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 **News: LUMBERJACK Battalion Returns to Fort Hood**

20th Engineer Battalion (TASK FORCE LUMBERJACK)    Follow This Unit

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Courtesy Story

FORT HOOD, Texas – The 20th Engineer Battalion, Task Force LUMBERJACK, is on its way home after a yearlong tour in Afghanistan. Their mission over the past 12 months was route clearance – hunting down and neutralizing the improvised explosive devices that plague the war-torn nation by killing its security forces and civilians alike, as well as coalition forces.



Courtesy Photo
 Pfc. Adams, 584th Mobility Augmentation Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, cradles a small child injured in an IED blast in the Arghandab District of Afghanistan while waiting for medevac helicopters to land. A local family ran over an insurgent's IED in their van, killing four. The infant and three others survived thanks to quick medical care.

LUMBERJACK route clearance patrols moved throughout Southern Afghanistan in heavily armored vehicles with specialized equipment designed to locate anomalies that could be an explosive device hidden by insurgents. Once found, they would use mechanical arms or robots to disable and destroy the device. The LUMBERJACKS worked very closely with Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams throughout the region in order to exploit evidence to target the bomb-makers themselves.

The unit operated in Regional Command South, chiefly in Kandahar province, but also in Helmand and Zabul. Its unique mission gave it a very diverse set of terrain, transcending more battle-space than any conventional ground unit. When the LUMBERJACKS first arrived into theater a year ago, they worked directly for the 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry, Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Task Force Stryker, as they operated, was halfway through its deployment and had suffered considerable casualties in the preceding months from IED blasts. The 20th began clearing the way for their operations as the region's main effort, and they saw a substantial drop in casualties. In mid-spring of 2010, they also supported the decisive Operation Mostarak in Helmand with U.S. Marines and British forces.

When 5/2 Infantry redeployed to Fort Lewis over the summer, the LUMBERJACKS took on a broader mission supporting Regional Commands South and Southwest, as its forces surged by several brigades. Here the 20th took on an instrumental role conducting shaping operations for Operation Hamkari.

During the peak of Afghanistan's historical summer fighting season, Task Force LUMBERJACK grew to over 1,100 soldiers, making it the largest combat engineer task force in theater. Over the course of the tour, the 20th operated with its headquarters and forward support companies, as well as the 510th Clearance and 584th Mobility Augmentation Companies from Fort Hood. They also operated with the 630th Engineer Company from Fort Drum, the 618th Engineer Support Company (Airborne) from Fort Bragg, Bravo Company of the 40th Engineer Battalion based in Germany, and the 806th Clearance Company, a reserve unit from Arkansas.

The battalion also operated with Charlie Battery of the 5/3 Field Artillery from Fort Lewis. The artillery unit converted to the mission of route clearance, the first to do so in the treacherous terrain of Afghanistan.

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Throughout their 12-month tour, Task Force LUMBERJACK completed more than 3,000 missions. On average, each mission lasted at least eight hours and spanned between 70–100 kilometers. Patrols covered more than 215,000 kilometers of terrain across RC-S.

In all, Task Force LUMBERJACK found and cleared more than 250 improvised explosive devices, and over 100 munitions of unexploded ordnance. Volatile devices that otherwise could have killed or injured Afghans or coalition forces.

Their commander is proud of all they have done. “It has been a long year, and these soldiers have fought hard. It was a difficult mission, and they gave their all—some gave everything. But the results are clear, and I know we made a significant impact. Positive things happened as a result of the operations we supported. Many lives were saved here. I’m proud of them,” says Lt. Col. Pete Andrysiak, Battalion commander.

Thirteen LUMBERJACKS paid the ultimate price. More than 40 were evacuated from the battlefield due to injury.

The LUMBERJACKS have cleared the way for everyone from combat logistics patrols to special operations forces—U.S., NATO, and Afghan alike. Its soldiers put themselves at exceptionally great risk to hunt down what everyone else tries to avoid. The LUMBERJACKS operated under the most unnerving and extreme circumstances knowing that they will likely see contact. Even after strikes, they still donned their gear and returned to the mission. LUMBERJACKS also met the enemy face-to-face, experiencing direct and indirect fire through hundreds of troops-in-contacts, while hunting for IEDs. In positively identified engagements, LUMBERJACKS eliminated insurgents with well-aimed fire.

The 20th Engineers have a rich history tracing back to World War I, where they earned the nickname LUMBERJACKS for clearing woods while fighting across Europe. Today, they are still clearing, but this time deadly explosives from the harsh terrain of Afghanistan.

In war, especially in a delicate counterinsurgency, where support of the population hangs in the balance, the shot not fired is the most important. Adding a new element to combat engineering, the LUMBERJACKS supported the people first, maintaining traffic flow and the daily way of life to villages and roadways. They made the roads safe for travel and did not fire once at civilians, either accidentally or as a warning. The insurgency is reckless, and often civilians were injured or killed by IEDs. In several instances, LUMBERJACK patrols arrived on scene, provided aid, and called for evacuation to coalition hospitals by helicopter, saving the lives of many innocent civilians, including women and children.

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