

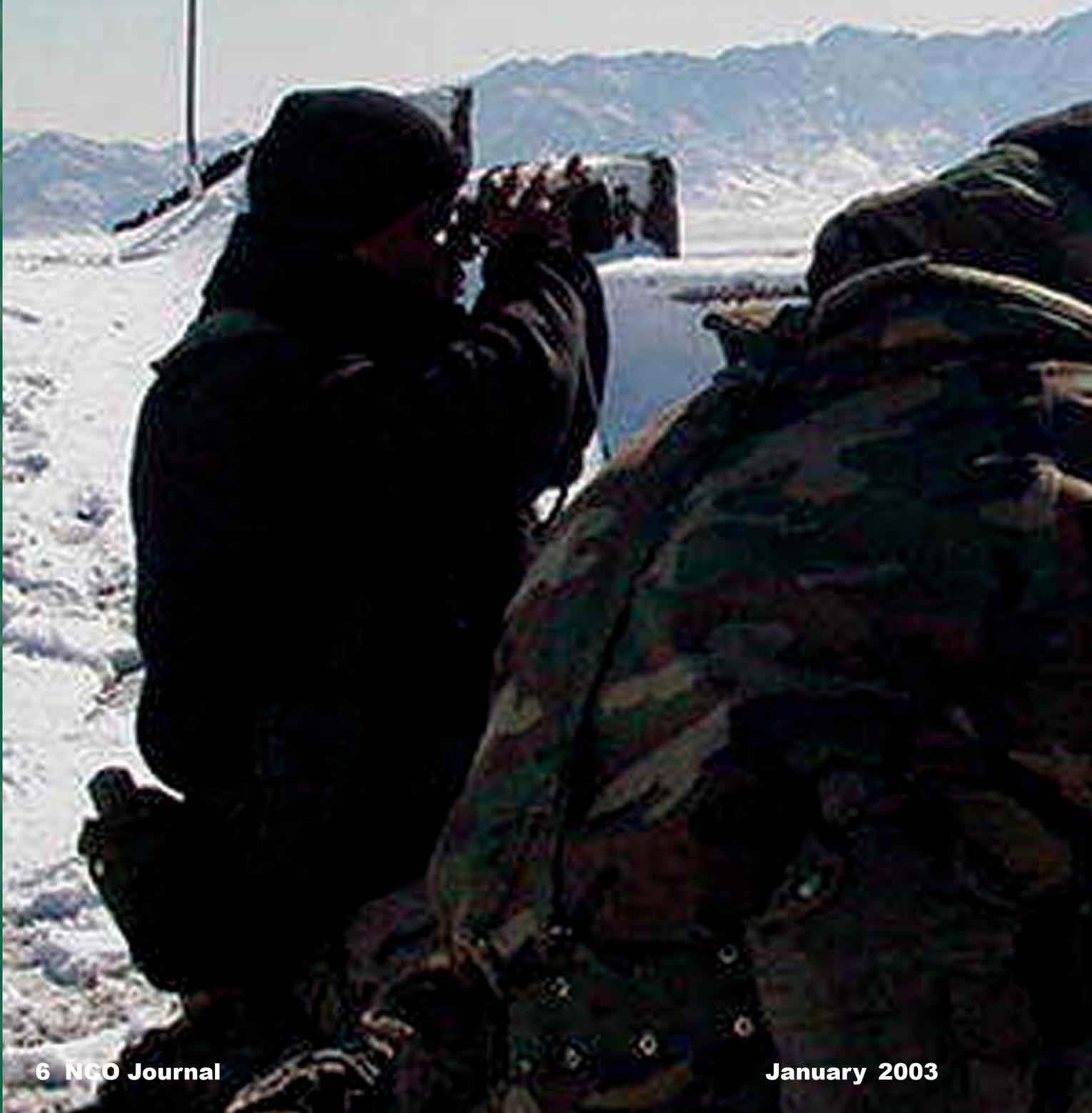
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10th Mountain Division:

# Soldiers use 'Big Four' battle

*Staff Sgt. Julio A. Martinez (left), a New York City native and forward observer, scans the Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, with Spc. Johnny Murray, a radio-telephone operator from Seymour, Ind.*

Photo by Staff Sgt. Jon D. Sheffer, 10th Mtn. Div.



# e drills to maintain combat edge

**By Staff Sgt. Dave Enders and  
Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class (Ret.) Phil Tegtmeier**

The soldiers offloaded the CH-47 helicopter taking their positions to block the escape of fleeing al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban troops. They had to rush almost immediately for the cover of a nearby ridgeline as fire erupted from an al Qaeda stronghold in the mountains above. That's what happened to 125 soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, when they landed shortly after 6 a.m. in Afghanistan's Shah-i-Khot Valley, March 2.

*Continued on next page*

“We knew there were al Qaeda in the area, but we didn’t know there were that many or that they were that well fortified,” said then 1-87 Inf. Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Grippe. He and his unit have since returned to home station at Fort Drum, N.Y., where Grippe now serves as the 1st Infantry Brigade command sergeant major.

“We were expecting to move by land about 500 meters and set up blocking positions to prevent the escape of any al Qaeda or Taliban forces.”

But al Qaeda terrorists who were already positioned in the mountain caves opened fire within moments after Grippe’s battalion hit the ground. The firefight escalated quickly as the al Qaeda group avalanched everything they had onto the battalion from the snowcapped mountains.

### Fire from above

“Within the first few minutes of the fight, we started receiving mortar fire, rocket-propelled grenades, heavy machinegun fire, light machinegun fire and small-arms fire, all from the hills above us,” said Grippe. The 1-87 soldiers had been in Afghanistan since November, but this was the first time they had engaged in a prolonged firefight.

When they first moved into the Shah-i-Khot Valley, the 1-87 Inf. soldiers expected to have time to take up their

fighting positions and wait for the enemy, but instead found themselves at the base of an al Qaeda stronghold.

“We hunkered down and manned our blocking positions. Nobody got through,” said Grippe. “We didn’t have enough troops to attack, so we maintained our blocking positions. Later that night, we asked for reinforcements to attack, but we were airlifted out at night and repositioned to attack from high ground.” That attack set a record for the Army.

### Record-setting altitude

“It was the highest elevation that the U.S. has ever fought at. We were operating in excess of 10,000 feet,” said Grippe. “It was the longest continuous battle since the Vietnam War.”

The fight was part of Operation Anaconda, a campaign to isolate and eliminate Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters in the Shah-i-Khot Valley. The battle involved not only the 10th Mountain Division soldiers in Grippe’s unit, but also Special Forces soldiers and the Rakkasans of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). The fight also included Afghan forces from the Northern Alliance.

The 1-87 soldiers deployed to Uzbekistan the first week of October 2001. Their first mission there was to secure the airbase at Karsi Kanabad, which would later serve as the

forward staging area for U.S. forces entering Afghanistan. The first 1-87 soldiers deployed into Bagram, Afghanistan, as the Quick Reaction Force for the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, to provide security to forward deployed U.S. military personnel. By Thanksgiving night, Co. B, 1-87 soldiers were in Bagram working side by side with Northern Alliance soldiers.

While in Afghanistan from November 2001 to April 2002, Grippe’s battalion also participated in operations at Mazar-i-Sharif to quell rioting Taliban prisoners. They also processed 3,000 enemy prisoners of war at Shebergan and worked side by side with U.S. Special Forces and Northern Alliance soldiers on patrols and numerous operations. The 1-87 were the first conventional Infantry soldiers to enter Afghanistan on a mission.

The 1-87 Inf. soldiers were ready for their missions because, like all U.S. warfighters, they train the way they expect to fight, said Grippe. In addition to being prepared for the wide variety of missions the battalion faced in Afghanistan through training like that, Grippe said. NCOs must be trained and led in a way that prepares them to be flexible in combat.

“You have to have complete confidence in your NCOs,” Grippe said. “You have to delegate responsibilities all the way down to junior NCOs during peacetime training. You should allow soldiers to train two levels up.”



Photo by Spc. Steven L. McGowan, 10th Mountain Division Public Affairs

*The soldiers continue physical training during the deployment. For example, the 10th Mountain Division soldiers set up a gym in a tent at Karshi Kanabad, Uzbekistan.*

## Training pays off

Grippe credited the training at the 10th Mountain Division and his own commander for having prepared his battalion well enough to get through such an intense firefight with such success. The battalion suffered no deaths, but 22 out of the 86 soldiers at Grippe's position were wounded (including Grippe himself, who was hit with enemy shrapnel in the firefight). Grippe said he trains his troops according to what he calls the "Big Four": battle-drill training, shooting skills, combat lifesaver training and physical fitness for the warfighter.

While all soldiers must be trained to Army standards, Grippe has always been able to train his soldiers beyond the standard. "The commanders that I've worked with and I have thought a lot alike," said Grippe. "We all worked together."

Grippe said the 1-87 Inf. battle-drill training was basic Army doctrine taken from a variety of sources. Grippe integrated a great deal of additional training into the battalion's scheduled training events. One driving force is the changing nature of combat. Grippe said the U.S. Army in Afghanistan continued to adapt to a new mindset, based on operational experiences there.

"The Army's too small to have a mentality that there's a separation between special operations soldiers and other light infantry forces," he said. "We need to build continuity between conventional and special operations forces." He cited the fact that throughout his battalion's rotation in Afghanistan, they worked almost exclusively alongside Special Forces and allied forces.

While collective training is important, Grippe's Big Four focuses on basic individual skills as well.

Marksmanship skills go well beyond shooting on the range, said Grippe. Some of the training that takes soldiers beyond marksmanship on the range includes taking the soldiers out to the known-distance range to shoot beyond 300 meters and shooting at night with lasers.

"The end state is that every squad needs to be able to live-fire at night with night observation devices," Grippe said. But it takes well-rounded training to keep soldiers alive, including learning how to help wounded buddies in combat.

Combat lifesaver training is standard for everyone in his unit, said Grippe. "We stress EMT (emergency medical technician) training, not just to the medics but to personnel in the rifle platoons because they're going to supplement the medics." This stress on medical training may have been key to keeping the wounded soldiers alive, he said.



Photo by Spec. Steven L. McGowan, 10th Mountain Div., Public Affairs

*A 10th Mountain Division soldier carries fuel to generators.*

"We had soldiers who were seriously wounded within the first 10 minutes of the firefight, but because of the intensity of the battle, we couldn't get them out of there until 14 hours later. Those with minor injuries went out with the main body 18 hours later," Grippe said.

Throughout the firefight, the 1-87 Inf. soldiers treated each other's wounds; they relied on their own lifesaving skills, said Grippe. "Everyone has to continually retrain on their medical skills to keep them fresh," said Grippe. "At a minimum you should have at least one EMT-qualified person per squad." The battalion sent soldiers through an EMT course at a local university to ensure that there would be enough medical personnel on hand in any given situation.

While Grippe ensured his troops were trained to treat wounds, he also ensured that they were physically fit enough to endure the combat conditions they faced in the mountainous terrain. In the Shah-i-Khot Valley, his soldiers slept in the snow in 15-degree temperatures and got next-to-nothing for sleep for eight days straight. The soldiers

gained their endurance in part from being smart about preventive medicine, and in part from tough physical conditioning at home station and in the theater.

### Physical fitness pays off

Physical fitness training must go well beyond training for the Army Physical Fitness Test, said Grippe. “We use a full-body workout. We don’t train for the APFT; we train for combat.”

Grippe equated the unit’s ability to succeed with the amount of training and confidence its senior leaders place in its younger soldiers. “No matter how elite our officer corps is, no matter how elite our senior NCO corps is, if the junior NCOs and junior enlisted fail in their missions, the country fails,” he said. “Can you imagine if we were not successful in all of our operations in Afghanistan?”

“Everyone has to be ready for immediate deployment to a combat zone,” said Grippe. “The U.S. Army is a very small force. No matter where you are in the U.S. Army, you have to be ready to go to war in a moment’s notice.”



*CH-47 Chinooks carry the brunt of the troop-movement work in Afghanistan.*

10th Mountain Div. Public Affairs



*A 110th Military Police Battalion soldier guards the military camp at Bagram, Afghanistan.*

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