

Lucas Eastwood Afghanistan Story

Things were a lot different back then. It was 2002; I was twenty years old and eager to find out a little bit more about the world. I was doing exactly that from a firebase on the eastern border of Afghanistan. I'd joined the military about a year prior on September 4, 2001. About a year after joining the military my company was on a flight in route to Afghanistan. I remember arriving to this desolate desert several months prior late one night. I remember on the flight from Kuwait (the primary staging area for all Afghanistan bound US forces), our C-117 took gunfire as we approached Kandahar International. I recall a profound excitement coupled with fear.

I came to know more of that fear and excitement during my short stay at Lawara that was the name of the firebase we were stationed at. There were about forty-five of us at this less than traditional firebase placed on a hill top just west of a mountain range known as Pakistan. I never really did figure out where the border was. It wasn't one of the most strategic locations in the country. We were on hill top in a bowl surrounded by mountains. This hilltop was a perfect target for anyone deciding to fire mortars at us. According to the soldiers that we relieved, the east side of the base saw all the combat action. We were all anxious to see firsthand what these soldiers were talking about. It didn't take long for us to get well acquainted with the daily routine of the base.

We had some make-shift bunkers created out of one inch steel plates and sand bags on the perimeter of the base. The bunkers surely would withstand gunfire and small bits of shrapnel, however I imagine one direct hit from a mortar would leave very little left of the bunker and anything in it. These served as security outposts. Each soldier occupied these bunkers for about eight hours a day with a machine gun and a radio. Usually we would "pull security" for a four hour shift before going on a mission during the time we weren't serving as a sleepy security force for our fellow soldiers. Between our security shifts, missions, and daily duties as soldiers, we we're constantly exhausted. Quite frankly the entire experience to this point had been boring. We got a mail and food drop every week or two. A big Chinook helicopter would come from the west and drop a pallet containing mail, food, and ammunition. The mail drop was about as much excitement as we'd seen.

Until one night, a night just like any other, I had fallen asleep and woke to the sound of an exploding mortar and an air horn. I jumped out of my cot and grabbed my weapon in route to the bunkers for some cover. Then I heard an explosion several hundred feet away created by the launch of the mortar. About two seconds after that I heard something I'd never heard before. It was the sound of a mortar whistling in the air over my head. My mouth was instantly dry and I thought to myself, "Is this it, could this be it? Am I going to get blown up out here in this fucking desert?" You could've heard a pin drop as we all listened in fear as that mortar whistled over our head. I heard and felt the thunderous impact a few feet away from me. I felt a second of relief as I rose to my feet and started running for the closest bunker. Then I heard another one launch. I instantly hit the dirt, waited and listened as the mortar round bellowed and eerie whistle over my head. Once it impacted I was up to my feet and into the bunker where I watched and waited for the attack to cease.

There was nothing we could do with our mortars or machine guns. It was virtually impossible to triangulate the exact location of the attackers. However, we were able to call in an airstrike. Within minutes A-10 aircraft screamed over our head and began dropping 500 pound bombs on the suspected location of the attack. I think the sound of the aircraft alone was enough to fend off our attackers.

We left Lawara shortly after that attack. US forces stopped using the base entirely. Part of the problem was that we were being indirectly attacked by groups of two or three people and as soon as we were able to establish their location or answer the attack they were long gone into Pakistani territory. The majority of U.S. casualties we encountered while in Afghanistan were caused by similar attacks. We seldom encountered our attackers face to face.

I haven't been back to Afghanistan since. I got out of the military in April of 2005 after a deployment to Iraq. I'm extremely thankful to be alive and healthy. I listen to the news and pray for my brothers. I know what it's like to serve in such a war torn land. I know what it's like to question your own fate. I feel very lucky I can say that. I'm so very fortunate to have made it home. I look forward to the day when all our troops are home and don't have to live each day in the fear that it's their last.