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2 PPCLI's B Company in Zharey-Panjwayi

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ZHAREY-PANJWAYI, AFGHANISTAN -- For over two months B Company from 2 PPCLI Battle Group has been operating in the Zharey-Panjwayi area of Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Although it has been a relatively short period, the company has already completed a large-scale operation, and countless dismounted patrols. The company's area of operation is considered the birthplace and heart of the Taliban, which is a challenging environment to begin a tour.

The first platoon from B Company arrived in Afghanistan in mid-February; they were soon followed by a steady stream of buses from CFB Shilo to 17 Wing in Winnipeg, which continued in the weeks after. Some changes, such as going from minus 40 degrees Celsius up to plus 25 degrees Celsius, were definitely welcome.

Other changes, mainly saying goodbye to family and friends, were more difficult. For the most part though, there was a feeling of exhilaration at finally being able to do what everyone in the Company had trained so long for.

After brief administrative routines in Kandahar Airfield upon arrival, members of B Company soon pushed out to Zharey-Panjwayi to begin their duties.

With rigorous work up training completed, and many of the Company's soldiers having served previously in 2002 and 2006, B Company was well prepared.

In a short amount of time, B Company immersed itself in everything Afghan - ranging from the people, to the food, to the environment. Foot patrol members interact on a daily basis with the locals, and speak with them through interpreters as a way to build trust and learn their concerns.

Patrols (and any other operation) almost always include the local police or Afghan National Army. Suddenly, working with those who have different soldiering styles presents unique challenges, but at the same time, it's greatly rewarding. Though initially wary of each other, it didn't take long for Canadian and Afghan soldiers to develop a deep sense of mutual respect. At the end of any mission, all Canadians are glad their Afghan counterparts were there.

Working in the Zharey-Panjwayi area also includes sampling the local chai when meeting with elders, or having a feast of goat, rice and flatbread during Now Ruz, which is Afghanistan's New Year.

The weather is mainly warm and sunny. Summer has not yet arrived, but patrolling often involves sweating through clothing, and having fine dust stick to almost everything.

The wind picks up every so often, creating the occasional dust storm which limits visibility.

There has also been the odd hailstorm. These changes in weather are usually taken with a casual shrug of the shoulders. Although it's quite far from Zharey-Panjwayi, CFB Shilo has done well in conditioning 2 PPCLI for extreme and varied weather.

By far, the most difficult part of the tour has been taking casualties. Sgt Jason Boyes and Pte Terry Street are two B Company soldiers we have sadly lost.

Their deaths have been felt across the Battle Group, and of course back home.

The very nature of living and working in western Manitoba, where everyone seems to know everyone, has made this loss even more profound. If you didn't know Jason Boyes or Terry Street, you probably know someone who did.

The mission continues with the motivation to ensure that no loss has been in vain. The bombs that kill Canadian soldiers can kill anyone--Canadian, Afghan, military or civilian. B Company will continue to stabilize its area and improve the quality of life for those who live here.

No better friend, no worse enemy.