

## **Journal entries of AP photographer embedded with US Marines in Afghanistan**

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The operation started really early Wednesday morning on this town called Dahaneh. It's south of Now Zad a few miles. It is Taliban-controlled. Alfred (Associated Press writer Alfred de Montesquiou), and Ken (AP Television News Cameraman Ken Teh) were put on the assault helicopter which landed outside the compounds they intended to raid. I was stuck on a 7-ton truck with ANA (Afghan National Army) soldiers, an NPR reporter and another American guy, who is a civilian military adviser.

Initially, we, the women, (Jacobson and reporters for National Public Radio and Armed Forces Network) were going to be left at ANP hill with the backup troops. After I found that out, I (we) did some pushing and polite complaining and they finally got us on these trucks. ANP Hill is all the way back in Now Zad. I was NOT going to sit up there with all the stuff going on in Dahaneh hoping the troops at ANP got called on. It was clear it was a female thing and very frustrating. I never want to start claiming discrimination, but it was just so obvious. So, we ended up on the 7-ton, which at least got us to Dahaneh that morning.

We left at 2:30 a.m., a long, long convoy of military vehicles with a bulldozer on tank tracks leading the way and basically creating a new path for us to follow. His job was basically to clear our path of IEDs all the way to Dahaneh. It was a slow drive over maybe five miles, lasting four hours. Just inside the pass which marks the north end of town, gunfire started from all around. A few rounds passed above or near us, but most of it was from the village itself or behind us, from the hillsides down on other trucks and vehicles in the convoy. The little AK-47 pops were met with thundering beats from 50 caliber machine guns mounted on the MRAPs (mine-resistant armored cars). A few mortar shells hit the ground less than 100 meters from us. At some point we pushed farther into town a little ways, and I could see Marines on a rooftop. I also noticed Ken and Alfred up there. I was just itching to get out of that truck. Eventually, by 9 a.m. we did. We entered the compound and I headed straight for that roof along with FOX News, who was also in a 7-ton. They weren't happy because they weren't in the main assault. I met up with Alfred and Ken.

Before I could get started and while we were lying behind a wall, Alfred told me about our colleague Emilio (AP photographer Emilio Morenatti) who was embedded with the Strykers in Kandahar and that he and the APTN guy with him had been hit by an IED. Emilio lost a foot, and Andi (AP videographer Andi Jatmiko) broke his legs and ribs. It was upsetting news to hear, and made it difficult to concentrate fully on what I was doing. Although, I was clear of mind enough to keep my head down.

I spent about a half hour up on that roof and then went downstairs to file a few photos quickly. Sometime around 10:30 as I was just finishing filing, an aircraft flew in and dropped a bomb on a house not far from us. The shooting ceased immediately. They later confirmed 10 dead Talibs (Taliban fighters). So all was calm and quiet through the late morning into the afternoon.

About 16:30, we were gathering to go on the first patrol through the village. Just as we were about to step through the door of the compound, gunfire erupted outside along with RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire.

When I say compound, it means a home basically. The homes here are made of two or more buildings surrounded by high brick and mud walls. The walls are at least a foot thick and usually more and very strong.



I learned quickly the difference between a bullet passing overhead and one that has ricocheted off something. A passing bullet merely pops as it breaks the sound barrier. A ricochet has a strange whirring noise to it.

Needless to say, they dropped the patrol. Sniper fire also started coming in from the mountainside behind us. Marines on the roof suddenly had to switch sides of the roof and crouch behind a wall. I crawled up there for a bit trying to make a picture of something. Three of the Marines were tucked low trying to mark the sniper so they could call in an air strike. The others were just sitting up there smoking looking bored. But occasional bursts of fire continued until dark, when the Taliban retreated. They know the Marines have the advantage in the dark with their night vision scopes. Only two more shots were fired in the night. After that, all was calm and we slept in the various rooms of the house, on the floor, some on carpets some on padded mattresses.

#### **Thursday, Aug. 13, 2009**

Today we went out on clearance patrols with the ANA. Basically we swept through town searching houses to clear the village of Taliban. The ANA did most of the searching with the Marines in support with security. This day is particularly important because it turned things around for me with the whole female thing.

It was freakin' hot. About 115 degrees. The patrol started at 11 a.m. I don't know whose bright idea it was to start it at that time. We started walking in two columns. Not five minutes out of the post gunfire erupted from the hillside to our right. We all just started running for cover behind walls. The ANA dropped into holes to provide cover but I don't think they ever fired a shot. They just kind of sat there staring. All the cover fire came from the Marine support vehicles.

So we sprinted about 70 yards to a corner compound and made the turn. We had about three more 100-yard sprints over open ground. I did them all and was sitting there after the last one wondering if I was going to make it through the day if we were going to have to run like that the whole day. My flak jacket weighs 23.5 pounds. My camera is about 5 with the lens on. I was carrying another 2-pound lens plus my Camelback with 3 liters of water, and some other misc. stuff.

So there I was doing these 100-yard sprints with about 35 pounds on me in that heat. And as I sat there wondering if I'd keep up or tank and feeling like a wimp, the squad leader suddenly says "OK, we gotta slow down or we're not going to make it. From now on we set up security as we go and take it slow. Don't forget to drink lots of water." I felt a lot better. It wasn't just me who was breathing heavily. So we pushed on through town, searched a few houses. Heard some gunfire from other parts of town. It was a pretty uneventful search for our squad. But I kept up as they climbed over walls, on rooftops, etc. I never lagged behind. I stuck with them and didn't utter a word of complaint. I popped a Clif Blok in my mouth every so often. Earlier in the morning I drank 1.5 liters of water with Gatorade powder mixed in. I believe that's what kept me going.

Around 3 p.m. we reached the southern line of where we wanted to be. We stopped, rested in the shade and waited for other squads. At some point one of the Marines said, "FOX News dropped out. They couldn't hack it. Hey look, Jacobson from AP is still here." They thought it was funny that the FOX guys tanked. Later back at the post, the squad leader said to me, "Jacobson, thanks for coming with us today. You were a good trooper." Now, I have to say that felt really good considering the fact that when he first realized I was coming with his squad in the morning, he sighed, practically rolled his eyes. It was clear he did not want a woman on his patrol. After that day, I did not get any more such reactions from anyone. In fact they would come seek me out and let me know when they were going to go do stuff.

**Saturday, Aug. 15, 2009**

Yesterday the day was all pretty calm. There had been no shots fired. Village leaders came to meet with the Marine commanding officer and the ANA commanding officer. One guy asked the Marine captain to give him back his 30 kilos of confiscated opium. The answer was no. We went out to the new outpost built on the edge of town for the ANA and raised the Afghan flag to the Afghan national anthem, with both U.S. and Afghan troops present around mid-afternoon.

But then, just as everyone was believing that Dahaneh had been taken, we had attacks on the house the Marines and ANA were using as a command post. They started by somehow creeping up on the back wall of the house and shooting scattered AK-47 rounds into the yard. Everyone scrambled for cover. Then they started firing mortars and RPGs in addition to the AKs. The Marines on the rooftop responded with heavy fire. Alfred, Ken and I all climbed up on the roof to do our jobs up there.

As soon as we got up there, the shout of "INCOMING!!!" rang out. We all hit the deck. Luckily, the Taliban miss a lot. But there were three more incoming calls before I was able to get up and run over to the wall where all the Marines were positioned shooting. One of the shots was an RPG which hit the side of the house. One mortar shell hit the side of the house also. The other mortar shells landed just outside the walls.

It was late afternoon and a patrol was going out as soon as the shooting calmed down a little. Marine attack helicopters were now circling overhead and the Taliban usually stop shooting when they come around. So the patrol went out. Alfred and I accompanied them. We slowly made our way through the abandoned bazaar seeing scorch marks on the walls of the shops and rubble in the street. Notes posted on columns by the Taliban were read by the ANA soldiers who were with us. The notes urged villagers to fight the Marines.

It was sunset when we had left the compound. As we left the bazaar we walked along a narrow street lined by tall compound walls. At a break in one wall some men in a family were sitting outside watching us curiously, and I thought a little too nonchalantly. It was almost like people peering outside their homes during a Wild West showdown to see what might happen.

As the sun finally disappeared behind the mountains behind us we came upon an intersection with an open field bordered by a short mud brick wall. The squad leader, Cpl. (Braxton) Russell, came over to the wall where I crouched next to a Marine who had his gun trained on a stand of pomegranate trees about 70 yards away. As it turned out, some of the locals we had passed, upon seeing ANA soldiers, came out and told them where the Taliban were lying in wait. The message was relayed by radio up to the front of the stack where I was, that basically the Taliban had eyes on us and would attack if we got any closer. It was dusk.

Cpl. Russell said to the Marine, "If you see anything move from there, light it up," and then he went back to his position in the gun turret of the MRAP. The Marine looked at me as I stood there struggling to get my footing next to the ditch near the wall and keep my head below the top of the wall at the same time. He said, "If you see me drop to a knee, that's a clue that I'm going to start shooting."

Not 30 seconds after he said that, the Taliban attacked with an RPG and then with gunfire. The explosion which felt close by startled us both. He looked at me, I said I was OK, and then we noticed the grass to my right begin to catch fire from the sparks from the explosion. I bolted to his left and then all hell broke loose with M16, 50-Cal, AK-47 fire all over. The Marine next to me started to run back the direction the explosion was. I didn't want to stay in that spot because there were Afghan soldiers there and they aren't very good, so I followed the Marine.

That's when I realized there was a casualty and saw the injured Marine, about 10 yards from where I'd stood, with his legs just hanging on by skin. For the second time in my life, I watched a Marine lose his. He was hit with the RPG, which blew off one of his legs and badly mangled the other. He lost consciousness a few minutes later just before they got him into the "ambulance." I hadn't seen it happen, just heard the explosion. I hit the ground and lay as flat as I could and shot what I could of the scene even though I didn't think I could use those casualty pics based on our media rules of engagement. It was also dusk at that point and very hard to shoot with such low shutter speeds. There was lots of yelling.

The injured Marine kept saying, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe." The other guys kept telling him "Bernard, you're doing fine, you're doing fine. You're gonna make it. Stay with me Bernard!" He held Bernard's head in his hands when he seemed to go limp and tried to keep him awake. A couple more ran in with a stretcher.

This whole time amidst gunfire, I lay flat on my stomach trying to brace my camera steady, but not doing very well at a 1/1000 second. It was strange to be worrying about my shutter speed with all the bullets flying overhead. At the same time I kept trying to gauge whether or not to drop the camera and help the Marines with the injured man. I remember feeling that as my first instinct when we had first approached him, but saw that there were two guys with him and decided I was not needed.

So all this is going on and as they were trying to help him, (it was just too dark to see what exactly they were doing), another RPG hit the mud wall on the other side of the street from where we were, about five yards away. It was a big BOOM, and I just lay my face in the dirt and everything went quiet for about 10 seconds. It was just silence like I was wearing noise-canceling head phones or like world peace had finally descended upon the earth. The air was white with sand.

Then I started feeling the rubble fall down around me. And I thought, "Is this what it's like to be shell-shocked? Am I all still here? I can't believe I am." One of the Marines looked my way, and I told him I was good, and he told me to head for cover of the MRAP, so I did. Alfred, the writer, was there and was relieved to see me. He said he saw me lying on the ground and was worried until he saw me move. I was fine and surprised at how calm I was and that I could actually still hear. I kept trying to shoot from behind the MRAP, wanting to move up to the wall again around the soldiers who had finally gathered there shooting.

But a freakin' Afghan soldier shot an RPG with five Marines standing behind it and almost fried them all. Plus at that point, I was not sure I wanted another round of RPGs sitting next to the wall. Those walls are pretty thick and strong, but I just couldn't be sure.

Gunfire continued for several minutes more before things finally quieted. They had already moved the injured Marine out. Alfred and I stood in a doorway of a home compound, and it was also pretty daggum dark at that point. There was still a touch of light in the sky a bit, but not enough to shoot. I tried, but it did no good. I couldn't see enough to focus and couldn't hold steady for very long. It was frustrating. I shot some video just for the sound because the APTN guy had decided to stay behind and continue shooting what he saw on the roof of our post.

When the MRAP pulled away leaving us exposed, Alfred pulled a cowering ANA guy out of the door so we could stand there. A minute later a Marine came running up to us yelling "Has this house been cleared?!" It was to their rear and could have been a good ambush point. I shrugged my shoulders and just said, "I don't know, there was an ANA guy here but I don't think he did anything." There was another one of them sitting down the street up against the wall away from all the action. He was just sitting there, legs crossed with his weapon in his lap like

he was waiting to be served tea. A flare lit up the sky. I made a few frames.

Shortly after, we decided to push back to the command post. The Marines said another squad was coming to do a night sweep through the orchard.

Someone started yelling for the translator, Franky. (They have American nicknames for the 'terps, 'cause they can't pronounce the real ones.) Franky didn't answer. They walked up and down yelling for him, worried that something had happened in the chaos. Then someone realized he was sitting in the 7-ton truck. He had retreated there when the firing started. Not a good thing, because it prevented the Marines from coordinating with the ANA.

We slowly began to push back. Cpl. Jackson asked me if I wanted night vision goggles to see to make my way back. I declined. I could make out their shapes in the dark, it was enough. As we made our way back, the night squad passed us going the other way, faces masked. They seemed like phantoms moving in the dark, intensely quiet, saying nothing to us as they passed.

We made it back to the command post just as the Black Hawk medevac helicopter was taking off with Bernard inside. Later in the night, we learned that Lance Cpl. Joshua M. Bernard had made it to the hospital at Camp Leatherneck but had died of a blood clot in his heart on the operating table.

### **Wednesday Aug. 19, 2009**

The last few slow days have allowed me to reflect some on the events of Friday, the 14th. I did not ever formally meet Bernard. There are some 50 men in a platoon, and every day we were going out with different squads, so I have not really gotten to know the guys too well. ...

I shot images that day well aware that those images could very possibly never see the light of day. In fact I was sure of it. But I still found myself recording them. To ignore a moment like that simply because of a phrase in section 8, paragraph 1 of some 10-page form would have been wrong. I was recording his impending death, just as I had recorded his life moments before walking the point in the bazaar. Death is a part of life and most certainly a part of war. Isn't that why we're here? To document for now and for history the events of this war? We'd shot everything else thus far and even after, from feature images of a Marine talking on a SAT phone to his girlfriend, all the way to happy meetings between Marines and civilians. So shooting the image was not a question.

To publish or not is the question. The image is not the most technically sound, but his face is visible as are his wounds. Many factors come into play. There's the form we signed agreeing to how and what we would cover while embedded. It says we can photograph casualties from a respectable distance and in such a way that the person is not identifiable. Then you think about the relatives and friends of Bernard. Would you, as a parent, want that image posted for all the world to see? Or even would you want to see how your son died? You'd probably want to remember him another way. Although, it was interesting to watch the Marines from his squad flip through the images from that day on my computer (they asked to see them). They did stop when they came to that moment. But none of them complained or grew angry about it. They understood that it was what it was. They understand, despite that he was their friend, it was the reality of things.

Then there's the journalism side of things, which is what I am and why I'm here. We are allowed to report the name of the casualty as soon as next of kin has been notified. It is necessary and good to recognize those who die in times of war. But to me, a name on a piece of paper barely touches personalizing casualties. An image brings it home so much closer. An

image personalizes that death and makes people see what it really means to have young men die in combat. It may be shocking to see, and while I'm not trying to force anything down anyone's throat, I think it is necessary for people to see the good, the bad and the ugly in order to reflect upon ourselves as human beings. It is necessary to be bothered from time to time. It is too easy to sit at Starbuck's far away across the sea and read about the casualty and then move on without much of another thought about it. It's not as easy to see an image of that casualty and NOT think about it. I never expect to change the world or stop war with one picture, but only hope that I make some people THINK beyond their comfort zones and hope that a few of them will be moved into some kind of action, be it joining a protest, or sending that care package they've put off for weeks, or writing that letter they keep meaning to write, or donating money to some worthy NGO, or just remembering to say I love you to someone at home. Something. I believe that is why I decided to send the photo in to the NY desk despite what the media rules of engagement said, to start some conversation about it and hope that it will move out there. It bothered me too much not to have at least some discussion about it. And with great respect and understanding to all the opposing arguments to publication, I feel that as journalists it is our social responsibility to record AND publish such images. We have no restrictions to shoot or publish casualties from opposition forces, or even civilian casualties. Are those people less human than American or other NATO soldiers?

So, debate amongst yourselves or maybe just to yourself. Send me your thoughts if you like. Enlighten me if you disagree.

**Thursday, Aug. 20, 2009**

Today was election day. One civilian showed up to vote around 3:30 p.m. The other voters were all the Afghan soldiers and police from here. There was a suicide bomb threat. The streets were pretty empty all over as far as I heard from some police who had gone out. The polling place was delayed opening because the ballots delivered were lacking the presidential ballots. So the Marines had to fly them in from another town in the province. Other than that, and a couple mortars that hit a ways from here, all's quiet.