

FEATURE

DRAGON STRIKE

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The Afghan National Army (ANA) 1<sup>st</sup> Kandak, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 205<sup>th</sup> Corps conducted “Operation Dragon Strike” from October 22 to October 27, 2007 in the vicinity of Baylough Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Zabol province, Afghanistan.

The combat operation was a joint effort by ANA Soldiers and U.S. Soldiers of A Company 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to clear anti-government elements (AGE) from villages and mountains in the Dawzi bowl. The ANA Kandak was mentored by Embedded Training Teams from the South Carolina Army National Guard 218<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team.

The ANA, their ETT mentors, and ISAF Soldiers entered the Dawzi bowl knowing they would encounter AGE elements looking for a fight. On the convoy to FOB Baylough, the ANA and their ETT mentors encountered three improvised explosive devices (IED) and two small arms ambushes.

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ETT mentor for 2<sup>nd</sup> Company 1<sup>st</sup> Kandak, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bde Capt. Jerry Cooper gave his view of the battle: “Our first day was spent searching the village of Molahkhel and questioning the locals about Taliban activity and rocket attacks on FOB Baylough.” Cooper said that the villagers claimed the AGE elements were foreign fighters from Uzbekistan.

“On the second through the fourth days of the operation” said Cooper, “we moved into the Dawzi bowl into the mountains and encountered a lot of mortar, machinegun, and sniper fire.” Cooper elaborated “We took fire from a PKM machinegun and Sgt. Maj. Doug Gillian, Senior Non-commissioned mentor for the 1<sup>st</sup> Company, took it out with a Mark 19 40mm grenade launcher.”

Capt. Jason Cowden, mentor for the 1<sup>st</sup> Company, described what they encountered in the Dawzi bowl, “We pushed further into valley and the mortar rounds died down. The ANA discovered an IED and a weapons cache. The ANA discovered a mortar firing position and we assaulted it. When we got within 700 meters of the position, the enemy fled.” Cowden concluded, “The ANA used the terrain to their advantage, they followed covered and concealed routes to attack the enemy. This allowed them to rout the enemy forces.”

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Cooper stated that the 1st Kandak ANA was the first unit to seize and hold the Dawzi bowl. “These guys are a good unit to begin with. When we received intelligence that the enemy was foreign fighters from Uzbekistan, the ANA really wanted to take the fight to the enemy. All of the ANA in this Kandak down to the lowest private want to run the foreign fighters out of Afghanistan. That’s the spirit the ANA need to secure peace for Afghanistan.”

Approximately 40 foreign fighters were killed at the conclusion of “Operation Dragon Strike”.