

HILLCLIMBER NOTES

Web Site: <http://www.147thhillclimbers.org>

Vol. 4 Number 1

Posted on: Thursday, April 15, 2004

rrbrown@147thhillclimbers.org

June 2004

A rough land — and the specter of bin Laden

By William Cole
Advertiser Military Writer

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Pfc. Michael Hodgson has always loved flying.

"I was one of those kids you saw hanging on airport fences," the 33-year-old Seattle man said.

These days, he's hanging out the side of a CH-47D Chinook helicopter as a door gunner — and getting in plenty of flying.

Company B, 214th Aviation Regiment, out of Wheeler Army Airfield, arrived March 20 as part of the yearlong deployment of the 25th Infantry Division (Light) to Afghanistan.

The Chinooks — a chopper the Army had intended to phase out of the active-duty inventory — have become war workhorses here.

The 214th "Hillclimbers" twin-rotor helicopters have been flying daily, ferrying supplies and soldiers out of Bagram Air Base.



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason Ford of Sand Springs, Okla., pilots a Chinook over the outskirts of Kabul. He's with Company B, 214th Aviation Regiment, out of Wheeler Army Airfield.



Soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division wait to board a 214th Aviation Regiment helicopter near Ghazni, Afghanistan. The O'ahu-based 25th Infantry Division (Light) officially is taking over today for the New York-based 10th Mountain Division.

Two of the company's choppers in Afghanistan, since refurbished, were Hillclimbers when the unit was deployed during the Vietnam War.

"Since Sept. 11 (2001), they've seen how much they need to keep these aircraft in the Army inventory," said Capt. Jed

Dimon, 32, Company B's commander. "We can haul so much stuff so quickly, especially in these altitudes."



Capt. James Dimon, of Axtell, Neb., left, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason Ford of Sand Springs, Okla., both with the 214th Aviation Regiment, lift off during a routine CH-47D Chinook troop transport mission. Ford says that because people back home haven't seen the terrain, they easily wonder why wanted terrorists can still be at large.

On Tuesday, the manifest included a platoon of 10th Mountain Division soldiers heading to a fire base near Ghazni about an hour's flying distance from Bagram.

Inside one of two Chinooks, 21 soldiers faced each other on either side of the bus-like aircraft with a mountain of weighty rucksacks and a few orange mail bags in between.

Flying south from the mountain-ringed, mile-high valley, the Chinooks — with an Apache gunship

escort — skimmed ridgetops and overflow mud-brick villages with homes grouped within fortress-like compounds.

Farther out, occasional green patches of farmland amid the khaki color that defines this region of Afghanistan gave

way to desert-like rolling hills where camels wandered individually and in herds.

"This place has the most diverse environment," said Dimon, who's from Axtell, Neb., a town

of about 700 people. "It's like you've got tons of mini Grand Canyons out here. Then you'll have green valleys and rivers, and they'll stop and it will be desert again."

That type of terrain also has shielded Osama bin Laden.



Troops pick up their packs after being ferried by a 214th Aviation Regiment CH-47D to a village near Ghazni, Afghanistan.

"A lot of people back home say, 'How hard can it be to find one person?' until you see the terrain," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason Ford, 30, from Okla-



Spc. Nicholas Gulick, of St. Louis, MO, of the 214th Aviation Regiment, must raise his voice to communicate over the noise of his helicopter as it takes on passengers. He's a CH-47D crew chief with the 214th Aviation Regiment out of Wheeler Army Airfield.

homa, co-pilot on one of the CH-47Ds.

The Chinooks arrived from Hawai'i via C-5 and C-17 transport jets. They came minus transmissions, aft and forward rotor pylons, and blades. It took crews nearly two weeks of steady work to get the helicopters flying again.

"These guys have been pretty busy," Dimon said.

The 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry (Wolfhounds), from Schofield are operating in southeast Afghanistan near the Pakistan border, while the Chinook company, and elements of military police, 125th Signal Battalion, engineers, division support command, and division artillery are based in Bagram.

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team headquarters is in Kandahar, and the 25th Division commander, Maj. Gen. Eric Olson, is assuming command of Combined Joint Task Force 180 in charge of all tactical ground forces.

Two other Schofield infantry battalions have not arrived in Afghanistan.

First Lt. Pierre Han, whose 10th Mountain Division platoon was being ferried back to Tactical Assembly Area Black Hawk on Tuesday after a six-day stay in Bagram, said the Ghazni area lately has been relatively quiet.

The unit works in conjunction with a Provincial Reconstruction Team conducting security for medical assistance, setting up vehicle checkpoints, and going out on "pres-



A CH-47D Chinook flies in loose formation with a AH-64 Apache, rear, during a troop transport flight out of Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.

Photos by Richard Ambo • The Honolulu Advertiser

ence patrols."

The 25th Infantry Division officially is taking over today for the 10th Mountain Division, based out of Fort Drum in New York.

"Obviously, they (the Afghan people) have been at war for a long time, but they don't seem to mind our presence," Hodgson said. "(But) a threat's a threat, and we'll take it as it comes."

Hodgson, who has a private pilot's license, is getting his flying in these days on Chinooks, something he doesn't mind.

"This is the best aircraft in the United States Army, and this is the best job, the way I see it. I love it," he said.

Marine CH-53E helicopters recently arrived in Bagram, "but we (the CH-47Ds) are about 90 percent of what gets moved around on the ground," Dimon said.

"They've got a great relationship with the (forward operating bases), because pretty much when the Chinooks come out, it means they are getting what they need," he said.

One more time into the breach....

It is with pride and tribulation that I announce the departure of B Company, 214th Aviation Regiment to the country of Afghanistan. They are to stay at least a year.

I encourage all former Hillclimbers to support our present day Hillclimbers by writing to the address below:

Name (No Rank, No SSN)*

B/214th AVN REGT

APO AE 09354-9998

*See attached instruction sheet for further details

A word of support to let them know that there are Americans other than the reporters, whom they are seeing daily, who wish them well and appreciate greatly their putting themselves between us and a return to the dark ages. Hold them in you prayers and good wishes. *R. Brown*

147th ASHC Hillclimbers Veterans Assoc.

c/o 7016 Pescado Circle

Rancho Murieta, CA 95683

916-345-1718 916-752-3265

www.147thhillclimbers.org

rbrown@147thhillclimbers.org