

**Email from SPC David J. Bixler, 1-320th Field Artillery, 2-101
Abn, to MG John F. Campbell, Commanding General, CJTF-101**

SUBJECT: Everybody Fights, Nobody Quits!

DATE: 8 February 2011

(reproduced with permission; other names we've used last initial only)

I stood proud the day we decided upon that motto, in holding with the traditions of the 101st in setting new standards and upholding the ARMY values that keep us on our feet and hold up the name of "Soldier". When we deployed to Kandahar province in June 2010, I knew this deployment was going to be different. I felt it in my gut. I knew something was going to happen, I just didn't know what it would be.

Months passed by and we had taken it to the enemy in ways that many couldn't fathom. We had lost few, and taken many. We had counted dozens of Taliban warriors fallen, and saw the graves they dug at night while they assumed we weren't watching. All the while our FLIR cameras were ablaze, watching in amusement at the progress we were making.

Months had passed, and we had been in dozens of firefights, without taking a single injury, except of-course our backs from carrying all of the extra weight. Needless to say, the things we carried were meant to save our lives. A tale was unfolding from that simple fact alone. I was given a team leader position over 3 ANA, a grenadier, a rifleman, and an R.P.G.

I had been to school to learn some Dari, and most of them spoke it fluently, and those that couldn't relied on the others to translate. We did simple dismounted patrols which didn't require many complicated commands. "Move there", "stay here". Not too many commands required much translating when I shouted and pointed in a particular direction.

One of our soldiers had recently been injured (PFC M) and we had no replacement to carry the THOR III so I was assigned to carry it along with the other gear I was already assigned.

We were given an OPORD (Operation Order) to meet with some land owners and possibly some town elders. So we were on our way to meet them. We had passed through a somewhat dry potato field, and crossed a canal, which was their main water source, as well as their sewage outlet (tasty). Once most of my platoon had crossed over the canal and climbed the unusually high dirt mound and reached the other side, it was my job to pick up our safety markers showing where we had cleared a path. I was supposed to be the last person over the dirt mound, and over the other side. As soon as I picked up the final safety marker, we took contact.

The entire wood line in front of us seemed to explode into a frenzy of AK and

RPK fire. RPK, PKMs, possibly a M249 SAW and RPG fire was hitting all around us. We were pinned down into a ditch just on the other side of the dirt mound we had climbed up after crossing that canal. We could only manage to get a handful of soldiers in decent fighting positions. The rest of us were stuck in that ditch. My platoon sergeant, SFC L, called out "Alright we need to pull back and regroup and get more men on the ground and call in Air Support and an AWT (Air Weapons Team) to level these jackasses. They've got us pinned down here so we're no good. Get ready to move back!". I left out most of the less than decent language for plain decency. We tend to use less than professional words sometimes when we're a little heated.

So most of use who were down in the ditch had already fired a few rounds as we were hopping down into cover. So we swapped out magazines for fresh ones and prepared to move out. All-of-the-sudden one of my ANA soldiers takes off on top of the dirt mound behind us, on uncleared ground. I yelled in Pashto first, then Dari, and even English "STOP or you'll get shot!" but he didn't listen. I would have shot his legs out from beneath him to save him from detonating an IED and possibly getting us all killed, but I had too many friendlies in the way, so I hauled up the dirt mound and grabbed him by the back of the collar of his IBA and threw him back attempting to push him back into the ditch when I stepped backwards and wide trying to regain my balance when I stepped on the pressure plate.

Post-blast analysis determined that it was a pie plate (crush box) tied to two 82mm (millimeter) mortars. Enough to take out an entire platoon given the proper circumstances, yet here I am, alive with most of my parts, and the ANA only suffered miner wounds, and is probably back in the fight already. My buddies CPL F and PFC C had concussions, but that is all.

All in all, I believe I made the right decision in my actions. I saved 4 people's lives in doing what I did (or so I believe) and I give credit to the gear for protecting my faculties. Eye pro prevented shrapnel from entering my eye sockets and into my brain; the ear pro prevented hearing loss, I still have perfect hearing; and the gloves kept my fingers from getting shredded by the shrapnel being flung all around me. I did lost parts of my legs and my feet, but judging by the shrapnel they pulled out of the THOR III that was on my back, it was a small sacrifice when it could have been much worse.

You could say Angels... I think not... I believe it was the spirit of the 101st that saved my life that day. To do without being told. To act without needing prompting. To sacrifice without remorse. To be, to do, to act, to train, to become, and to live. These are what we are in the 101st ABN DIV. We are soldiers. I would gladly have given my life to ensure the safety of our families back home. I will walk again, and I will gladly make the same sacrifice again knowing that my child, and wife have a future. We keep this madness from reaching our homes, and that's why I did what I did, and I do what I do. Take it to the enemy, not the other way around.

"Everybody Fights", "NOBODY QUILTS!" our Battery commander would answer

and sound off. I will hold true to that answer. I will not quit. I am proud to be part of HHB 1-320th FAR 2 BCT 101st ABN DIV. I am proud to be part of the US ARMY. I will always fight, because it was never about me... it's all about us. Freedom.

David J. Bixler