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SOLDIERS OF 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE FUEL POINT TEAM KEEPING AFGHANISTAN TASK FORCE ON THE MOVE

By **Sgt. Nathan Bowen**

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team Brigade Public Affairs Office

NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- "If The Fuel Don't Flow, The Army Don't Go" reads a large sign at Forward Operating Base Fenty's fuel point.



SGT NATHAN BOWEN

Paratroopers from the 173rd Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) top off the tank of a forklift at the Forward Operating Base Fenty (Afghanistan) refueling point Feb. 8.

On a base that uses between 4,000 to 6,000 gallons of fuel a day just to maintain operations, not including the vehicles and aircraft that require refueling for several missions a day, that statement isn't bragging -- it's a fact.

Soldiers from Alpha Company, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion, 173rd Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), are in charge of operating the fuel point and making sure the tanks never run dry, on or off base.

"If we're not supplying the fuel, then this place wouldn't run," said Sgt. Edward Waugh, fuel accountability NCO. "Every vehicle that comes through here will get fuel through us."

At full capacity, the fuel point can hold 210,000 gallons of diesel, and every drop is tested for quality before it touches a gas tank. Sgt. Kerron Joel, a heavy wheeled vehicle operator, knows what can happen if dirty fuel slips into the system.

“We’re trying to get rid of water that’s in the fuel, (and) any foreign objects such as welding rods, plastic, rubber ... even Styrofoam cups,” said Joel. “We don’t want to issue fuel that may cause aircraft to go down due to a clogged fuel line, or vehicles to stop operating properly.”

Every day the fuel point team processes trucks waiting at the FOB’s front gate and spends about half an hour to an hour per truck testing and receiving fuel. The work may seem repetitive, but the routine has its benefits as well.

“You meet different people every day,” said fuel supply specialist Sgt. Glory Tataw.

Tataw also likes how everyone at the fuel point brings their individual skills together to work as a team. When not engaged in a specific task, the team spends time cross-training each other on their jobs preparing everyone to take on greater responsibility.

Younger Soldiers like petroleum supply specialists Pfc. Carlos Santiago and Robert Alvarez say they benefit from NCOs who expect them to be proficient at their jobs and the jobs of the Soldier to their left and right. When the time came to move the fuel point, they said, they all had input on how the new facility would be set up to provide the best service.

So far this deployment, the fuel point has supplied more than 3 million gallons of fuel to Soldiers of the 173rd-led Task Force Bayonet and the civilians who support it. They expect to double that number by the time the brigade's deployment is scheduled to end in August, Waugh said.

The 173rd is a U.S. Army Europe unit headquartered in Vicenza, Italy.



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