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Subject: Another Afghanistan Story

All,

In early 2001 and into 2002, 10 Special Forces Operational Detachments Alpha (ODA) carried the fight here in Afghanistan. Upon arrival they married up with indigenous forces of the Northern Alliance and routed the Taliban in just a few months. The SF guys back then grew beards as an attempt to accept the culture of the Northern Alliance. In the years since, the enemy has come to fear "The Bearded Ones" on the battlefield.

We have ever since been on "relaxed grooming standards" during our deployments here. Relaxed grooming does not imply that our guys are free to look like hillbillies. They can grow their hair one inch beyond regulation and grow a beard that is neatly trimmed and no longer than one inch. Thanks largely to one Air Force guy attached to one of my ODAs, that all changed just recently. Because this one guy went unkempt, our relaxed grooming standards were taken away. We now shave daily and we are no longer "The Bearded Ones." Or are we? We often heard chatter on the radio when out on patrols. The enemy would lay in ambush positions waiting for the unsuspecting US patrol to venture through. When we passed through their ambush zone, they most often held their fire, the enemy commander stating over the radio to "hold fire because it is The Bearded Ones." With or without beards, we are no different today than before. We remain the most feared force in theater. As proof, I offer up this story from our most recent patrol.

We are responsible for the security of a large region along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, which is dotted with Border Control Points (BCP). The BCPs are out in the Wild, Wild West, Injun Country, and they are attacked frequently. The enemy uses them as confidence targets. If they can attack and overrun the BCP, it serves to raise their confidence and make them bolder, whether they hold the ground or leave.

Reports of an enemy attack on one of our BCPs by a 400-man enemy force raised some concerns with one of my ODAs responsible for that BCP. The ODA was occupied on another mission and powerless to counter the threat at the BCP. So my company headquarters threw together a quick plan, loaded up a plethora of weapons and ammunition. I had five weapons to employ myself. The nine of us (former) Bearded Ones along with an escort of about 30 Afghans headed off into the Badlands. Without beards, the enemy still knew we had come to town and that we meant business. We arrived at the BCP, took up positions, and settled in for the night and a good fight. The enemy force altered their plans, moved 20 kilometers and attacked a different BCP. From our mountaintop position we had a clear view for tens of kilometers. We watched the battle through our night vision optics and let me tell you it was a hell of a fight. When it was done, the enemy attackers were unsuccessful in their assault. Our well-trained Afghani force at the BCP held off the enemy for a couple hours, beat them back, and suffered zero casualties in the battle. I believe that speaks volumes for what we have established with our Afghani brothers in arms and leaves a legacy of which we should be proud, with or without beards. They still fear us sans beards, and the Afghans we trained are easily our equals in battle. I am proud to serve with them and proud to fight alongside them.

After a long, chilly, rainy night at the BCP, we loaded up around mid-morning the next day and headed back to our firebase. We visited another BCP on the way back. Along the

very narrow, winding road through the mountains bordering Pakistan we came across a small village. In the attached pictures there are two that show some tents. That is the extent of this village of the Koochie tribe. Our Afghani Security Guard force commander stopped the convoy at the Koochie village so we could hand out socks and gloves and hats and warm sweaters donated by Christ Delong Church in Bowers, PA. The village was excited to have visitors and happy to receive the gifts. I enclosed a couple pictures from the Koochie village.

The last couple pictures are random shots from our time at the BCP. And two pictures of trucks. The nice looking truck belongs to the conventional forces here and is typical of what they use. The "Monster Garage" looking truck is one of ours that we've been using here for five years now. I suspect that the enemy has come to associate our well-worn looking trucks with The Bearded Ones.

I hope this finds you all well, happy, and enjoying life as I am.

Rob