

Lessons Learned in Afghanistan

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Purpose of Travel

- **On 13 March CENTCOM called Natick Soldier Center's Hotline and asked for a team to go on/about 7 April to Afghanistan to survey:**
 - **Cold Weather Underlayers and determine why soldiers are not wearing their Bear Suits, and**
 - **Intermediate Cold Weather Boots and determine if soldiers have the correct boots.**
 - **Other soldier equipment issues from Operations Anaconda and Mountain Lion.**
- **Natick Soldier Center passed mission message to PEO Soldier since the PEO has item management of these items.**
- **PEO Soldier asked the NSC's Operational Forces Interface Group (OFIG) to execute a Quick Reaction Force mission on the PEO's behalf. The NSC had previously conducted such missions into Somalia, Bosnia, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, and Macedonia.**

Preparation

- **OFIG contacted PM Soldier Equipment and asked for updates on the two equipment items.**
- **OFIG asked PM Soldier Equipment if they had other areas that they wanted investigated. The final topic areas covered most major areas of individual equipment used by dismounted Infantry.**
- **OFIG contacted PM Small Arms to ask for survey information on weapons. Surveys were included on all platoon small arms types.**
- **OFIG prepared written surveys and interview questions.**

Execution

- **OFIG's two-man team deployed on 6 Apr 02 and linked up with CFLCC's CSM Myers (Coalition Forces Land Component Command (aka U.S. 3rd Army)), Camp Doha, Kuwait.**
- **CSM Myers escorted the OFIG team with two additional personnel (CFLCC's CSM Bailey and SGT Hoang) to Kandahar, Afghanistan and then to Pakistan.**
- **CSM Myers wanted OFIG to interview Operation Anaconda participants, namely 1-187th Inf, 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div.**
- **CFLCC CG (LTG Mikolashek) asked the team to interview Operation Anaconda participant 1-87th Inf, 10th Mtn Div, who had already returned to Ft Drum.**

Personal Purchases

- Soldiers Still Purchasing:

- Flyers gloves.
- Cushioned socks.
- Miniature binoculars.
- Sunglasses (Units bought too).
- Cargo belts for DCU pants.
- Flashlights.
- Internal cushioning for PASGT helmets.
- Padded shoulder and waist straps for ALICE rucksacks.
- Weapons cleaning kit items.
- CamelBak Systems



The “Likes”

- **Modular Sleeping Bag System**

“The Modular Sleeping Bag System” is one of the best things the Army ever came out with,” COL Wiercinski, 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div Kandahar, Afghanistan.

- **Poncho Liner**

“The Poncho Liner is great! Don’t ever get rid of it!,” COL Wiercinski, 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div, Kandahar, Afghanistan.

- **Field Jacket Liner**

- **Black Watch Cap**

- **Old Sleeping Bag Cap**

- **ALICE Rucksack**

- **Weapons in General**

The “Dislikes”

– **Brown T-Shirts**

- Dry too slowly.
 - 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div, ordered CoolMax T-shirts for all Soldiers.
- Get stretched out of shape.
- Don't wick sweat away from the body.

– **Snaps on ALICE Load Bearing Equipment**

- Snaps fail or pull out of nylon fabric and straps.
- Soldiers can replace/repair snaps in the field.
- DX is limited.

The “Dislikes”

(continued)

– Wear of Desert Combat Uniforms (DCUs)*

- Crotch seams rip out when climbing over rocky terrain.
- Uniforms shrink during wash.
- Collars are too large.

* Other than these areas, the Soldiers generally like the DCU.

– Performance of Sun, Wind, and Dust Goggles

- Fit poorly under brim of PASGT helmet.
- Fog up too easily.
- Soldiers must make homemade covers to prevent reflection.
- Lenses frequently pop out of the rubber frames.



The “Dislikes”

(continued)

– **Some Aspects of Desert Boots**

- No ankle support.
- Lug on soles wear out too fast (1-2 months).
- Soles peel off leather uppers.
- Skin abrasion/blisters across foot at lowest lacing.



– **Prescription Glasses Frames (Brown BCDs)**

- Fit poorly under brim of PASGT helmet.
- Bruise bridge of nose when helmet driven down onto glasses frame (PVS-14, etc.).
- Ugly.

The “Dislikes”

(continued)

– **Load Bearing Vests**

- Vests poorly integrate with the Interceptor Body Armor.
- Pockets are hard to use with M16 magazines and M203 40mm rounds.
- Dry very slowly.
- Hot.
- Soldiers wanted their LBEs back.

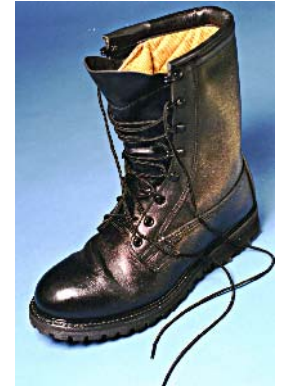
– **Some Aspects of ALICE Rucksack***

- Insufficient padding on shoulder and waist belt.
- Frame bends and pops rivets.
- Insufficient pockets (needs add-ons)



*** Other than these areas, soldiers expressed their love for ALICE.**

ICWB Lessons Learned



(1) Intermediate Cold Wet Boots (ICWBs)*

- All soldiers were issued at least one pair. Some boots not worn-in prior to operational use.
- 63% of Soldiers had foot problems with these boots.
- 65% had problems with the soles cracking.
- 55% had problems with seams coming unstitched.
- Soldiers felt the boots were fine for static missions.
- Boots were poor for movement.
 - Too inflexible, thus slipped around.
 - Got wet from sweat and stayed wet (7-24 hours to dry).
 - Heavy.

* Troops expressed a desire for a light weight hiking boot such as those used in European armies and made by companies such as Scarpa.

Underlayers Lessons Learned

(2) Cold Weather Underlayers

- 101st deployed with Bear Suits.
- 10th Mtn Div reemployed with new Fleece.
- 47% stated that they were not able to keep warm with their combination of underlayers.
- Leadership confusion over SPEAR suit.
- Fit, comfort, and packing issues with Bear Suit – not used.
- Soldiers expressed desire for a system of light, sweat wicking layers that can be easily donned and doffed while wearing their boots and that can be easily and quickly stored in small spaces.



Polyester Fleece Jacket and Bib



Polyester Fleece Jacket and Bib

ICWG Lessons Learned



(3) Gloves

- Soldiers deployed with issued Black Work Gloves, Glove Liners, and Intermediate Cold Wet Gloves (ICWGs).
- Very many Soldiers purchased Flyers Gloves before deployment.
- Most/all liners and Flight Gloves fall apart at the fingertips.
- 100% used ICWGs for warmth but 72% stated that they could not operate their weapons or other equipment while wearing the ICWGs.
- Troops stated that they would rather wear thin gloves and have cold hands than to wear the ICWGs, have less cold hands, and not be able to manipulate their weapons and other equipment.
- Soldiers stated that they would like to be issued a more robust version of the Flight Glove.

Helmet Lessons Learned



(4) PASGT Helmet

- Soldiers dislike the PASGT helmet.
- 85% of Soldiers complained that the helmet is too heavy, causing long term headaches and neck pain.
- Helmet suspension shapes their scalps for hours/days after wear.
- Sides of helmet impede hearing.
- 42% stated that the helmet interfaces poorly with the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) when in the prone position, even when the collar to the is not worn. Back SAPI plate compounds interface issue.
- Troops want a multi-point attaching chin strap to stabilize the helmet, especially when wearing Night Optical Devices (NODs).
- Helmet interfaces poorly with goggles and eye glasses.
- Helmet needs more cushioning. Many soldiers buy foam doughnuts from Clothing Sales.



Body Armor Lessons Learned



(5) Body Armor

- All soldiers interviewed wore the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA).
- 1-187 In Commander (101st Abn Div) stated that he had no difficulty keeping his soldiers in their IBAs.
- All soldiers had at least one SAPI plate and if they only had one, they wore it on the front.
- Soldiers complained that the inflexible nature of the back plate hindered their mobility.
- 43% of soldiers stated that the IBA hindered their mobility, especially in assuming and operating in the prone firing position.
- Rear SAPI plate caused interference with the PASGT helmet when in prone position and with the ALICE rucksack frame. Many soldiers removed rear SAPI plate during dismounted movements when wearing their ALICE rucksacks
- Proper sizing was an issue. One soldier was killed when he was shot through the side and the bullet passed between the front and rear armor by the sizing straps.
- IBA collars, neck guard, and groin protection generally not worn.
- Soldiers complained that the arms holes are too small and that they lose 15 circulation in their arms, especially when wearing their rucksacks.

M4 Carbine

Lessons Learned

- 34% of Soldiers reported that their M4's handguards rattle and become excessively hot when firing.
- 15% reported that they had troubles zeroing the M68 Reflex Sight.
- 35% added barber brushes and 24% added dental picks to their cleaning kits.
- Soldiers reported the following malfunctions:
 - 20% reported double feeding
 - 15% reported feeding jams
 - 13% reported that feeding problems were due to magazines.
- 89% reported confidence in the weapon.
- 20% were dissatisfied with its ease of maintenance.
- Problems reported locking magazines in and some soldiers had to chamber a round in order to lock the magazine.
- Soldiers asked for a weapon with a larger round, “So it will drop a man with one shot.”



M203 Grenade Launcher

Lessons Learned



- 50% stated that they had engaged the enemy with their M203 (personnel, buildings, bunkers, and vehicles).
- One soldier used a nonlethal round which fit poorly into the weapon (too tight).
- 15% reported that their M203 malfunctioned in combat and they could not open the breach due to stuck breach latches.
- In general, however, Soldiers reported that they were confident in their M203s.
- Other suggestions: buckshot round, better safety switch, non-slip grip on the handguard, and a 40mm muzzle cap.

M249 SAW

Lessons Learned

- 25% had engaged the enemy with their SAWs (personnel, bunkers, buildings, and vehicles).
- 54% reported problems cleaning or maintaining their weapons.
- 30% reported weapons easily rusting.
- 80% of Soldiers were pleased with the weapon's accuracy and lethality.
- 64% of the Soldiers were confident in their weapon.
- Soldiers reported ammunition drums falling off and rattling.



M240B Machine Gun

Lessons Learned



- 17% reported engaging the enemy with their M240B.
- 42% reported problems getting spare parts in Afghanistan (barrels, springs, small roll pins, T&E pin, heat shields, sear pins, spare barrel bag, cleaning materials).
- 1 soldier reported a double feed in combat.
- 50% reported that they need better ways to carry ammunition (ammo bag, etc.).
- 100% were confident in their weapon.
- 82% felt that their M240B was reliable.
- Suggestions: improved sling, lighter, more durable tripod, more durable heat shield.

M9 Pistol Lessons Learned



- Soldiers had problems with the magazine springs becoming too slack.
- 25% felt that the bullets need to be more powerful and of higher manufactured quality.
- 50% reported rust and corrosion problems, especially with the barrel.
- 63% reported confidence in the M9.

Final Report

- The Natick Soldier Center's Operational Forces Interface Group is currently mailing out the final reports on this mission.
- If you would like a copy of the report, please provide your name and mailing address on the sheet being provided.
- The Final Report provides much more detail than could be included in this presentation.