



(U) Armed Forces Week Look Back: Deployed to Afghanistan

FROM: Sgt [REDACTED], USMC
IA Intern
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(U//FOUO) Note from SIGINT Communications: In commemoration of Armed Forces Week, we are reposting this article detailing the experience of Sgt [REDACTED] a Marine deployed to Afghanistan:

(S//SI) My name is Sgt [REDACTED] and I deployed to Bagram, Afghanistan as part of a [NIST](#). I am a [MINSAP](#) participant and this deployment seemed to be a natural extension of the office I was working prior to going out. Although I had been working the Iraq target, the methods and points of contact within NSA were something I was fairly comfortable with.

[REDACTED]
Bagram, Afghanistan

(S) Upon my arrival in Bagram, I got off of a C-130 late in the evening and it was pitch dark. There is a light discipline in effect for Bagram and no exterior lights are allowed around the flight line. I was guided around the base (with cautions to "stay on the hardball, there are active mines everywhere") and was shown to my tent.

[REDACTED]

(C) The NIST team members who were not on watch helped me bring my gear into the tent. I passed out, exhausted, almost immediately after getting settled in. When I awoke the next morning and stumbled from my cot out into the morning light, I gazed in wonder at my surroundings. I was in the middle of a tent city that was ringed by snowcapped mountains. The sun was just peeking over the mountain tops, illuminating a complete ecosystem starting to bustle alive around me.

(S//SI) Once I settled into the routine, I quickly realized that we were in for some odd hours. The three analysts switched off as there were not enough terminals for more than one of us at any one time. We were on 8 hour shifts, but whenever anything odd came up, or we were working some kind of 'pet project', we often stayed for many hours after shift. There was an extra terminal that was reserved for the senior analyst who was not always there and we would commandeer that machine for extra work. We were fed by Brown and Root (the Army's civilian contracting company who is the answer to malnutrition, scurvy, and an appetite), and had 2 hot meals a day. That meant we were fed a hot breakfast and hot dinner. As much as people like to complain about such things, the food wasn't all that bad. Everywhere we went, we went armed. We usually carried a 9mm pistol in a shoulder harness, but when we took trips off base, we also carried M16 A2 service rifles and M4 rifles.

(S) We were often traveling to Kabul. We had to pick up new analysts, occasionally go for analyst exchanges, and conduct escort duty for the various trips undertaken by personnel from the rest of the base. We also had the unique opportunity to travel to the Salang Tunnel with the New Zealand detachment personnel. They were headed there, and we were afforded the opportunity to tag along. It is supposed to be the highest tunnel in the world, and as a piece of military history it is fascinating. It has been fought over by the Taliban, Northern Alliance, Russians and most recently, the U.S.. All along the route up the mountainsides there are burned out tanks and troop carriers left behind during previous conflicts. The U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers is overseeing the multi-national team doing the reconstruction of the tunnel. It was amazing to travel throughout the countryside. It is a very primitive and stark landscape. It was beautiful in its own way.

[REDACTED]
Salang Tunnel

(U) The biggest eye-opener I had was in observing how NSA deploys its personnel. I have been deployed with the Marine Corps in the past, and it is a very different experience. It was nice to know I was going to an established site. I was excited by the prospect of not having to bring the equipment in, clean it up, pack it out and bring it home.

[REDACTED]

(U) As much as I missed my family and really wanted to see green grass again, when I looked around Bagram that final morning prior to flying out, I was kind of sad. If there's one thing my experiences deploying around the world have taught me, it's that these trips are ALL once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Each one is a unique and exciting adventure.

(U//FOUO) Note: this article appeared on December 1st, 2003. It was part of the [IA Interns Abroad](#) series.

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