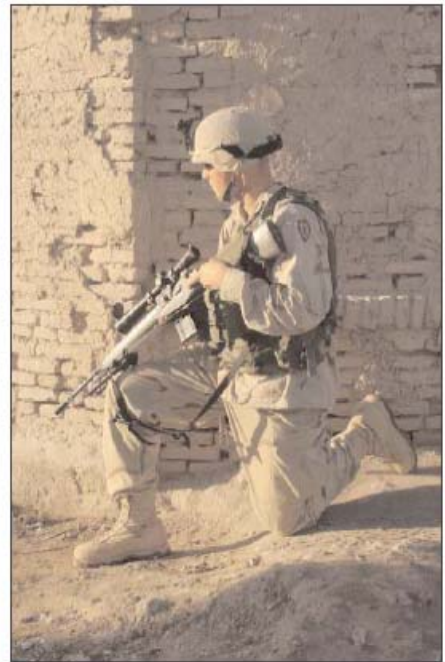
During this particular dismounted patrol, 1st Lt. John Bowman, Co. B fire support officer, met with the Tarin Kowt mayor to discuss some pending projects in Tarin Kowt. After some discussion, he invited the mayor to FOB Ripley the following day, where they would review specifics.

While Bowman talked business inside, the Soldiers pulled security outside and interacted with the local population.

"I like being around the people," said Laflair. "I'm trying to learn a little bit of the language from them. Most of the Afghans are trying to learn English from us, so I figure I should try to learn their language, too."

Other Soldiers in the platoon also enjoy the interaction they get from the dismounted patrols.

"I'm learning a lot about their culture, their language and their lifestyle," said Herrera. "It also reminds me of home. I have a little girl, so interacting with all these kids reminds me of my little girl. And I know that I'm here trying to make a better home for them to live."



Above: Pfc. Patrick Stellick, 2nd Plt., Co. B, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., takes a knee during a halt on a patrol through Tarin Kowt. The Bobcats of 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., run regular patrols in the area to meet with local leaders and provide security and stability.



Soldiers from 2nd Plt., Co. B, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., interact with local children in Tarin Kowt during a dismounted patrol.

Top: Stellick brings up the rear of a patrol through Tarin Kowt while a young Afghan boy marches along with him during one of the platoon's movements through the area.