

## SWORN STATEMENT

My name is Sergeant First Class (b)(3), (b)(6), Romeo. My current unit is Chosen Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion-503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, located in Vicenza, Italy.

In July 2008, my unit was Chosen Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion-503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment. At that time we were located in Wanat, Afghanistan. My rank at that time was Staff Sergeant Promotable, and my duty assignment was Section Sergeant for the Company's 60 Millimeter Mortar Section. I was assigned to Chosen Company January 2006. I was part of Chosen Company during the unit's pre-deployment work-ups.

After we were in theatre for a few months, there was a lot of talk about us moving to Wanat. I believe before we could move, our unit had to negotiate land agreements with the District Governor and the towns-people of Wanat. This was probably around the summer '07 time frame. I could be off with the timing, but that's what I recall. We were talking about shutting down COP Aransas, which we called "Ranch House" and opening up a forward observation base in between Blessing and Bella.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, I was one of the first soldiers that moved to Wanat. We were supposed to be there for four days and another mortar section was going to take our place. I didn't think setting up at Wanat was the greatest idea in the middle of a Relief in Place (RIP), but we had to establish a stopping point with Blessing being the Battalion forward observation base. We needed something to stop the enemy from coming right down the Wygal Valley. If not, they would just continue to mass their forces. A battalion needs the ability and freedom to maneuver which will allow them pull assets for support. A lot of my people were pissed we were going to Wanat because we were getting ready to leave in two weeks. I was telling people we had to go and set up because this was war; it had to be done.

When the sunlight broke in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> and I was able to see the location, I thought "What the heck are we doing here?" It was the exact same scenario we had been complaining about with other COPS. We were placing a base at the bottom of the valley with mountain ranges surrounding us. There was one way in and one way out of the valley and that was the main road and the mountain ranges were just too close. We should have been higher up, on high ground. I let a couple of people know how I felt about it, including the Platoon Sergeant, SFC (b)(3), (b)(6). Also, once we left Blessing, that left no mortar systems at Blessing. We had to take a 120mm mortar with us and we had to take a 60mm mortar from FOB Michigan. That left the FOB without a 60 millimeter mortar. Just to clarify my interview, if I refer to Michigan, I consider it a FOB and not a VPB.

Yankee

On the night of my arrival at Wanat, my team consisted of Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6), Maple and myself. The following day, the rest of my mortar section flew in. They brought a 120mm millimeter mortar system and another three soldiers. When they flew in, they brought the 120mm ammo and more 60mm ammo. I was allowed to place my mortar position where I wanted. Lieutenant Brostrom gave me free reign to select the site. He just wanted me to advise him and give him a reason why it made the best tactical sense to have it in that position. I positioned my fire support in a way that would allow me to place indirect suppressive fire upon any advancing element coming down off the ridge into our positions. We never completed the 120mm mortar pit, so I never started on the 60mm mortar pit. The seven foot

INITIALS OF PERSON MAKING STATEMENT \_\_\_\_\_ (b)(3), (b)(6), Romeo

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HESCOs were not full. We couldn't get them full because the small bobcat bulldozer couldn't reach up high enough. All the four foot HESCOs got filled up, but the two in between them could not be because the bobcat couldn't raise up high enough. The 60mm mortar would have fired in 360 degrees. There was no maximum/minimum elevation with the 60mm.

Before, moving to a position like Wanat, I would have liked to sit down with the FSO. The FSO had been up there before and had done several presence patrols and meetings with the District Governor and others. The FSO did give me a target list and an overlay and a target worksheet which allowed me to plot the grids and see what was going on. Ideally, I would have liked to sit down with the FSO and discuss things with him. When we pulled into Wanat, the FSO was up at Bella. I didn't have any problems with ammo for my 60mm and 120mm systems. We did run a little short on concertina wire; we only had enough for two layers around the post and not the required three. The concertina wire was the only thing we ran out of.

Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of July we never had an issue with water or chow. We conserved our water and never ran out of chow. We got low on water, but on that point, it was on me as the senior NCO for my section to make the decision that my men could go ahead and back off, because the heat was getting to them. We were running low on water, and I wasn't going to burn through my water. A good NCO is going to know that. You have to know your Soldiers' limitations and how much you can push your men. I never had an issue with my section running out of water;. Whether others did, I can't speak for them, but I never had that issue with my men.

While out there, we had to dig a hole for the 120mm mortar base plate. We had to cut some HESCOs because there were no four foot hescoes sent out to us. We had to cut seven foot hescoes down to facilitate our mortar system defensive plan. We filled HESCOs with E-tools the best we could. We also helped dig some other people's fox holes, laid concertina wire, pounded pickets, and stuff like that. We just conducted normal day-to-day activities to help improve the base. The engineers I was working with were pretty good. They were helping us lay wire and helped a couple of us fill sand bags. They were good, hard workers. From the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> of July the bobcat was constantly being used. I don't recall it running out of fuel—it might have run out once, I can't really say for sure. The bobcat helped us build our positions the best it could.

On the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> of July we conducted STAND TO and did our radio checks around 04:30. Very soon after we got the initial burst of enemy fire. The burst came from the East ridge line. We had just got up and had packed away all of our equipment because we were supposed to be flying out that day. The initial burst came right down the center of the mortar pit and hit Private First Class Abad who went down. We pushed out to the corners of the mortar pit and started to return fire. We tried to get an assessment of where the enemy fire was coming from. At that point, the TOW missile truck had already been lit to hell and back by RPGs and had started to catch fire. Rounds were coming in from everywhere.

The day before the attack took place, there was a two-man observation post spotted up on one of the ridges. It looked like they were observing our positions. I wanted to fire a few mortar rounds near the

place where the individuals were spotted but permission was denied because we could not be positive they were actually conducting observation of our positions. The morning of 13<sup>th</sup> of July, there was a four to five man element doing the same thing, conducting observation. The TOW truck was repositioning itself to scan through its optic sites in order to get good eyes on the individuals who were spotted on the ridge and then that's when the fire fight broke out. At that point, the TOW truck started getting hit and the OP started getting hit. We were taking contact from every direction possible. No matter where you moved, you heard rounds zipping by and no matter where you looked, you saw muzzle flashes. They were right on top of us. We were still in the mortar pit, so at first we just took cover. After a minute or so we started to return fire. I shifted the cannon to where I thought the main enemy force was and started dropping rounds there.

At this point, we considered everything around us as hostile. If the locals allow the enemy get one to two meters off of my fence, and I'm taking contact from every single house there, I figured the hell with it, I might as well drop whatever rounds I can to try and get them to pull back. I shifted the tube to the West, and I started dropping rounds. I had nobody to hand me rounds because they were all engaged in the fire fight.

At this point, I turned to get more rounds and an RPG came over my left shoulder and slammed into the ammo. The round peppered me with shrapnel and knocked me on my ass. I jumped back up and went to fire, but my weapon would not function. I looked at it and saw that it had been peppered with shrapnel. I put it down and grabbed a SAW from one of the engineers who was not firing. Mud was everywhere. A natural spring popped out of nowhere overnight and flooded our pit. We woke up in ankle deep water. When I picked up the SAW, the belt was already in it and rounds were seated in the feed tray. I slammed the bolt to the rear and went to fire. I got a nice big, "clu-chunk," which everyone hates to hear. I immediately dropped to a knee and applied remedial action. I opened the feed tray, swept down the feed cover, kicked the rounds out, swept out the feed, opened up the top, and looked down in the center to make sure there was nothing jammed into it. It was clear. I slapped it down, slapped the rounds back up top and gave it a second charge. I went to fire again and got a second, "clu-chunk." At that point, I opened it up, took another look at it and couldn't see anything wrong with it. I put it to the side and grabbed the other kid's M-16, put it to burst and started burning through magazines to try and suppress the enemy.

At that time, another RPG came in and slammed into the ammo a second time. When I looked over, I saw the cammo nets and ponchos near the corner of the mortar pit had caught fire. I felt the enemy were intentionally targeting the mortar pit, but they couldn't really aim well enough for a direct hit. I saw that the mortar rounds had taken hits and one of the 120mm mortar ammo cans started to expand. When a 120mm charge ignites, the magnesium inside gets really hot. We had two rounds there and whole load of rounds under it. It was also the ammo resupply point. We had 7.62 ammo, 5.56 ball ammo, hand grenades, and claymores in that area so if it went up it was going to be one big blast. I told everyone to break contact and get back to the CP truck which was where the Company CP was located. We broke contact and took off to the CP truck.

We fell behind the CP truck and the HESCO wall. PFC Cruppa was on the 50. cal gunning at all the buildings that we were initially gunning at. Then the TOW truck exploded. It was the loudest sound I ever heard. I thought I was dead or something. TOW rounds exploded and everything went off. The explosion was so intense that it knocked me on my rear through a HESCO wall. Everyone fell over and was wondering what the hell was going on. Shortly after that, a TOW missile landed right in the middle of the CP area. It was sitting there and you could hear the gyro kicking. Once that gyro spins up, the missile is about to launch. The missile just started spinning, getting ready to go off. A lot of people started to run out, but there was nowhere to run. I told Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) to give me two sandbags. I grabbed the tow missile, ran out to the center of the base and threw it down and ran back to the CP..

Khaki

When I got back to the CP, Captain (b)(6), (b)(9) (Chosen 6) told me that the OP up on the hill was being hit pretty hard. They were about to be overrun. He lost contact with Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and someone needed to get up there. I told him, "Sir, I don't have a weapon right now, but if you give me your weapon, I'll go." He gave me his M-4. I then told Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) and Specialist (b)(3), (b)(6) and (b)(3), (b)(6), Khaki Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) anybody who wasn't tending to a casualty to grab a weapon and some ammo and that they were coming with me.

Cyan

Yankee

Ivory Maple Mahogeny

We arrived at the OP and the first person I saw was Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6), Cyan. They had established a good fortified position up there with the sandbags. They had set up a little porthole where they could fire as a base platform from the top and if they needed to, they could drop down to the porthole. As I approached, I dove through the port hole in the sandbags. Once I was through the hole, I saw how bad it really was up there. Their weapons were all done, bolts were seized to the rear, weapons' systems were blown in half from direct RPG hits. There were fragmentation pieces in some of the weapons. I believe there was one SAW we picked up that was good. Everything else had been peppered with shrapnel or bullets and was not operable. I tried to charge the charging handle of the SAW; and when we went to use it, there was a round struck in the side and the bolt wouldn't go forward anymore. One 240 machine gun looked like superman had grabbed it and bent it in half. One had a butt-stock blown off it. It was my worst nightmare. There were no radios up and running; they had been hit by bullets and shrapnel.

We got everyone into the OP and started positioning people. I started collecting up the bodies of the guys that had been killed up there. I didn't want everyone staring at the bodies getting demoralized; didn't want their morale to drop looking at the bodies. At that point, there was a lull in the fire. That is when the initial quick reaction force arrived led by Captain (b)(3), (b)(6). At this point, everyone thought the fire fight was done. Just a couple of pop shots going off here and there, nothing real major. The MEDEVAC birds had started touching down and we were getting all the soldiers who were shot on the birds to get them out. No sooner than the last bird started coming in, a whole new fire fight broke out that was just as intense with as many rounds as when the fire fight first started. It was like someone turned the light off and then all of sudden turned the light back on and all hell broke loose.

Quebec

We started taking contact from everywhere again. We used what weapon systems we had available. We had a 240 machine gun that we took from the Marines who were with us. I gave Sergeant (b)(3), (b)(6) a load of rounds and emplaced him on the Western portion of the terrace where he could see right into the back side of the bizarre and the hotel. I told him there are no friendlies moving through there; that

Maple

anything you see, shoot it. There was all kinds of movement in there. He just started putting rounds down in through the hotel and the backside of the bizarre with the 240. The barrel started to glow white. I took a knife and cut some small holes in a water bottle, just enough to sprinkle some water on top of the 240 barrel to keep it just cool enough to allow the gun to continue to fire. We were also lobbing hand grenades and firing up the ridge.

At that time, Captain (b)(3), (b)(6), Quebent his element to push up past the Mosque. Once they got there, they started taking contact. The Apaches were doing gun runs and some of our guys brought us ammo a couple times, because we were running low on 240 ammo. We just kept on fighting. Then there started to be another lull in the fire. Private (b)(3), (b)(6) made his way up to the OP on one of the ammo resupplies and told me the 60mm mortar was set up and he needed assistance to execute a fire mission. I went back down to help reestablish the 60mm mortar position. Right when we were getting ready to fire the 60mm mortar, more birds were circling the area, so we were told to check fire by Chosen 6.

Redwood

Looking back at my overall set up of the mortar pit, if the assets were available, I would have had my pit surrounded by HESCOs and I would have put the ASP underground. All the ammunition would have been stored underground. This would have allowed more freedom of movement inside the pit. To do that, we probably would have needed a backhoe because you'd have to dig a deep enough hole for it. You could use a bobcat, but it would take a lot longer. It would take a lot of equipment and materials to build a proper mortar emplacement and ASP; things like 8x8's, 4x4's, 2x4's. The one we built at Blessing was ideal. It was perfect. But at Blessing, we had everything we needed and workers to do it.

After the battle, I remained in Wanat and helped break things down. When I heard we were going to retrograde, I was pissed, because we had just lost nine soldiers for no reason. Everyone knew that when we set up that COP that there was going to be a big firefight. Everyone knew the fight was coming because all the intel that was gathered was saying that the enemy was going to try and overrun Bella. Well, we shut down Bella and guess what happened. All those enemy personnel who had consolidated around hit Bella, just moved seven clicks down the valley and hit the next COP. They hit the Ranch House hard, we broke it down. They hit Bella hard enough, we shut it down. So why not hit the next one hard too? The thing that got me about Wanat was when the District Police Chief said they were taking all their police and they were leaving for the night. I think that was on the 12<sup>th</sup>. They said they weren't going to be back for a day or two; that's what set things off for me. That's when I started telling all my boys something was going to happen. They had been observing us from the bizarre for days; you knew they were up to something.

Since I was involved with the Ranch House incident, I kind of had a bad feeling about the Wygal Valley. It's not a good place. The Wygal Valley is a death trap. There's nowhere to go there. It's not ground that you can really hold. There's nothing there, just mountains.

**AFFIDAVIT**

(b)(3), (b)(6), Romeo  
I HAVE READ OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME THIS STATEMENT WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 1 AND ENDS ON PAGE 6. I FULLY UNDERSTAND THE CONTENTS OF THE ENTIRE STATEMENT MADE BY ME. THE STATEMENT IS TRUE. I HAVE INITIALED ALL CORRECTIONS AND HAVE INITIALED THE BOTTOM OF EACH PAGE CONTAINING THE STATEMENT. I HAVE MADE THIS STATEMENT FREELY WITHOUT HOPE OF BENEFIT OR REWARD, WITHOUT THREAT OF PUNISHMENT, AND WITHOUT COERCION, UNLAWFUL INFLUENCE, OR UNLAWFUL INDUCEMENT.

(b)(3), (b)(6), Romeo

Subscribed and sworn to before me, a person authorized by law to administer oaths, this 16<sup>th</sup> day of OCTOBER 2009 at CASPERA EDERLE

**WITNESSES:**

(b)(3), (b)(6), Lemon

ANNA FOLLO  
ORGANIZATION OR ADDRESS  
  
(b)(3), (b)(6), Iota  
IT HAD THE NAME  
ORGANIZATION OR ADDRESS

(b)(3), (b)(6), Owl

(Typed Name of Person Administering Oath)  
Judge Alvacca  
(Authority To Administer Oaths)