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## Living an adventurous life on 'Haji Beach'

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Soldiers relax on a cot in a typical sleeping area of a Forward Operating Base. Hesco-Bastion walls are in the background.

**Arghandab River, Afghanistan** – The Muslim call-to-prayer broadcasts over loud speakers from the local mosque, mixing with the crowing of unseen roosters. Soldiers wipe the sleep from their eyes as the sun peeks its head over the distant mountain range. One thinks to oneself: 'This wouldn't be such a bad place if bad guys weren't lurking around every corner'.



Sergeant Tim Fletcher and Private Dennis Bray maintain their vigilance while patrolling an area near their combat outpost.

Waking up to the smell of bacon tricks the tired mind into thinking you are at home. Then the smell of marijuana fields and soldiers' sweat reminds you that you are in Afghanistan. The banks of the Arghandab River are less than 200 meters away. The fast-flowing cool water appeals to the sorest parts of the body. The stifling heat begs you to jump in; the landmines, explosives and fear of Taliban ambush tells you not to.

This is Haji Beach, named after three nearby villages, Haji Soltanmohammad Khan, Haji Atamohammad Khan and Haji Mohammad Yusof.

Cots are strewn about in an apparent haphazard manner reflecting the reality of a lack of space. Hesco-Bastion walls protect the troops who call the small combat out-post home. The Afghan National Police (ANP) add local flavour to the camp.





A member of a Force Protection unit stands guard for a meeting beside the Arghandab River.

Long patrols throughout varying hours of the day and night add excitement to what would otherwise be a lacklustre routine of security. The ANP lead a group of Canadians, cursing the heat under their breaths, through side roads and wadis (dry river beds). They seem to take no notice of the heat, wearing toques and thick cotton uniforms. Upon return, de-briefs take place to share perspectives on anything that could be categorized as intelligence.

As night approaches tired bodies head towards their bunks for some well-deserved rack-time. Familiar routines include the nightly spider check. Flashlights are turned on, almost in unison across cots and ceilings, hoping to catch spiders before they descend into sleeping bags. Sandals at the ready, troops swing wildly at the arachnids.

Those off duty snore the night away. Others tip-toe cautiously around outstretched limbs, and make their way to the tower for a shift on observation post. Familiar rustling sounds emit from the kitchen area where the local mascot, Sonic the Hedgehog, takes advantage of the quiet night to feast on Cheerios left out for him.

Music competes with conversation and laughter in the ANP section of the camp. The smells of chai and barbequed goat fill the air. Shadows of the ANP dance on the walls as they horse around and joke with each other until the wee hours of morning.

The sun begins to rise, signalling the start of a new day at Haji. The process of food, work and rest begins anew. Patrols depart for new places to meet with new locals. New scents of breakfast waft from the mess. Cheerios are added to Sonic's dish. Cigarettes are smoked and coffee drank, the day begins. Maybe we will get re-supplied today.

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