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SOLDIERS OF V CORPS' 12TH COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE HELP KEEP ROUND-THE-CLOCK EYE ON SECURITY AT BALAD BASE

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- As the unforgiving sun beats down here during the day and others seek the refuge of air conditioning, some Soldiers from V Corps' 12th Combat Aviation Brigade remain outside; watching, listening and waiting.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

Pfc. Mark Jones, a tower guard with V Corps' Task Force at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, scans his sector during his shift Aug. 25. Task Force XII is responsible for sending 40 Soldiers each day to man the LSA's guard towers.

Even as the shadows grow long and darkness consumes the sky, a watcher is always there.

Positioned in various guard towers here, Soldiers from Task Force XII do their part to help defend LSA Anaconda from enemy attack.

These are not infantry troops. Most of them are administrative Soldiers or helicopter maintainers assigned to aviation battalions. But each knows he is a Soldier first.

“We are the most critical part of the security for LSA Anaconda,” said Sgt. 1st Class Shon Skinner, NCO-in-charge of the 16 towers assigned to Task Force XII. “We are the eyes and ears, so it’s up to us to report what we see to Anaconda Main.”

Each of the 16 towers has two Soldiers keeping guard 24/7. The Soldiers work four-hour shifts in the towers three times a day.

“I feel like I’m keeping everyone here safe,” said Spec. Lee Usmaal, a tower guard from the brigade’s 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment. “Without us out there, the bad guys could do whatever they want.”

“We have specific intelligence given to us to let us know what things to look for,” said Sgt. Lewis Cunningham of the 412th Aviation Support Battalion. “They report to us what they see and we report to Anaconda Main.”

If the Soldiers have positively identified a person’s actions as hostile or unusual, they are expected to handle the situation in keeping with their Rules of Engagement and Escalation of Force policies, said Skinner.

ROE let Soldiers know what actions or activities are considered a threat to Soldiers or mission-essential equipment. EOF lets Soldiers know what actions they must perform before firing their weapon as a last resort.

“Knowing ROE and EOF helps the Soldiers in these towers make the right decisions,” said Skinner.

“I don’t want to get shot at, but if we do -- I qualified expert,” said Pfc. Mark Jones as he clutched his M249 and scanned the landscape in his sector.

Night presents its own challenges for the guards. Limited visibility and fatigue are enemies, too.

There is too much terrain out there for one person to monitor, so both Soldiers have to stay awake, said Cunningham.

“To stay awake, I constantly scan my area and I try not to get too comfortable,” said Usmaal.

Getting too comfortable shouldn’t be a problem, since the guards wear more than 35 pounds of equipment while in the tower.

“This equipment is designed to keep them safe and to protect them in case they get shot during an attack,” said Skinner.

“It’s good stuff that you should wear while you are out there,” said Usmaal. “If something happens, and you’re not wearing it, you could really get hurt.”

