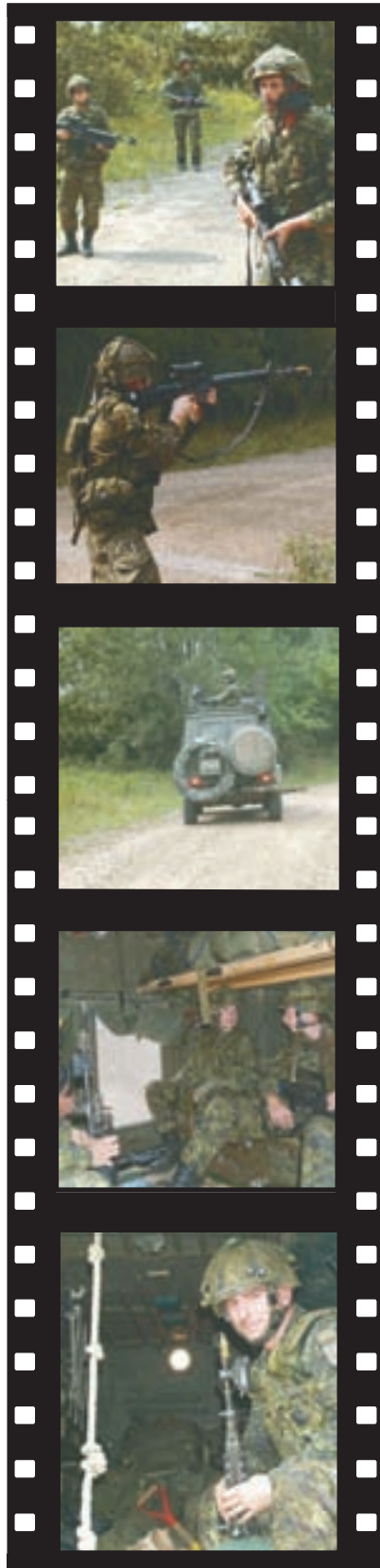


Embedded with the engineers



By Michelle Minnoch

On the morning of Sunday, August 19, I was loaded into a G-Wagon with the engineers. Although Master Corporal Churcher was unaware I would be embedded with them, I was welcomed by open arms by the five men in the back of the truck – Corporal Duolinski, Snapper Russel, Corporal McNabb, Snapper Worthington, and Snapper Manany.

Sitting in the back of the truck in the dark, beads of light protruded from tiny holes in the wagon – although there were flaps by the door to let in light, dust kept kicking in from the road, and it was best to keep them closed, and ride in the dark.

The boys informed me the best part about being engineers in not only that you get to fight, but blow things up as well. We were out to rendezvous with a truck that had our explosives – this was the third outing in a row for the boys in which they were supposed to get explosives and go and blow up a bridge.

About half an hour into the ride, the G-Wagon was parked in cover and we set out. Walking along the plains, we walked a slow pace, the troops keeping an eye out and looking on the ground for IEDs. The IEDs are placed throughout the area, in unknown areas to the troops. If they come across one and it detonates, blue powder comes out, signaling their instant death.

We constantly got down on the ground as vehicles in the area,

unknown to the soldiers, would drive by the road once in a while. As we cannot afford to be seen or shot at by an unfriendly, we have to take every precaution possible to keep the soldiers (and their embedded journalist) alive. Walking for a few hours in the crisp Alberta air, and without much equipment on, I can only imagine what our soldiers must be going through overseas, with not only the equipment, but the heat and constant dust.

We walk to Belanday, one of the Afghan villages. Seeing the village for the first time, I almost believe I am in a foreign country. The road to the village, guarded by Canadian Forces, looks like I have stepped into Afghanistan, with a Mosque located in the village for daily prayers.

As soon as we step into the village, the Afghan Police make sure to watch our every move. Standing with their guns ready to go at any sign of trouble, as we walk from one end of the village to the other, Afghan Police are constantly eyeing us, standing at the doorways of the villagers who live there. Master Corporal Churcher, disappointed to find we would not be rendezvousing with the explosives vehicle, says it is time for us to move out.

Packed for an overnight excursion, we met back at the truck with the other engineers and headed on the road. Sitting in the back of the G-Wagon with the boys, talk turns to music, movies and more.

Then I heard a noise I would

never forget. The sound of bullets being fired at our truck – we were being attacked by the Taliban. The sound of bullets ripping through the air is shocking to my ears and a form of realism sets in not only for me, but for the soldiers that have to get the job done.

A smoke bomb is thrown out of the truck while we get out. Jumping about four feet from the base of the truck, I am photographing the mission from bushes as I watch most of my troops get shot. While the firefight is going on, the dead have to lie on the ground.

The reconnaissance forces show up to aid in the fight. Sweeping the road and the forested area on either side of us until the area is secure, we cannot leave.

Once the area is secure, the two

surviving members of my troop and I catch a ride back to the base with another group. Those who have died take a ride to the morgue, where they have to stay for six hours.

And I have to visit the field hospital, as my hands are embedded with thorns. With numerous of mini-rose bushes along the ground, without notice, when I had to ‘get down’ I must have inadvertently crawled through the bushes.

Once six thorns from my right hand and two from my left are removed, I am good to go.

Unfortunately, my troops are not, so I am in for the night. Although ready for a night out with the boys, sans tent, the rest of my mission is scrapped.



WES - Weapons Effects Simulation training

By Michelle Minnoch

The Weapons Effects Simulation (WES) gear is worn by those taking part in the training. This land base combat training unit provides a realism never used before in training soldiers. WES monitors, tracks, and records all actions taken by every individual soldier. Everything is seen, monitored and recorded for After Action Reviews (AAR) for the reserves.

WES can accurately determine when a soldier fires a weapon, when and where a soldier is hit and monitors vehicles to see if they have come into contact with land mines, mortars and the effects of nuclear, biological and chemical attacks.

The gear is comprised of a detector, player unit, GPS, speaker and battery power module, GPS antenna, IR link emitter, player unit antenna, control unit and small arms transmitter.

The computer monitored, laser guided system, for example, can inform a soldier if he or she has been fired at, where they have been hit, and how long they have if the wound is potentially fatal. If a soldier has been killed, he or

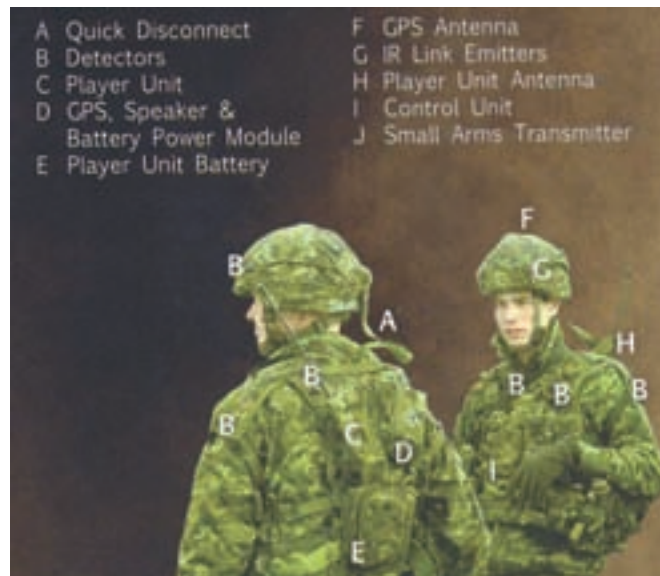
she is taken to the morgue for six hours, and is ‘out of play’ if their troop is redeployed in that time frame. If they have been instantly killed, a noise goes off in their helmets and does not shut off until they lie down – dead.

“We always know where the soldiers are, when they have made a shot, and where they have taken a shot, and if they are dead,” said Col. John Hansen. There is a Master Control Centre (MCC) on the base, where the performance of the mission is constantly being monitored.

“Once the soldier has been killed, we have to figure out how to get them back to the base, as we would if reinforcements were needed,” said Col. Hansen. “There are people out there that may be going to Afghanistan, some that have just come back. We need them to be prepared and this is the best tool for that. This is the closest it can get for them.”

“We have the world’s leading system here,” said Col. Hansen. “We have been working on this system for five years now, and it is not being used like this anywhere else in the world.” He said Australia and Spain are watching to see how the technology plays out in Wainwright. “This is not a

combat system, but a training aid.” He said it is the closest they can get to combat and live bullets.



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