



# NEWS RELEASE

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**[BagramMediaCenter@afghan.swa.army.mil](mailto:BagramMediaCenter@afghan.swa.army.mil)**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Spartans live 'Support Starts Here' motto, gets job done behind the scenes**

By U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Casey Hinkson  
Task Force Dolch

LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – It is 6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 12, and the sun has already disappeared behind the snow-covered peaks of the Hindu Kush Mountains. As an all-encompassing darkness settles over the Afghan landscape, an Army lieutenant looks up at the dark storm clouds behind which both moon and stars are hidden.

It has been snowing hard for the past three days; and as the officer stands in the darkness, a mass of thick, white flakes continue to fall around him. With a winter storm so badly hindering visibility, both air and ground missions across the country have been cancelled. It looks like he and his platoon will be stuck for another day.

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Ed Zerwes, of Forest Hills, N.Y., is the distribution platoon leader for 54th Engineer Battalion's Forward Support Company (FSC). He and his Soldiers comprise the battalion's Combat Logistics Patrol (CLP). Every week or so, the CLP departs from battalion headquarters on Forward Operating Base Shank to move supplies, equipment and personnel to and from the six other FOBs 54th Engineer, Task Force Dolch, units occupy.

The week of Feb. 12, however, the CLP was caught on mission when the storm hit and was consequently forced to remain at Bagram Air Field until the storm cleared and the Soldiers could return to Shank.

Dealing with the affects of Afghanistan's unpredictable weather is just part of an FSC logisticians' job. Although the CLP doesn't leave the wire looking to engage insurgents, as many of the combat units do, they have their fair share of obstacles to surmount.

The greatest challenge that faces the CLP on a daily bases is the terrain, said Zerwes. The huge trucks used to transport heavy equipment often can't handle the rugged, unimproved roads, which are the best that Afghanistan has to offer. Often times, the trucks don't have enough room to turn around or

maneuver, and there is a constant danger of getting stuck or rolling over on the uneven terrain, he said.

U.S. Army Spc. Devon McMullen, a native of Stone Mountain, Ga. and a distribution platoon gunner, recalls one occasion when the patrol encountered a particularly rough stretch of road.

"They told us that it was going to be a hard-ball road all the way, but when we hit this one part, the vehicles were bouncing so much that the butt stock of my M240b machine gun actually broke,"

As TF Dolch's FSC, the Spartans are responsible for providing support for the eight route-clearance platoons spread across Regional Command East, no easy task for a battalion stretched all the way from the Pakistani border to the boundary of Regional Command South, said Zerwes.

"We carry everything from ammo, to trucks, to bulldozers," said Zerwes. "Pretty much anything that needs to be carried."

Since arriving in theater a little more than two months ago, the FSC CLP has covered approximately 5,000 kilometers of ground, moved more than 900 thousand pounds of cargo and conducted more than 40 logistics operations in support of TF Dolch, reported Zerwes.

The FSC concept is relatively new, and the Spartans are in the unique position of being the only non-engineer company in an engineer battalion.

"It's hard, because a lot of engineers don't understand logistics operations; they've never worked with it before," said U.S. Army Capt. Deosaran Pokhai, FSC commander from Jersey City, N.J.

Despite the challenges, 54th Engr. Bn.'s FSC has been able to work with the other units in TF Dolch to provide continuous sustainment support. In addition to running combat logistics patrols, the FSC provides technical support and expertise to the other units in numerous fields. The FSC provides maintenance support for Headquarters and Headquarters Company and conducts drivers training for all of Dagger Battalion's subordinate units.

As any good Army unit should be able to do, the engineering FSC has adapted its operations and task organization to better suite its unique, ever-changing situation, said Pokhai. For example, many of the company's cooks, who work in the dining facility in Germany, are now integrated into the distribution platoon and are taking an active part in its everyday operations.

"These Soldiers have done extremely well since they moved over into the distribution platoon," Pokhai commented.

Additionally, although not typically part of a Forward Support Company, the commander created a Company Intelligence Support Team (CoIST). The CoIST

allows the company to gather and analyze its own intelligence on CLP routes to better prepare patrol personnel for their missions, said Pokhai.

Since their arrival in theater, the FSC Spartans have done an outstanding job providing logistical support for Task Force Dolch, said Pokhai. Their efforts enable the Dagger Battalion to run smoothly and allow the engineer elements to focus on their mission of providing counter-improvised explosive device route-clearance support to the brigade combat teams.

Whether it is through maintenance, training, or transportation, the Spartans are daily living up to their motto, "Support Starts Here."



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LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Sgt. Jasmin Zeighler (right) from Forward Support Company, 54th Engineer Battalion, Task Force Dolch of Sesslach, Germany, instructs an FSC Soldier during vehicle-recovery training on Forward Operating Base Shank, Afghanistan Feb. 9. Soldiers of the 54th Engineer Battalion are deployed in support of route-clearance operations in Regional Command East, Afghanistan. (Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Rosalind Arroyo, Task Force Dolch)



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LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Soldiers assigned to Forward Support Company, 54th Engineer Battalion walk to their vehicles before departing on a combat logistics patrol from Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, Feb. 7. Soldiers of the 54th Engineer Battalion are currently deployed in support of route-clearance operations in Regional Command East, Afghanistan. (Photo by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Ed Zerwes, Task Force Dolch)



110118-A-0000X-001

LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Soldiers in the Forward Support Company, 54th Engineer Battalion pray before departing on a combat logistics patrol, Jan 18. Soldiers of the 54th Engineer Battalion are currently deployed in support of route-clearance operations in Regional Command East, Afghanistan. (Photo by U.S Army 1st Lt. Ed Zerwes, Task Force Dolch)

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Issued by RC-East/Combined Joint Task Force-101 e-mail: [BagramMediaCenter@afghan.swa.army.mil](mailto:BagramMediaCenter@afghan.swa.army.mil)  
Telephone: 00 93 (0)79 906 3013

To Reach Headquarters ISAF Joint Command Public Affairs Office E-mail: [jc.media@afghan.swa.army.mil](mailto:jc.media@afghan.swa.army.mil) or [jcmediaopsnu@apod-kaia.isaf.nato.int](mailto:jcmediaopsnu@apod-kaia.isaf.nato.int)

Telephone: From Afghanistan 079 951 3999 (wait for voice prompt) 688-4441/4447 or dial 070 113 2000 (wait for dial tone) 318-449-9244/9153/9154

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