



New Sniper System Designed for Urban Fight

PEO SOLDIER

Soldiers deploying have just received a weapon that will dramatically improve sniper operations. The new M110 Semi-Automatic Sniper System (SASS), approved for full materiel release in August, is now in the hands of snipers from Fort Polk, Louisiana. The mid-November fielding represents the first time the weapon has been fielded before deployment.

MAJ Marc Meeker, Assistant Product Manager for Soldier Weapons — the Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier office responsible for the weapon's acquisition — was on hand for the milestone.

“Our focus is to try to get this weapon fielded to units prior to their deployment,” he said, stressing the Army's commitment to providing comprehensive training and the best equipment to its Soldiers. “We don't want to field in theater. We would rather train in a peacetime environment, and have Soldiers equipped with the best and newest equipment as they go forward on the battlefield.”

After the Soldiers at Fort Polk spent some time getting acquainted with the M110, they deemed the weapon a great improvement over its predecessor, the M24.

“It's everything a sniper wants,” one sergeant said. “We're all very excited about this new weapon system because it's custom-tailored to the kind of fight we're in.”

That environment — typically an urban one — stands in stark contrast to the terrain the sergeant faced in his prior deployment. “It's a very target-rich environment for them over there,” MAJ Meeker noted, “and they have to be very selective about their targets.”

One of the major improvements that will help in that environment is the higher-



PEO Soldier photos

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rate of fire, allowing snipers to target insurgents accurately and quickly in civilian-dense areas. This has been achieved by replacing the M24's bolt-action system and internal five-round magazine with quickly detachable high-capacity box magazines. Another essential upgrade is the flash/sound suppressor.

The M110 also can eliminate unnecessary baggage when snipers must switch gears to engage the enemy in close-quarters. According to SSG Aaron W., “I don't have to have my shooter carry an extra weapon when we go into buildings to clear rooms. He can actually use (the M110). That's going to lighten our load a lot.”

In addition to these features, the M110 includes a 3.5-10x power variable rifle scope, and MIL-STD-1913 Picatinny rail, which allows the



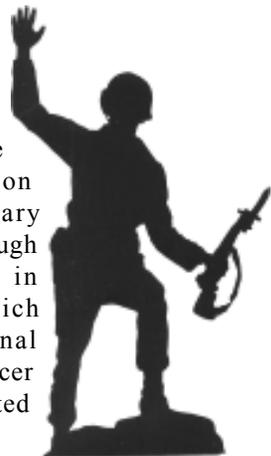
Soldiers become familiarized with the new M110 Semi-Automatic Sniper System at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

weapon to be tailored with rail-mountable accessories such as the AN/PVS-26 clip-on night sight, which was also fielded at Fort Polk.

PEO Soldier is responsible for virtually everything the Soldier wears or carries. More information on weapons and other PEO Soldier programs can be found at www.peosoldier.army.mil.

USAIS ANNOUNCES 2008 WRITING CONTEST

The purpose of the 2008 U.S. Army Infantry School Professional Writing Contest is to stimulate discussion and the dissemination of information relevant to the contemporary operational environment through the publication of articles in *Infantry Magazine* which contribute to the professional development of officers, officer candidates, NCOs, and enlisted Soldiers.



Eligibility:

The USAIS Professional Writing Contest is open to anyone, civilian or of any military rank, including Maneuver Captains' Career Course (MCCC) and Maneuver Advanced NCO Course (M-ANCOC) and other commissioned and noncommissioned USAIS students wanting to share their experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, or on other deployments with Soldiers serving in the global war on terrorism.

Submission Criteria:

Each entrant should submit an unclassified, original paper on any subject. Some suggested topics appear at Figure 1, although other topics relevant to current operations in the global war on terrorism may be acceptable as well. Magazine issue themes for FY 08 are listed in Figure 2. Papers should be between 2,000 and 4,000 words. Submit slides and line art as Microsoft Office PowerPoint files, with photographs submitted as jpeg or tif files. We will not accept copyrighted art or photographs without written permission of the copyright holder, and it is the responsibility of the entrant to obtain such permission. Each entry must include a completed submission form, Figure 3. The article should be a double-spaced Word document in 12 point Times New Roman font.

Prizes and recognition:

First Place: Award of \$300, a Certificate of Achievement signed by the Chief of Infantry, publication in *Infantry Magazine*, and a year's subscription to *Infantry Magazine*.

Second Place: Award of \$150, a Certificate of Achievement signed by the Chief of Infantry, publication in *Infantry Magazine*, and a year's subscription to *Infantry Magazine*.

Third Place: Award of \$50, a Certificate of

Figure 1 — Suggested Topics

- **Information operations in the contemporary operational environment** — What is the enemy doing, what are we doing? How are the print and broadcast media affecting our efforts, or how might they be assisting our adversaries? Impressions of the impact of our media on host nation people are useful, too.
- **Intelligence gathering in stability operations** — What essential elements should we be looking for, and what should we be denying the enemy?
- **Military transition training** — What have been our successes, what did not work as well as we had hoped? Comparisons between today's MiTT initiatives and our advisory efforts in Vietnam.
- **Lawrence of Arabia** — What can we learn from him? What lessons did he learn, and how are they relevant nine decades later? What did Vo Nguyen Giap learn from him, and how well did he apply it?
- **Counterinsurgency** — How does today's COIN relate to other insurgencies such as the British experience in Malaya, the Mau Mau rebellion, or Vietnam?
- **The asymmetric environment and its effect on small unit leadership** — Are we teaching our company grades what they need to know?
- **Mountain operations** — How do today's operations differ in light of those in World War II? Where do we stand in comparison to our allies with experience in fighting in the clouds? What can we learn from the Germans, Italians, Greeks, Indians, Pakistanis, and Russians?
- **Combatives** — Are we training enough, and how effective is what we teach proving to be on the ground in GWOT?
- **Cultural awareness** — How have our training initiatives worked? Have we learned enough about other cultures, and how can we introduce them to our own way of life and help them better understand why we do the things we do?
- **Dismounted operations and the urban fight** — What have we learned, and what has our enemy learned? Are we losing our edge on mounted operations as we adapt to a new enemy on new terrain?
- **OPSEC** — Are we as aware of it as we should be, and where do our weaknesses lie?

Achievement signed by the Chief of Infantry, publication in *Infantry Magazine*, and a year's subscription to *Infantry Magazine*.

Evaluation and Judging:

A board of subject matter experts chosen from within the USAIS staff and faculty will screen and evaluate all submissions, select the top three, and rank order them according to standards of relevance to current and future operations in the global war on terrorism; technical accuracy; original thought; and adherence to the Army Writing Style.

Contest Milestones:

Entries and submission forms due to Editor, *Infantry Magazine*, by December 31, 2008.

Mail to: *Infantry Magazine*
ATTN: Editor
P.O. Box 52005
Fort Benning, GA 31995-2005

In addition to a hard copy of the article and submission form, please include a disk or CD with the files a well.

Winners will be announced in the May-June 2009 issue.

OPSEC:

We cannot accept any entries containing classified or sensitive material. Entrants are responsible for having their entries screened by their security managers or public affairs personnel prior to submission, and will attach a statement to the submission sheet indicating that the screening has been completed.

Biography:

Entrants should submit a 1-2 page biography which covers military and civilian education, rank, last three assignments, and — for officers — source of commission.

For more information about the contest, contact the magazine staff through one of the following methods:

E-mail — russell.eno@us.army.mil.

Telephone — (706) 545-2350/6951 or DSN 835-2350/6951

Web site — www.infantry.army.mil/magazine (will need to enter AKO login and password)

Figure 2 — *Infantry Magazine* Themes for FY 2008

November-December 2007 — Military Transition Teams

January-February 2008 — Mountain Operations

March-April 2008 — Urban Operations

May-June 2008 — Cultural Awareness

July-August 2008 — Counterinsurgency

September- October 2008 — Training Tomorrow's Infantrymen

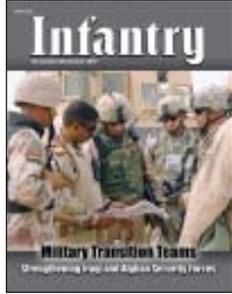


Figure 3 — Submission Form (This form is also available online at <https://www.infantry.army.mil/magazine>)

MEMORANDUM FOR: Editor, *Infantry Magazine*

SUBJECT: The 2008 USAIS Professional Writing Contest

1. Attached is my entry for the 2008 Professional Writing Contest.
2. The subject of my paper is _____.
3. This research paper is my original work. I have properly attributed all material drawn from other sources and no part of it has been plagiarized. It has not been previously published in this form, nor is it currently under consideration for publication in any magazine other than *Infantry*. It has not been entered in any writing contest other than this one.
4. I understand that, whether or not it is selected as a winner, the United States Army Infantry School may reproduce it for instructional purposes, and *Infantry Magazine* will have first right of publication without copyright restrictions.
5. This paper has been screened by a security manager or public affairs officer to ensure that it does not contain classified or other material in violation of operational security (OPSEC) guidelines.

Signature _____

Printed Name _____

Title / Organization _____

SOLDIERS CONFIDENT IN M4 DESPITE TEST

J.D. LEIPOLD

In a test conducted last month under extreme conditions, the M4 carbine had just over one of every 100 rounds jam in the weapon or magazine. A recent survey, though, indicated that an overwhelming majority of Soldiers who have used the M4 in combat have high confidence in the weapon.

At a Pentagon media roundtable December 17, the Army addressed the results of the M4 carbine Extreme Dust Test III conducted in November. The test had been scrutinized by Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma after the M4 finished last of four weapons in the technical testing.

The M4 was put through technical rigors along with the XM-8 lightweight assault rifle, the MK-16 combat assault rifle and the HK-416 carbine in a series of extreme technological performance tests designed to push the four weapons systems to failure and to identify their boundaries.

The four weapons were first subjected to 25 hours of constant, heavy dusting in laboratory conditions at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, “in an environment not commonly found, if ever, in an operational environment,” said BG Mark Brown, commander of Program Executive Office Soldier and the Natick Soldier Systems Center, who stressed the test was not an operational examination. “Extreme dust test does not replicate any typical Soldier use or operational condition.”

The general stressed the test did not address reliability in any typical operational condition, nor did it test weapons part service life or life-cycle maintenance costs or any other aspect of weapons effectiveness, such as suitability, survivability or other reliability and performance other than technical reports in extreme dust conditions.

After being exposed to the heavy dusting, 10 of each weapon fired 6,000 rounds apiece. They were fired in 50 120-round cycles. Each was then wiped and re-lubricated at the 600-round mark. After 1,200 rounds were fired from each weapon, they were fully cleaned and relubricated — far less often than would have occurred in the operational field where Soldiers typically clean and lube their weapons after each mission, even if their weapons have not been fired.

“While the M4 finished fourth out of four, 98 percent of all the rounds fired from it went off down range as they were supposed to do,” BG Brown said. “However, the three other candidates did perform better at about a 99 percent rate or better, which is a mathematically statistically significant difference, but not an operationally statistical difference.”

Even with extreme dust test III’s 98.6 percent success rate there was a total of 863 class 1 and 2 weapon/magazine stoppages with 19 class 3 stoppages. During extreme dust test II conducted during the summer, there were 296 total class 1 and 2 stoppages and 11 class 3 stoppages. A class 1 stoppage is one a Soldier can clear



PEO Soldier

A technician at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, puts a heavily dusted M4 carbine through a series of firing tests.

within 10 seconds; a class 2 stoppage is one a Soldier can clear, but requires more than 10 seconds; and, a class 3 is a stoppage that requires an armorer to clear.

“One of the concerns we had about the test and what drove us to this news conference is that the test was still under analysis when we started getting external questions about it,” BG Brown said. “At this stage of analysis of the test results, this is very early preliminary feedback. We don’t know what caused the differences in performance between dust test II and dust test III.

“The tests were undertaken at different times of the year; they were taken under different humidity conditions — it’s not a humidity controlled chamber; the tests were undertaken by different crews, so we’re in the process of evaluating why the big disparity between the tests,” he said. “Still, we’re talking about a 98-percent performance rate with no stoppages. The M4 carbine is a world-class weapon, and the Soldier feedback on that weapon since the war began is that they have a high confidence level in the M4.”

The Army has put an option on an existing contract for 64,450 M4s, according to the general.

In a recent survey conducted by the Center of Naval Analysis, 917 Soldiers who have used the M4 carbine in combat reported an 89 percent overall satisfaction in the weapon. A total of 734 or 80 percent reported confidence that the M4 will fire without malfunction in combat; and 81 percent did not experience a stoppage while engaging the enemy. Three percent who experienced a stoppage reported an inability to engage the enemy during a significant portion or the entire firefight after performing immediate or remedial action to clear the stoppage, while only 1 percent, or 12 Soldiers felt the M4 should be replaced.

NEWS BRIEFS

Firing Table Updates Available —

The Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC) Firing Tables and Ballistics Division announces the availability of FT 60-P-1 Change 16. The updated table can be downloaded from the FTaB Mortar Tabular Firing Tables AKO page at the link <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/doc/9725298>.

USAMU Needs Pistol Shooters —

The U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, is looking for a few good shooters.

The highly competitive unit is putting out its annual call for Soldiers who are interested in competing in pistol competitions in the summer of 2008.

Soldiers in the rank of staff sergeant and below with fewer than 15 years of service who obtain approval from their commanders can travel to Fort Benning in April at the expense of the marksmanship unit to participate in the initial training. The Soldiers are trained

in advanced marksmanship skills.

Once that is complete, pistol team officials will select shooters to participate in the Interservice Championships in June and the National Matches in July.

After the three-month tour, Soldiers return to their units with invaluable marksmanship training that can be harvested by unit trainers to improve the marksmanship skills of their Soldiers.

Soldiers who are interested in the developmental pistol shooter program can contact SFC Jason M. St. John at (706) 545-7022 or 545-3893 or DSN 835-7022 or e-mail Jason.StJohn@usaac.army.mil.

Reunions Set — The **Society of the First Infantry Division**, veterans of the Army's "Big Red One," will hold its 90th annual reunion August 20-24 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, at the Crowne Plaza.

For more information, visit the society's Web site at www.1stID.org, e-mail Soc1ID@aol.com, or call (888) 324-4733.

The **45th Infantry Division**

(**Thunderbirds**) will hold its reunion September 25-27 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. For more information, contact Raul Trevino at (210) 681-9134 or 2145 NE Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73111.

Wear-out Date Set for BDUs —

The Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for G-1 (Personnel) announced that the final wear-out date for the Army Battle Dress Uniform and Desert Battle Dress Uniform will be April 30 for both active-duty and reserve-component Soldiers.

The Army began phasing out the woodland and desert-pattered uniforms on June 14, 2004, with debut of the digital-patterned Army Combat Uniform.

All brown T-shirts, black combat boots and green and black jungle boots, woodland and desert-camouflage caps, olive-drab-green name and U.S. Army tapes, subdued-olive-green shoulder-sleeve insignias and the black rigger belt and web belt with open-faced black buckle will also become obsolete on April 30.

NEW AMMO WILL DECREASE RICOCHET HAZARDS

DARRYL HOWLETT

A new type of ammunition is arriving in time to help Soldiers in dangerous urban landscapes, such as those in Iraq.

BG James E. Rogers, commanding general of the Joint Munitions Command at Rock Island, Illinois, approved the full materiel release of the M-1030 12-gauge shotgun breaching cartridge in late 2007.

"The M-1030 is an anti-material cartridge designed to be used for defeating wooden doors (deadbolts, knobs and hinges) and padlock hasps," said R. Ned DeWitt, product manager of crew served weapons with the Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center. "The cartridge is functional with the Mossberg 500/590 and the Remington 870 shotguns. The cartridges will be tested in the XM62 Modular Accessory Shotgun System as part of the product qualification testing for the weapon."

DeWitt said changes in combat from open field to urban



Ssg Antonieta Rico

The M-1030 is designed to minimize ricochet hazards associated with buckshot breaching.

environments drove the implementation for the changes.

"Since combat has migrated toward military operations in urban terrain, ballistic-breaching operations have increased. This necessitated the need for a specialized breaching munition capable of being fired from existing and future small arms weapons," he said.

The most important aspect of the new munition is its safety toward Soldiers.

"Current shotgun-ballistic breaching utilized 00 Buckshot cartridges that are not designed for breaching," DeWitt said. "Soldiers have suffered severe

injuries during breaching operations utilizing buckshot cartridges," he said. "The frangible projectile of the M-1030 minimizes ricochet hazards currently associated with buckshot breaching and provides a much safer alternative to the Soldier."

(Darryl Howlett is assigned to the U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command Public Affairs Office.)

HUMAN TERRAIN TEAM HELPS SOLDIERS IN IRAQ UNDERSTAND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

SERGEANT MIKE PRYOR

On a bright afternoon, Professor Dave Matsuda traveled with a group of U.S. Soldiers to tour a food distribution depot in the Ur neighborhood of Iraq. The Soldiers were worried about how to keep the depot from being infiltrated by Moqtada Al Sadr's Shi'ite militia army, which controls that part of the Iraqi capital.

The chief of security at the depot, however, assured them the warehouse was safe, because his "organization" protected it from Sadr's influence.

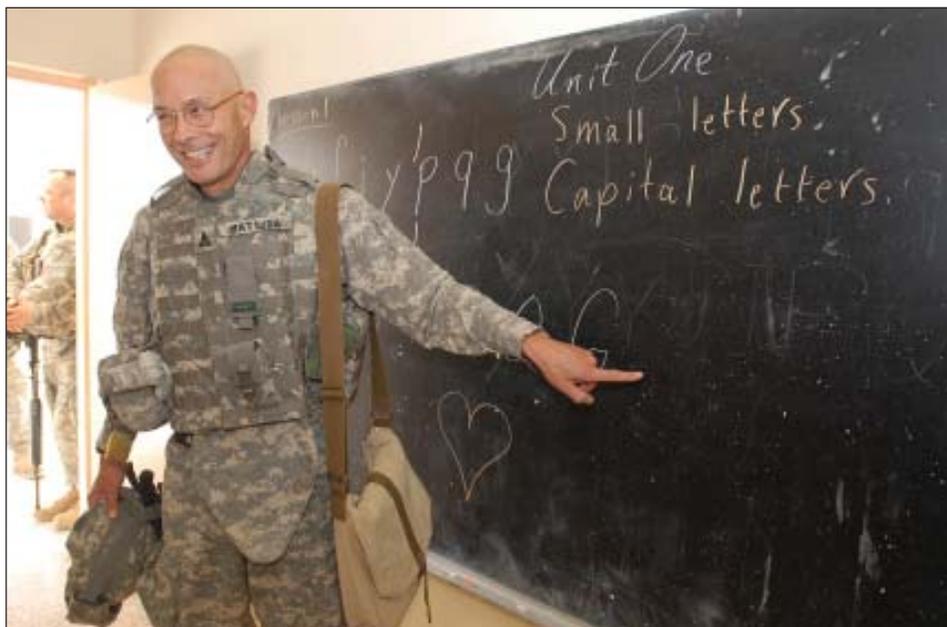
The Soldiers were doubtful the warehouse was safe. The chief's independence seemed inexplicable given what they knew about the area — it was a puzzling anomaly in a sea of data pointing in the other direction. Prof. Matsuda, though, believed he could put the pieces of the puzzle together.

He began asking the chief questions about his family, his extended family, his tribe, and the tribe's affiliations with other tribes. Later, he was able to chart the relationships on a diagram to show how the chief's tribal hierarchy operated, giving the Soldiers a rare glimpse into the complicated inner workings of Iraqi society.

It was a valuable insight drawn not from standard military intelligence gathering techniques, but from the science of anthropology.

"A military person would say 'Let's look at this in political or military terms,'" Prof. Matsuda said, "but an anthropologist says, 'Let's look at the tribal relationships underneath everything.'"

There's a reason Prof. Matsuda knows what an anthropologist would look for: he is one. Back home, Prof. Matsuda teaches at California State University, East Bay. He holds a double doctorate in anthropology and developmental psychology. Tall, soft-spoken, and bespectacled, he fits the image of the bookish professor perfectly. But these



SGT Mike Pryor

Dave Matsuda, a professor of anthropology working as a cultural analyst with the Human Terrain Team, returns to his teaching roots while playfully instructing a class during a visit to a school in Baghdad's Sadr City.

days, Prof. Matsuda has traded in his professor's tweeds for combat boots and a bulletproof vest. In September, he brought his expertise to Iraq as part of a small group of cultural experts called the Human Terrain Team (HTT), which is attached to the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team operating in northeast Baghdad and Sadr City.

The HTT's mission is to diagram Iraq's cultural landscape — its "human terrain" — in the same way intelligence analysts map out Iraq's cities, roads, and rivers. It's a function that has become increasingly important as the U.S. military has turned its focus to counterinsurgency operations, in which cultural understanding is the key and knowing the human terrain is absolutely essential, said the team's leader, LTC Edward Villacres.

The Team

The 2nd BCT's Human Terrain Team

uses history and social science to provide cultural awareness that supports the brigade's operations, LTC Villacres pointed out.

HTT consists of the team chief, an area specialist, a social scientist, and a research manager. Prof. Matsuda, the social scientist, is a civilian, while the other members are active-duty Army with specialized knowledge. All team members have specialized knowledge specific to their HTT jobs.

"We've got people who know the culture in and out," said 1LT Sami Tioni, the team's research manager and a native Arabic speaker.

To accomplish its mission, the team draws on two pools of knowledge: information that has already been collected and information the team members collect themselves. They then analyze the information and present their conclusions and advice to the brigade commander.

"It gives him an additional level of

insight as he prepares to make decisions,” LTC Villacres said.

Officials with the 2nd BCT said they appreciate the contributions the HTT has made to the brigade’s operations so far.

“They add a critical dimension to the fight, one that has been missing up to now,” said LTC David Oclander, the 2nd BCT’s executive officer.

Outside the military, however, the teams have sparked some controversy. Much of the opposition has come from people in the academic world, who, according to Prof. Matsuda, fear the Army will misuse the knowledge offered by social scientists.

“Some are saying anthropology can’t be part of the Army without being corrupted,” he said.

Prof. Matsuda said some of the concerns are valid, and some are motivated by knee-jerk antimilitarism. Regardless, he said, the stakes are too high in Iraq right now to sit on the sidelines.

Knowing the Script

Even though Operation Iraqi Freedom is in its fifth year, LTC Villacres said many in the U.S. military still fail to appreciate the differences between Arab and Western culture.

“Arab society doesn’t have any of the common foundations we have,” he said.

As a result, it can be difficult for Iraqis and U.S. Soldiers to find common ground, despite good intentions on both sides. Prof. Matsuda gave as an example an instance where U.S. Soldiers thought they had settled a dispute with people in a village by making a condolence payment. But when the Soldiers returned a few days after making the payment, they were attacked. The Soldiers thought they had been betrayed, but in the villagers’ eyes, the agreement had never been valid because the traditional reconciliation ritual hadn’t been conducted, Prof. Matsuda explained.

Anthropologists believe all societies operate according to a certain “script,” Prof. Matsuda said. Iraqis have one script, Americans have another. The HTT’s mission is to provide an interpretation of the Iraqi cultural script that will help Soldiers make the right decisions.

The team has carried out that task in ways both small and large. One small way they affected operations came when the brigade was about to put out a wanted poster featuring an image of the scales of justice. Prof. Matsuda pointed out the idea behind the scales of justice was a Greek-derived, Western concept that meant nothing to Iraqis. Instead he proposed changing the poster to show two open hands — an image drawn from ideas in the Quran — in order to make it more resonant with Iraqis.

We try to find the assumptions and motivations behind what people do,” the professor said.

Why it Matters

1LT Tioni said the value of insights the HTT offers shouldn’t be underestimated.

“We fight an enemy who is very fluid, and the only way we’re going to defeat them is by knowing the culture,” he said.

The team’s work isn’t simply an academic exercise, team members said. 1LT Tioni said he is convinced greater cultural awareness will help protect Soldiers out on the streets and knowing how to interact with the population is what’s going to save lives.

In justifying his work in Iraq, Prof. Matsuda returned to the example of the Soldiers who were attacked even after making a condolence payment because they didn’t understand the importance of cultural traditions.

“I don’t want those guys going into that village thinking they got it all taken care of and they end up getting shot,” Prof. Matsuda said. “I want everyone to come home.”

(SGT Mike Pryor serves with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division Public Affairs.)

AMBUSH ALLEY!

THE ROAD TO ZEROK COP

SPECIALIST MICAH E. CLARE

ZEROK COMBAT OUTPOST, Afghanistan — It is known to coalition forces as “Ambush Alley.”

Despite the imminent threat of attack by insurgent fighters along the winding, narrow road surrounded by steep hills and large rocks on the way to Zerok Combat Outpost (COP) in northern Paktika province, nothing can deter the courage of the paratroopers of 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

Army SSG Timothy Hamilton, a mortar team squad leader in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, from St. Petersburg, Florida, remembers one such attack on August 27, a day he will never forget.

The HHC convoy was moving from Forward Operating Base Orgun-E to Zerok COP on a mission to secure a nearby pass while the battalion command group convoy traveled through.

Just as the HHC convoy stopped to send a dismounted team into the hills, the attack began.

SSG Hamilton stepped out of the passenger side of his vehicle to set up a mortar firing position with his Soldiers, when he heard a roaring noise somewhere behind him.

“I heard a big explosion,” he said. “I whirled around just in time to see a [rocket propelled grenade] impact into the truck behind me. I immediately jumped back in my truck.”

On cue, a hail of small arms fire came raining down on the convoy from that direction, and the gunners went into action immediately.

“My gunner opened fire with the [M-240b

Continued on Page 10



SPC Micah E. Clare

Paratroopers from the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, patrol through Ambush Alley in Paktika province, Afghanistan.

machine gun],” SSG Hamilton said. “The enemy firing positions were so close though; his machine gun broke down after it was directly hit three to four times, so he switched to his M-4 and emptied about six magazines at the attackers.”

This was when SPC Dillon Bergstad, a .50 caliber machine gunner from North Bend, Oregon, took a round through his upper arm while firing from the company commander’s vehicle.

“Suddenly I was knocked down,” SPC Bergstad said. “It felt like somebody pushed me over, and I fell back into the truck. When I got back up, I looked around, but didn’t see anything at first, so I thought nothing had happened.”

He kept firing and remembers killing several enemy fighters at close range.

As the convoy started moving forward to get away from the side attack, they started taking even heavier contact from the front.

Four RPGs hit the company commander’s truck.

“Every time we stopped, another pane of armored glass was

‘spider webbing’ as round after round cracked against it,” SPC Bergstad said. “I couldn’t believe the intensity of this attack, they just wouldn’t stop coming. These guys weren’t joking around.”

SSG Hamilton, back in his vehicle, felt something hit him in the back of his helmet.

“It felt like a jackhammer,” he said. “It slammed my head down, and right about then, I heard another thump and (felt) a searing heat on my neck.”

Two rounds had punched through his truck. One had hit his helmet and another had grazed his neck. He could see a dent on the floor where that bullet had missed his thigh by inches and hit the floorboard.

It was during this time, that the first sergeant’s gunner, PFC Thomas Wilson of Maurertown, Virginia, was killed.

Even though the loss of their teammate was awful, the rest of the platoon still had to concentrate on getting out alive, SSG Hamilton said.

“We just couldn’t believe it,” SSG Hamilton said. “In the moment, you kind of have to forget about it and just focus.”

The attackers retreated after about 10 minutes of sustained gunfire and the Paratroopers quickly worked to tow the severely damaged trucks and bring everyone back to Zerok COP. Three vehicles needed to be towed back, and the other vehicles had broken glass, blown out tires and other damage.

Once there, both SSG Hamilton and SPC Bergstad were treated by medics, who were amazed to find their wounds very minor.

SSG Hamilton had barely escaped having his neck pierced and his thigh penetrated; SPC Bergstad had a bullet lodged just under the skin near his bicep, which was easily removed with little damage.

“I realize I could have lost my dome,” SSG Hamilton said. “I was incredibly lucky.”

In his three deployments, SSG Hamilton, a husband and father of two, says this is the worst ambush he’s ever been in. He was able to count 34 bullet strikes on his truck, including the two above his head that nearly killed him.

Three days later, the HHC convoy was mission ready once again, patrolling on the way back to FOB Orgun-E.

Since August, the 1-503rd Paratroopers have made many more trips through ambush alley and have been attacked on most of them. It doesn’t make any difference to the 173rd “Sky Soldiers” though.

Sometimes SSG Hamilton looks up at the bullet holes above his head, and sees the sunlight shining through them.

“When I see those holes, I think to myself, ‘a few more inches,’” he said. “It would have been a completely different story.”

Despite the loss of a comrade, he still knows they have a job to do. “We’ll just keep rolling through,” he said.

SPC Bergstad, looking over the ambush site from his turret, says he now sits a little lower in his seat than before.

“Still, somebody’s got to patrol this area,” he said. “It might as well be us.”

(SPC Micah E. Clare is assigned to the 4th Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office.)