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[Back to History Index](#) | [35th Infantry Regiment ASSN Home](#) | [Contact](#)

Scouts put 'eyes on'

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Photo(s) by Sgt. Jeremy A. Clawson

Scouts from HHC, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt. provide over-watch for other Soldiers from the battalion conducts a cordon and search in a village below

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan -- It didn't take long for the scout team to scale the steep jagged rock face and establish its over watch position. Heat rose from the rocks on the small plateau that served as the perch, yet the team remained focused on the task -- keeping "eyes on" the objective. The scout platoon from HHC, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, provided over-watch as A. Co. infantrymen created a cordon around a village near Mizan in central Afghanistan in conjunction with Operation Blue Candle, held recently.

Each Soldier in the scout platoon has a specific mission when providing over-watch for an infantry company. This mission as Soldiers on the ground began to search for contraband as part of a larger stabilization effort in which coalition members are engaged throughout Afghanistan, the scout platoon observed their movements, as well as potential threats, from high on top the ridge.

The radio telephone operator listened to chatter over the SINGAR handset. The sniper scout manning the 50 caliber rifle placed the cross hairs of his scope on the distant ridgeline, where two possible Anti-Coalition Militants squatted in a saddle. The platoon sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Gerard Normand, scanned the village compound in the valley below through his M4 scope, voicing his observations.

"We're usually the first ones in and the last ones out, that way we can over watch the infill of the company," said Normand, adding that the scouts "Provide over-watch the whole time." Once the main effort is done, "they take off in Blackhawks. Then we get picked up. That way we can provide over watch for the extraction. When we extract, we have the Apaches providing over-watch for us."

Scouts report anything remotely unusual to the elements on the ground, giving them as much information as possible. Normand said they are the "early warning of funny stuff, while the platoons do what they gotta do in the town." For leaders on the ground this flow of data is critical.

Scouts give the essential early warning that only a birds-eye view can achieve. Early warning is critical when seconds count, but the scouts can do more than just warn of impending danger. They can also lay down heavy fire power if needed.

"We have one M107 50 caliber sniper rifle. We have a M24 -- seven point six two, sniper rifle. We have an M14 that's been converted into a sniper rifle, about five scoped M4's and the 203," he said, adding that if they needed to, they could rain lead down when called on. "So, basically from here we can range the whole valley, especially with the 50 cal. -- we can get over a click easy."

Yet, with all that firepower, Normand is quick to acknowledge their greatest asset doesn't need ammunition.

"The biggest weapon out of all we have is what he has right there," he said, pointing to his RTO. "The radio, it's what we call the Apaches on. They drop a little bit more stuff than we do," emphasizing the value of the Apaches.

According to Normand, the scouts like what they do.

"It's a good time," he said. "It's a little hot and the hills are steep, but it earns the paycheck. It's a good job."