

# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

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My firsthand account of events leading up to the Taliban's 2012 attack on Camp Bastion airfield **and** a call for a new inquiry and accountability of the most senior British military command



It was just after 10pm on a Friday when the first shots of the battle of Bastion rang out. I was about a kilometre away, by our accommodation tent having a last smoke before bed - far enough away for the ensuing firefight to sound more like popcorn popping than gunfire. A few moments later a fireball lit the moonless night sky, silhouetting the airfield as a dense column of rolling flame reached hundreds of feet into the night sky. We were under attack.

By the time the sun rose the next morning two US Marines were dead, another seventeen men were wounded and all but one of the fifteen attackers lay in the morgue. Material damage included:

- **An entire squadron of Harrier jump jets decimated, value c. \$200 million**
- **One Hercules C130-E transport plane severely damaged, value c. \$20 million**
- **Three vertical take off Osprey aircraft 'minor' damage, value c. \$72 million/each**
- **One Sea King helicopter minor damage, Two Jackal vehicles significantly damaged**
  - **Three fuel storage bladders and contents destroyed**
- **A battle damaged airfield closed, still smouldering and covered in war debris**

<http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/USCENTCOM%20Bastion%20Attack%20Investigation%20Redacted%2015-6%20Report.pdf>

The total financial cost of the raid to NATO was c. \$400 million, by far the greatest single material loss of the entire campaign and the US's single biggest combat loss of aircraft since the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam.

The next morning was the quietest I remember in Bastion - no flights in or out of the usually busy airfield that had yet to be cleared of battle debris. There was also a silence amongst the British troops as the

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principle cause of the raid's success was already known and being discussed in hushed tones across the camp:

**The British guard towers nearest the Taliban's fence breach point hadn't been issued with any night vision kit, on a night with just 2% natural illumination**

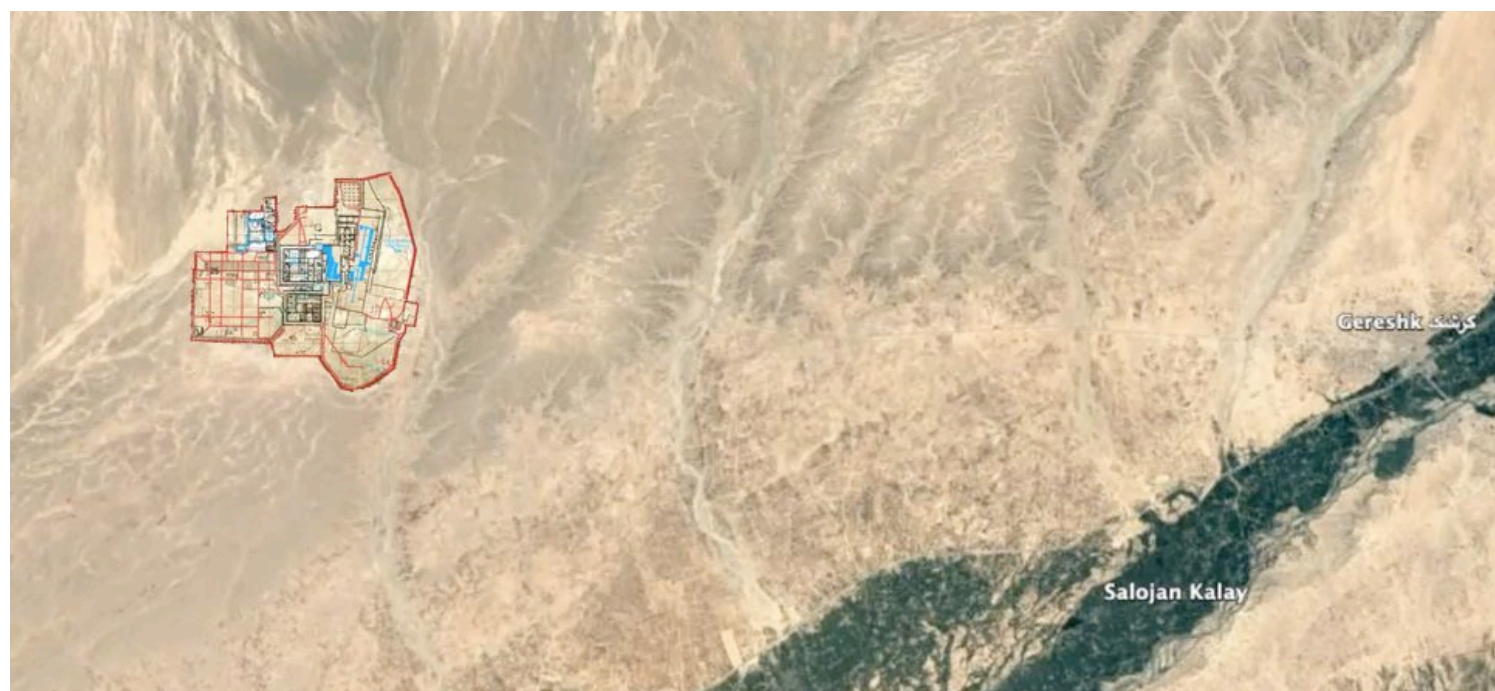
The British Commonwealth soldiers manning these guard towers were effectively left blind whilst guarding our main operating base. Yet this single piece of critical information is missing from both the US & UK official reports. Neither the British government nor military have had the courage or decency to admit this fact or **countless other catastrophic failings** that they are responsible for and that allowed the attack to succeed.

I hope this photo journal will show the reality and scale of the British military command failures that summer, and give justification for a new inquiry into a command that appears to know no shame.

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## Location

The location of Camp Bastion was deliberately chosen in 2005 to create an impregnable fortress, quite literally a bastion in the desert, self-sufficient and surrounded only by sand and open spaces. The satellite image below shows the camp's front gate was three kilometres from the nearest main road, the closest population centre was over twenty kilometres away and there was at least fifteen kilometres between the base and the infamous green zone of the Helmand river valley.





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So in April 2012, on my first guard duty in an active conflict zone, I expected to be looking out over the perimeter defences on to an empty desert as shown in the next image.



But instead I was greeted with this scene: a tree line less than one hundred metres from our defences, thick vegetation and a large compound, one of a dozen strung out along the fence in front of me. The once barren valley, now watered by the run-off from our main operating base had become a thriving village, perfect camouflage for insurgents reconnoitring the heart of our operations – Bastion airfield and runway.

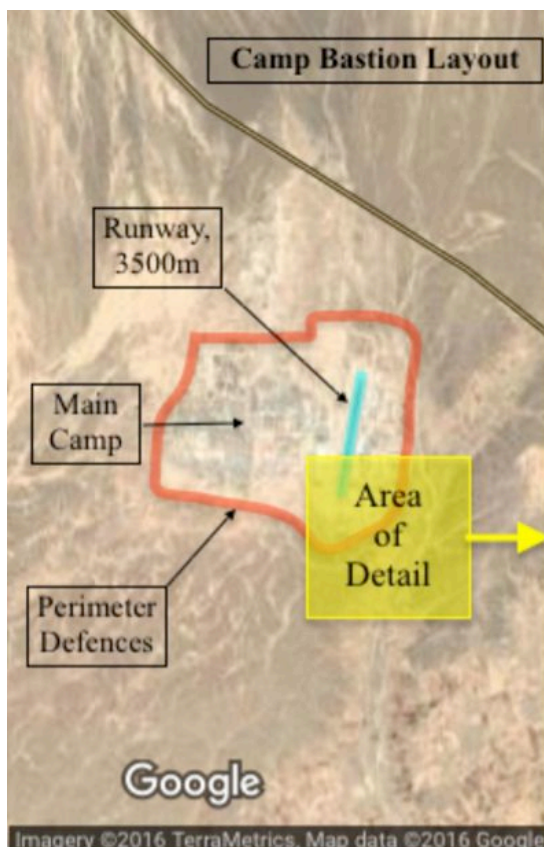




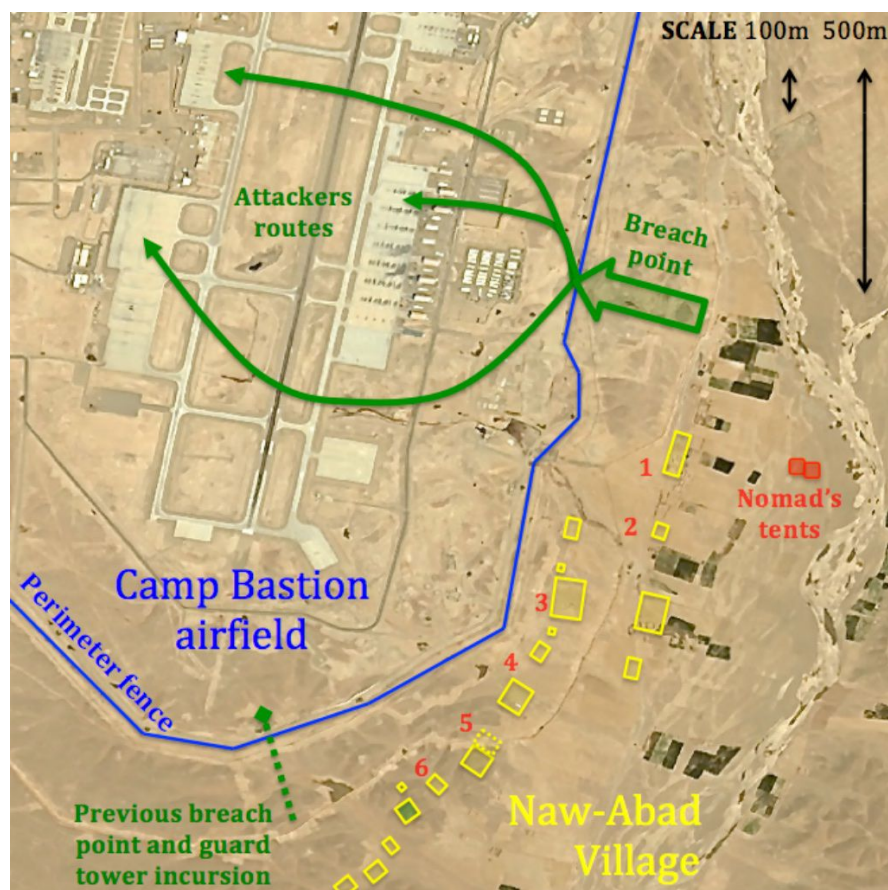
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The following images show the camp and airfield layout:



The numbers on the image to the right correspond to the numbered photos below:





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## Outside the wire

1. The first compound to the far left of my view was the largest in the village of Naw-Abad and directly opposite the airfield's eastern entrance. An exact translation of the village name means nothing more than 'new buildings'. A second newly built village on the far side of the valley was called Shah Pushta – this translates as 'Elites Hill'.

Anthony C Heaford ©



16th June 2011

2. In the image, the view half-left from my tower, looking at the road that ran parallel to the airfield, a US patrol sweeps for mines. The valley area had an operational name of Belleau Wood, named after a battle fought valiantly by the US Marine Corp in France, 1918. There is another compound in the foreground, just one-hundred-metres from the camp's eastern entrance, but it was hidden from view by the tree line and rolling terrain.

These vehicles were part of Task Force Belleau Wood and were tasked with patrolling the valley daily and engaging with the expanding community on our doorstep, but despite their considerable efforts they were limited in what they were able to achieve due to British policies already set in place.



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3. Directly to our front was the principle compound, adjoining the village mosque with its loudspeaker mounted on a pole above to announce the call to prayer. There were reports of a gunfight between two Afghan groups in the field to the left of this photo. Unidentified visitors, possibly the Afghan Local Police, were warned away by the compound's occupants through an almost casual exchange of rifle fire.



A subsequent inspection of this principle compound found two AK-47s and a single shot (sniper's) rifle, but despite having suspected forged certificates the owners were allowed to keep them, for 'self defence' purposes. It is very possible this firefight on Bastion's perimeter was over illegal drug benefits, stemming from illegal drug production in the shadow of Camp Bastion that we had protected.



There was constant vehicle traffic to this compound. Reporting any concerns resulted in the same answer - "don't worry about it, this valley is controlled by Mohammad Daoud".



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3. The next two photos show nine adult males arriving in two groups within a few minutes of each other to visit the compound hidden from my view by the tree line and rolling terrain. It struck me as bizarre that in a base built in the desert for its own protection we had large groups of men wandering the perimeter unchecked, and when reported to the guard commander I was told *'don't worry about it, this valley is controlled by Mohammad Daoud'*. 25th June 2012



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## Mohammad Daud Noorzai and Community Engagement

It appeared that we had passed responsibility for base security on that eastern flank over to the Washir district governor, a member of the historically powerful Noorzai tribe of central Helmand. We were told that the principle compound in the valley, directly opposite my guard tower, belonged to a Mr. Daoud Mohammad.

This is Daoud Mohammad, aka Mohammad Daud Noorzai, pictured on a US & Afghan security forces escorted visit to Naw-Abad village area on 19th August 2011. During the meeting the Afghans talked about local crime and putting an end to it.



<http://www.iimef.marines.mil/News/News-Article/Article/528940/lone-star-battalion-marines-ana-escort-washir-district-governor/>

And Daoud Mohammad again during another meeting with US & UK forces in the valley besides the airfield on 28th November 2011. This time discussing the construction of a police station in Task Force Belleau Wood area to “provide a security buffer for Camp Leatherneck”:



<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/81718/task-force-belleau-wood>

### Mohammad Daud Noorzai and the Noorzai tribe information sources:

[http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com\\_afghanbios&id=675&task=view&total=66&start=20&Itemid=2](http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=675&task=view&total=66&start=20&Itemid=2)

[http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com\\_afghanbios&id=1881&task=view&total=2&start=1&Itemid=2](http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=1881&task=view&total=2&start=1&Itemid=2)

[http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com\\_afghanbios&id=1606&task=view&total=2&start=0&Itemid=2](http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=1606&task=view&total=2&start=0&Itemid=2)



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US policy had been to provide solar-powered drinking water filtration systems for the villagers, establishing a school, distributing wheat seed and crop fertiliser and generally improving security. British policy was to irrigate the poppy fields with treated water from inside Camp Bastion, allow illegally held weapons to be kept, to protect the opium harvest from interference by the Afghan security forces and generally hope nothing went wrong. One British community engagement visit in April 2011, actually broadcast on British forces tv as propaganda, discussed the possibility of building a swimming pool and snooker hall at an area near the camp's main entrance. This desert area was ambitiously described as a truck stop, when in reality it was little more two rows of saplings and a couple of buildings besides two fuel pumps next to the main ring road. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/raf-police-support-afghan-army-patrol>



I'd describe the area around this truck stop as been more akin to the 'Mad Max' movie than a model development program. Needless to say the swimming pool and snooker hall were never built, remaining part of the British delusion / illusion of reconstruction and development.

Perhaps a clearer example of the British charade was the access road from Bastion's front gate to the main ring road a few of kilometres away. In 2012, six-years after the base had been established, this was the state of the access road used by both NATO forces and local civilian logistics vehicles:





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And to give further credence to this point, the image below shows the state of the access road to our main operating base as we departed on a logistic patrol. Here you can see the commander of the vehicle in front stood on top of the cab as he tried to navigate his vehicle around one of the dozens of shanty town structures. The camp perimeter defences can be seen on the left of this photo - there was a completely unregulated shanty town within a stones throw distance of our main operating base.



3. Back at the eastern perimeter of the airfield, this is a close up of the principle compound belonging to Mohammad Daud Noorzai. It shows a second floor window looking back over the airfield and what looks





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like a loophole cut in to the compound wall at knee height. Snipers view their target using such loopholes. The white sheet was hung across a gap in the compound wall for most of that summer, but was missing on 7th September. One part of the change in the 'atmospherics' I noticed seven days before the raid.



24th May 2012

My concerns were raised with and ignored by the British command time and time again, but were later vindicated by Major General Sturdevant of the US Command. He stated of this same area:

***“Bastion was increasingly being probed.... we were being observed”***

3. This image shows the same compound on the 7<sup>th</sup> September – overgrown, seemingly unoccupied and the previous permanent feature of the white sheet missing:



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The following transcript from guard tower 11 logs covers just four hours in May that year and illustrates just how busy, and unregulated movement besides the fence was:

## **0400 hours**

*1 x big truck enters compound directly in front of guard tower. Truck leaves ten minutes later*

## **0611 hours**

*3 x local national (LN) males working on eastern side of compound directly in front of tower.*

*1 x male LN and 1 x child working in fields between both compounds in front of tower*

## **0625 hours**

*2 x male LN seem to be farming whilst 3x children sit in the right hand field and watch them*

*1 x male LN walks up and down track to the left of compound in front of tower*

## **0635 hours**

*1 x male LN stands in the field near watering hole to the far right of 3<sup>rd</sup> compound, looking around whilst on phone*

*1 x white lorry turned up at compound directly in front of tower, followed by 1 x white salon car.*

*Both stopped for two minutes talking to male LN before departing north.*

This kind of activity could only be realistically monitored and policed by local forces with knowledge of the people and culture of the province. But the Afghan police had effectively been banned from the valley by the British who were more concerned with protecting opium harvesting than allowing the local security forces to do the job we had trained them for.

4. Looking a quarter right from the tower you'd see the most activity in the village, between these two compounds. Both appeared to be occupied most of that summer, including hosting the migrant labourers who were there to harvest the opium. It is where the first stage of heroin production probably occurred too, all under British protection.





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The previous photo shows the opium harvest in progress, under our protection. Any Afghan driving past Camp Bastion would see opium harvesting under British guard towers, then fifteen-kilometres down the road see British soldiers helping to destroy the poppy fields of poor Nadi-Ali farmers.

22nd April 2012

In the next image you can see the families that lived and worked here throughout that summer - families and activity that were all missing on 7th September, seven-days before the airfield raid.



2nd May 2012

5. My half-right view was of a large compound with high walls but very little activity – it appeared unoccupied.



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6. And looking south towards Nadi-Ali, past the end of the runway. Half a dozen compounds and buildings are strung out almost directly under the approach flight path. Again they appeared unoccupied, but whilst there was no obvious 'pattern of life' around these compounds there was still activity there – figures in doorways, visitors on motorcycles to the overgrown compound. Reporting this activity again resulted in the same advice: "Don't worry about it".



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The photos above are of Naw-Abad village – literally meaning "new buildings" - built immediately adjacent to the south eastern corner of our main base, on once barren land that had been easily defended and had justified the siting of the camp there.



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This screen shot from the Forces News, Youtube published report linked above (now deleted) showing the view of our operations centre on Camp Bastion airfield from outside the wire:



And this screen shot from the same report shows an RAF Regiment patrol in Naw-Abad village as a cargo plane approaches the runway. Again, the same view of our defences and airfield that anyone passing the base would have seen, and which anyone living besides the base would be able to survey and monitor:



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But this information is already known, and the situation dismissed by British General Capewell at the parliamentary inquiry as being nothing more than “**a *minor tactical error***”.

So if this security debacle outside the wire made little difference to the success of the raid, and assuming the \$400 million raid wasn't all just down to 'luck' on the Taliban's part, then the blame can only be placed inside the wire and on those responsible for guarding the fence. A responsibility the British command appears to have ducked so far - as the Mother of US Marine Lieutenant Colonel killed in the raid has correctly said:

*Dodging blame is the only concern of UK military leaders*



## ***Dodging blame is the only concern of UK military leaders***

The mother of one of the troops killed in the Camp Bastion attack, condemns the British Army's complacency in an open letter





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## Inside the wire

Several very accurate maps of Bastion airfield were published after the attack, the most significant of which was the Taliban's, shown in its publicity video of the raid:



The layout corresponds to this screen shot of a CBS news graphic of the attack:



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Both of those layout schematics corresponded to the reality on the ground, shown in the photo here. The guard towers the attackers walked between are to the right of the image and the hangers and fueling stations where the attack commenced on the left. The unmonitored undulating terrain shown here inside the wire highlights how critical the integrity of the perimeter fence was – it was essentially our last line of defence. 21st April 2012



This photo shows 13 US Marine Super Stallion helicopters with a total value of over \$400 million. They were parked just to the left of the hangers seen in the image above, and illustrate the value of kit we were defending, and it's proximity to the unregulated population centre that had appeared besides us. 15th June 2012



There has been significant criticism of the US forces for failing to defend their base adequately – significant enough for two Marine generals to be forced to retire early because of their perceived failings. I know their single greatest failing though – they assumed British forces were capable of defending a chain link fence. The de-classified US report states:

***“all members of the Marine Air Wing leadership indicated they relied on UK forces and TFBW to provide for their force protection, yet they were unaware of UK plans, capabilities, or limitations.”***

and

***“Many of the Marine Air Wing interviewees, including Major General Sturdevant, expressed that they were a tenant unit, and they relied upon TFBW and the UK FP Wing to protect them.”***

The US section of the camp had no external fences – it was entirely within the bounds of the wider British camp and they were only there for one reason: to do the job the British command had already



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failed to do – bring security and stability to Helmand. The US command had tried to share responsibility for base security by creating a coordinated defence with a unity of command, but this was rejected by British officers too focused on justifying their own existence. It was their trainset and they didn't want to share it.

So having demanded exclusive responsibility for the perimeter fence security how did the British approach this task? I would say with a criminal nonchalance and disregard that at times took my breath away and ultimately chilled me to the bone – the only thing that genuinely scared me during my six months in Helmand was the British command.

This impression struck me in the first five minutes of my first guard duty, and was reinforced on every duty until my last guard on this section of fence when I was reduced to cowering inside the guard tower whilst off watch, knowing an attack could come at any time but that no one seemed aware or even to care.

My first guard duty briefing, within the first five minutes I spent on the base perimeter, included:

**Ordered to call for the quick reaction force (QRF) to prevent the Afghan army or police from interfering with the farmers who were harvesting opium right in front of us.**

**Ordered not to fire illumination flares (essential kit when guarding a large base at night) over the valley “because it disturbed the neighbours”.**

The Sergeant also confirmed that soldiers recently caught sleeping on duty - normally a court-martial offence in a conflict zone - had gone unpunished. This was a stated and practiced policy of the senior British command – effectively saying sleeping on guard was ‘okay’.

This seemingly implausible claim that soldiers caught sleeping on guard duty in a War zone would not be formally punished has since been confirmed to me – this is an account of the order of business at the Camp Bastion Friday morning garrison meetings:

***“It was usually a discussion of such weighty matters as sleeves up or down, shirts tucked in or out and a weekly bun-fight of the '10 best reasons why my men can't do Sanger guard duty'. Sleeping on sentry was topic raised by the military police commander almost weekly, him being of the opinion that offenders should be subject to Court Marshall. The garrison commander however thought a 'stern talking to' would sort that problem.”***

This discourse allegedly recounts meetings in 2011, the year before my tour, suggesting that the failings were embedded and institutional, rather than solely at an individual or unit level. I saw the consequences of this policy on 7th September when i visited the observation level of the guard tower and found the two soldiers supposed to be guarding the base sat on the floor watching a movie on their laptop. I didn't report it because i already knew the command within my own platoon to be corrupt, I knew they wouldn't be punished and i genuinely feared the repercussions of speaking out. In this matter I became part of the problem - I failed in my duty.

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The unarmored bus carrying up to thirty-soldiers around the perimeter road travelled the same route at exactly the same time each day, stopping to change the guard in each occupied tower, which as we have seen were very easily viewed from outside the wire. Anticipating the possibility of it being targeted from outside the wire, at points where the perimeter road was higher than the surrounding fence and open to the fields and drainage ditches outside the camp.

This civilian bus is transporting personnel around the airfield's internal roads, but it was also a civilian bus (perhaps twenty years older though) that ferried the change of guard around the perimeter security track to the towers each day.

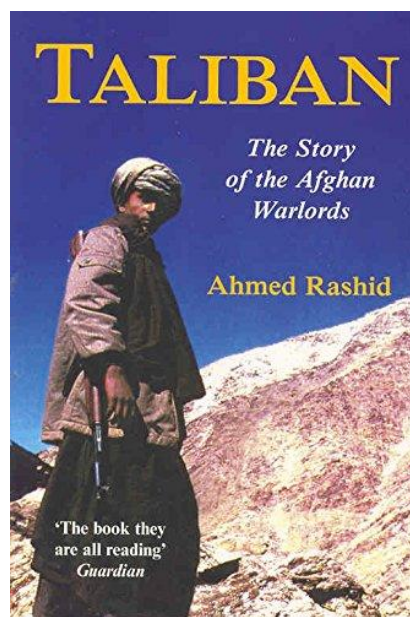


17th June 2012



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I had read Ahmed Rashid's book *Taliban* before deploying and remember him telling of a renowned mujahideen fighter who would submerge himself in roadside drainage ditches full of foul water for hours at a time. Breathing through a straw he'd wait to feel the vibration of approaching Russian military vehicles before emerging from hiding firing RPGs from the hip. Although undoubtedly an exaggerated War time legend, I still always wore my body armour for the journey, just in case.

A civilian cargo plane coming in to land at Camp Bastion, flying just a few hundred feet above the guard tower at the southern end of the runway.



The significance of this guard tower is that the Taliban were as familiar with it as we were. The supposedly secure airfield defences had been breached at least three times that summer, all incursions going undetected until after the event and only when patrols found cuts in the chain link fence. Two of those breaches happened besides the tower in this photo, just a few hundred feet below the aircraft's final approach to the airfield. Subsequently reviewed surveillance video recordings showed one trespasser entering this guard tower and remaining there for sometime. The potential for a catastrophic attack against an aircraft from that guard tower is starkly obvious I think, but I saw no change in the guard posture other than to relax it, especially towards the end of our six-month tour rotation. From October 2006 to October 2014 the British rotation of troops occurred like clockwork every six-months, so in September 2012 the Taliban would have know the disposition of our troops intimately. Such regular and predictable rotations would have simplified logistics and paperwork greatly for the command I imagine -

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but at great cost to any tactic advantage we hoped to achieve. Again, it struck me then as it does now, the British military command really didn't know its arse from its elbow when it came to the occupation of Helmand.

The third airfield incursion was also recorded on surveillance tapes and two figures can be seen breaching the defences (close to the 14th September breach point) and entering a technical compound. This was the cryogenics lab that was subsequently targeted during the airfield raid. The British command dismissed these intelligence-gathering operations into the heart of NATO's Helmand base as:

***“a mixture of criminality and silliness by children, and the last thing we want to do if we find a kid trying to get over a fence is to shoot him or her dead. In the balance of judgment at the perimeter level, you have not only to be absolutely sure that this is a terrorist intervention or an enemy intervention, but to make sure that, in determining that, you do not mistakenly kill an innocent person going about his normal business who may be high on solvents or who may just be mischievous.”*** - Lieutenant General Capewell

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/830/830vw.pdf>

The “***criminality and silliness by children***” that Lieutenant General Capewell was referring to was scrap metal (brass) collecting activity had been happening besides the firing ranges on the far side of the base for sometime. Characterising the airfield incursions as being “***silliness by children***” again illustrates the incredible naivety of the British command to the operational reality.

Others were more confident about the camp's security; here two British soldiers navigate the perimeter security track on bicycles – wearing no body armour in an area prone to indirect fire (25th May 2012)







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The publication of the route, timings, attendance and other arrangements for a weekly 'park-run' event held in Bastion struck me as a pretty basic failure of military intelligence. Posted to a public website for the duration of the event it was information available to anyone with an internet connection, identifying exactly where and when an average of fifty people each week would assemble unarmed and without any body armour.




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## Camp Bastion parkrun - Weekly Free 5km Timed Run

**What is Camp Bastion parkrun?**  
It is a 5km run - it's you against the clock.

**When is it?**  
Every Saturday at 6:30.

**Location of start**  
The route will start outside the main gym on Bastion road, along the road that runs between the gym and the galley. The start/finish line will be between two concrete blocks located on the road



## Course Description

Starting from Camp Bastion 1 main gym, the course runs directly south towards the perimeter road. Then it does an anti-clockwise 4km loop, with small dog leg at the end, and back to the gym.

### Camp Bastion parkrun event statistics

Problem with results? please contact [campbastionoffice@parkrun.com](mailto:campbastionoffice@parkrun.com)  
Any questions? Please visit our [support site](#)

Number of events: 111	Number of runners: 1,524	Number of runs: 5,831
Number of first finishers: 106	Number of clubs: 66	Number of PBs: 1,555
Average number of runners per week: 52.5	Average number of runs per runner: 3.8	Biggest Attendance: 144
Average run time: 00:24:00	Total hours run: 0 Years 03 Days 19 Hrs 05 Min 33 Sec	Total distance run: 29 150km

*"When is it? Every Saturday at 6:30*

*Where is it? It is run within the Camp Bastion military base in Afghanistan.*

*Location of start: The route will start outside the main gym on Bastion road, along the road that runs between the gym and the galley. The start/finish line will be between two concrete blocks located on the road*

*Course Description: Starting from Camp Bastion 1 main gym, the course runs directly south towards the perimeter road. Then it does an anti-clockwise 4km loop, with a small dog leg at the end, and back to the gym."*

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This photo shows how vulnerable the event gathering point was to attack (25th August 2012):



This photo taken as the participants ran round the airfield shows how vulnerable the event was to an insider attack. Such an attack in March 2012 had seen a disgruntled local national employee steal an unattended vehicle on the airfield and attempt to run down NATO personnel there. British commanders had claimed this was the main threat to personnel on the base that summer, and that was one reason they gave for not guarding the perimeter fence, but looking at this photo you'd never have guessed that.



This final image of the weekly sporting event is to show its proximity to the airfield that the British command claimed it was too busy to guard. 25th August 2012





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The airfield was also used for more mission-orientated activities too. Here the new Foxhound vehicle is tested within the camp, having just arrived in theatre.



The £400 million Foxhound project had managed to deliver a patrol vehicle to Afghanistan that did not function in hot weather. It arrived in theatre seven years after the need for a snatch Land rover replacement was identified, and then just as our main offensive operations were ending. This is a very typical example of the MoD's procurement incompetence.

25th May 2012

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These photos show one of the more surprising scenes on the airfield that summer – the area right besides the runway appeared to be being used by Afghan forces as an infantry tactics training ground:



Over forty NATO personnel were killed by our Afghan allies in 2012, the worst year of the entire campaign for 'green-on-blue' insider attacks, so to see dozens of Afghan soldiers wandering freely across such a mission critical area as the airfield was a little disconcerting to me. 2nd July 2012

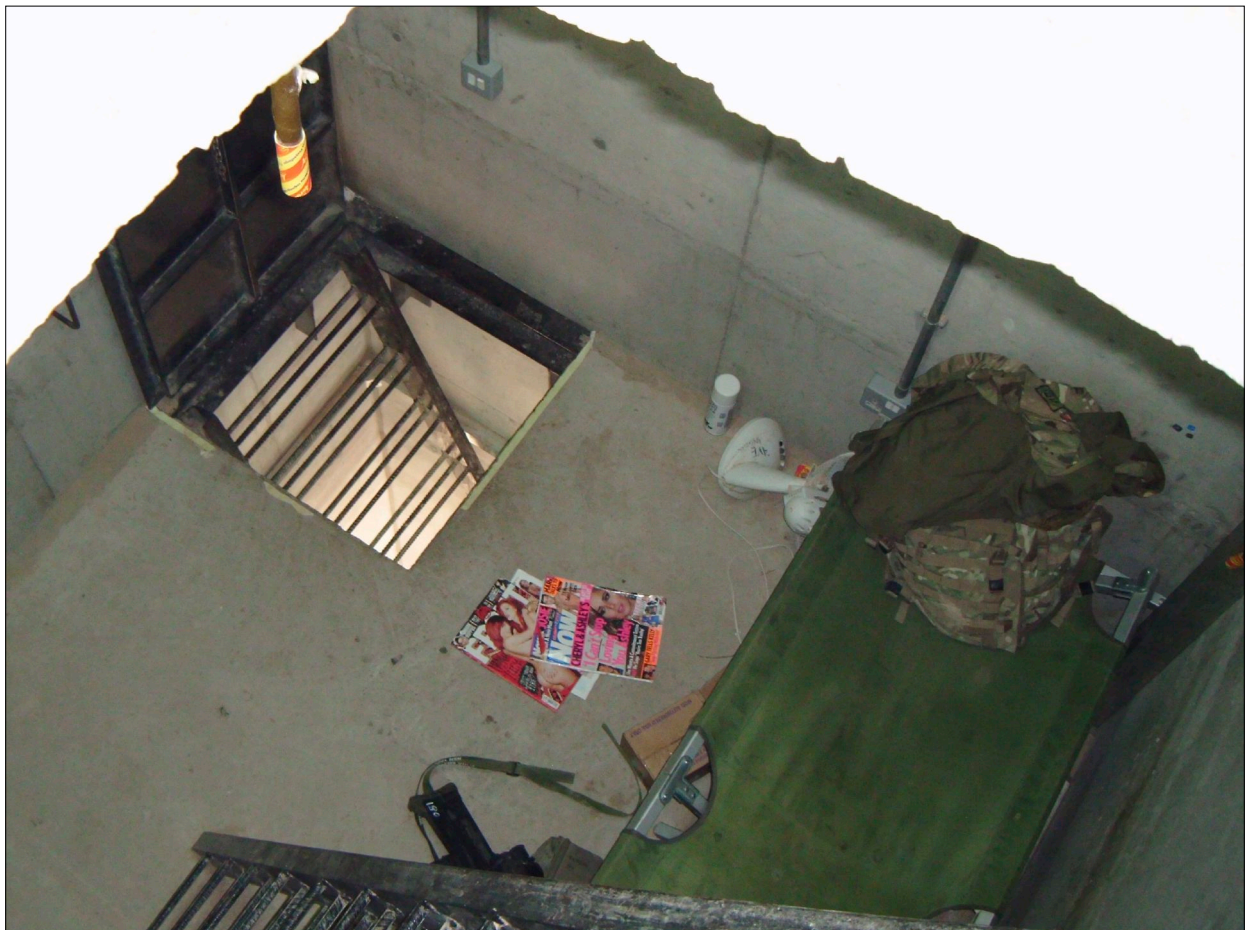




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This all made my off watch rest position feel a little more precarious, until finally on my last duty in tower 11, on 7 September 2012, when the situation was so precarious I took down my hammock and resorted to cowering on the middle floor of the fly infested concrete guard tower 17th June 2012





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## 07 September 2012

The following photos are from my last guard duty, seven days before the raid. As said, the events over this last duty left me cowering in the concrete guard tower even when off watch – the atmospherics outside the base had changed – compounds were unoccupied, normal activities absent and abnormal movements observed. But the guard command's advice remained consistent - "don't worry about it". The numbering on the photos below again corresponds to the schematic map at the beginning of this report.

2. The view at dawn, looking a quarter left from my tower shows a camel train passing behind two nomadic tents pitched almost directly opposite the subsequent perimeter breach point. This kind of activity could only be realistically monitored and policed by local forces with knowledge of the people and culture of the province. But the Afghan police had effectively been banned from the valley by the British who were more intent on protecting the opium harvesting than allowing the local security forces to do the job we had trained them for.



3. The white sheet, a constant feature of the principle compound to our front was gone, the gardens appeared untended and there was only one older Afghan male that I saw wandering near the usually busy compound over the whole duty:





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4. The normally busy compounds to my quarter right view also appeared derelict – doors closed with non of the usual activities or movements.



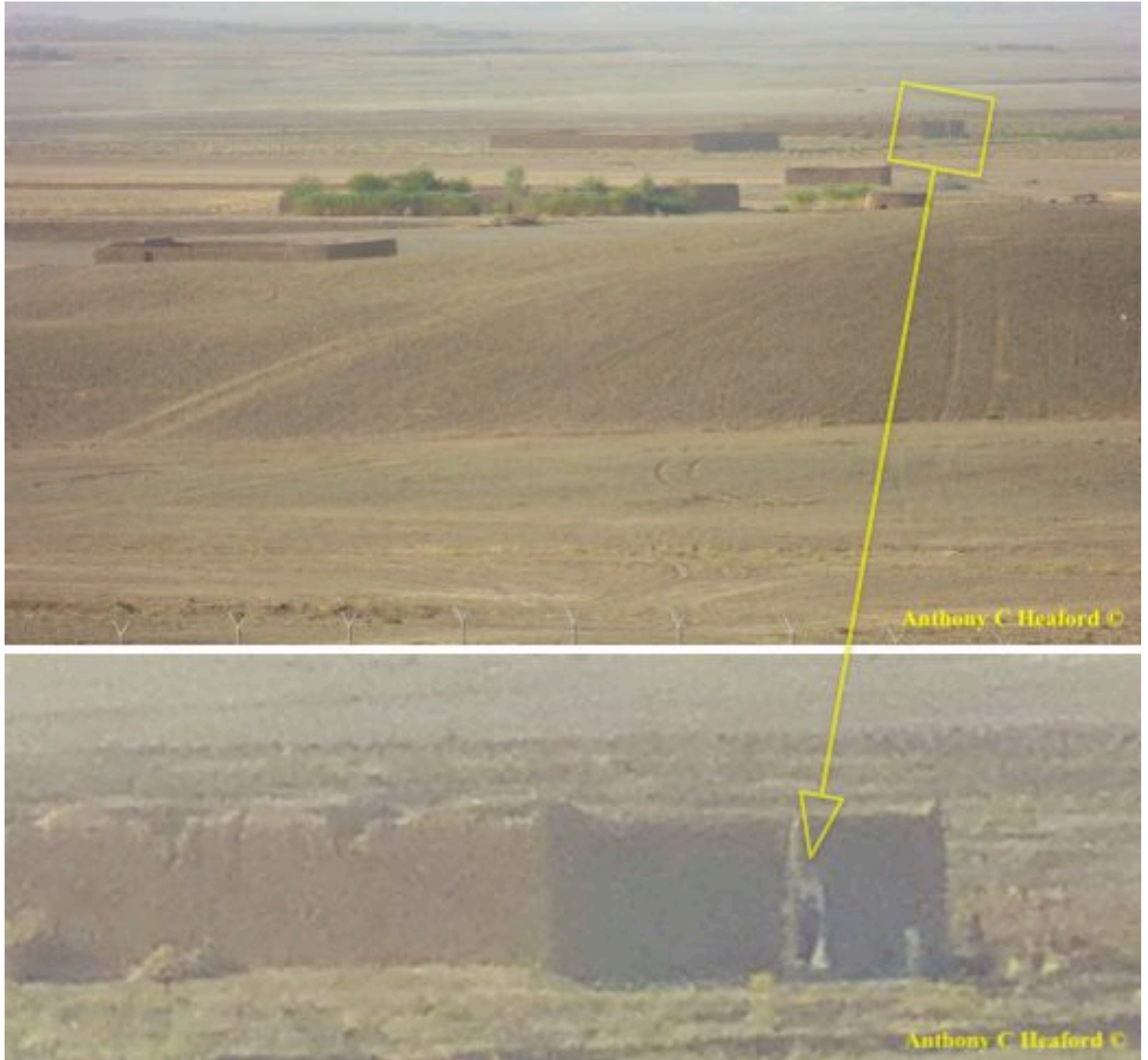
5. These photos show three men building another large compound besides our fence and adjacent to the half dozen seemingly empty compound. The pace of their work suggested they were simply passing time rather than striving to complete the new build.



# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

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6. And this photo shows a figure stood in the doorway of one of the derelict compounds to my far right, under the flight path, someone who appeared only to be loitering there, observing us.





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But life inside the wire remained relaxed. Here a lone female jogger in a gymslip uses the perimeter security track for jogging, in full view of Naw-Abad village. The construction debris visible just outside the wire remained unsecured, providing perfect cover for the approaching attackers one week later – later – the goat herd in the top right corner of the image below was another change in the normal ‘pattern of life’ that was noted.



This, just seven-days before the attack, was the first time in five months I'd seen goats at what turned out to be very close to the launch point for the subsequent raid.

A known tactic of the Afghan/Russian War was for insurgents to transport weapons, etc by tying them to the underside of sheep, so it is quite possible this photo shows preparations for the raid, either intelligence gathering or depositing weapons or ammunition very close to the launch point of the raid that would happen just seven-days later. I admit that I did not report this unusual movement on the basis that I knew what answer I would receive - "Don't worry about it". I recall entering the detail to the tower log which were intended to build a picture of the pattern of life around the base, but I had little confidence in this system either. The tower logs were supposed to be collected daily, checked and monitored but I had once seen these logs go unchecked (not collected from the tower) for seven-days when the usual guard sergeant was on his R&R leave.

# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

The last photo I took on 7 September was a selfie – one prompted by desperation and intended to record my ‘scared face’. It was about 2230 hours and I had just finished a two hour watch, one where I had twice been refused permission to illuminate the valley with a flare.



I had seen a lone figure crouching in a ditch besides the road four hundred metres from the tower, the only time over six months I'd seen anyone outside of a compound after dark. I'd had to ask permission to pop the flare in light of the command I'd received five months earlier – “don't pop flares over the valley - it disturbs the neighbours”. I was convinced we were being probed but the command remained resolute: “don't worry about it” they said – this was the scariest moment of the entire tour for me – as I realised that the command who were supposed to be leading and protecting us appeared not to know its arse from its elbow.

My premonition of an impending attack and the British command disinterest in our security led me to consider breaking ranks and approaching a US soldier in the base, any US soldier, to try to convey my fears to them. But I was a reserve vehicle mechanic on my first tour, a forty odd year old private soldier with no combat experience – how could I convince a foreign army that the collective British command didn't know what they were doing and that they should instead heed my advice? Other than securing myself I took no further action and instead conformed to British army doctrine – I stopped think for myself and instead accepted the infallibility of the command's wisdom, even when they were blatantly wrong – I was just following orders...



# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

## 10 September 2012

In an amazing act of modern day warfare chivalry, the Taliban announced their intention to kill or capture Captain Wales (Windsor), aka Prince Harry. Harry was an attack helicopter pilot based in Camp Bastion; a capable and personable officer by all accounts but none the less a high value target to the enemy. The Taliban press release of 10 September 2012 was reported by most news channels and even on youtube, stating:

***"We are using all our strength to get rid of him, either by killing or kidnapping,"***

the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Reuters by telephone

***"We have informed our commanders in Helmand to do whatever they can to eliminate him,"***

The Taliban actually told us they were coming; they gave us an advance warning via youtube and Reuters, but for *some unknown reason* (it was greed, unprofessionalism and incompetence) the British command took NO additional security measures around Harry's base of operations whatsoever. It could be said we even stepped down security after this most specific of warnings by the Taliban.

## 11 / 12 September 2012

The days after the Taliban issued their warning against Harry were a hive of activity on the airfield. We had the visiting British defence secretary Philip Hammond stood in a guard tower one day, ironically overlooking the same ground the Taliban would launch their raid from three days later. But Hammond wasn't there to check security; Hammond was there to complete his part in a £400-million British procurement corruption deception. The Foxhound vehicles had failed hot weather tests before being deployed to Helmand in 2012, but the British commanders decided to perform an act of mass deception - deceiving a government minister in a active war zone about the state of our equipment.

Hammond was in that guard tower to watch a patrol of Foxhound vehicles pass by the the valley besides the airfield. This was a stage managed charade with recovery wagons prepositioned along the route, but out of Hammond's line-of-sight. They were there because the Foxhound was liable to breaking down in hot weather, an inherent design fault in a desert vehicle fitted with an underpowered speed boat engine. And the sole purpose of this sophisticated deception of a government minister was to justify the purchase of even more of the non-task worthy Foxhound vehicles.

This was unadulterated procurement corruption that encompassed industry, military, civil service and government individuals and entities, and the greatest irony is that the Taliban will likely have had a front row seat to it. Their scouts were likely observing this activity because it was right by their planned attack point they'd use just three days later.

Seeing this significant effort to secure £400-million procurement corruption carried out with such efficiency whilst knowing the perimeter fence was unsecured and an effective open door for the enemy was mind blowing. But once again, who could I tell? The Foxhound corruption went up from the workshop mechanics to the most senior commanders in theatre - this was an institution wide deception. If they'd hang other soldiers out to dry by passing off defective kit, were they likely to be bothered by someone else getting killed on the other-side of the airfield? I doubted it - an assumption that's since been vindicated.

# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

## Night vision

The morning after the raid was the quietest I remember in Bastion – the air bridge was still closed and there was an embarrassed silence amongst the soldiers as the single greatest cause of the attack was discussed in hushed tones across the British camp:

***“The guard towers closest to the breach point had no night vision equipment”***

Despite this fact being discussed by private soldiers within hours of the attack, despite it being mentioned in a GQ magazine article and on the Tongan armed forces Wikipedia page it remains missing from both the UK and US official reports. There is an tacit reference to night vision in the US report when, after assuming each tower did have night vision equipment, it states:

***“Personnel in the Camp Bastion guard towers were equipped with rifles, semi-automatic weapons, hand-held spotlights, night vision devices, and communication equipment”***

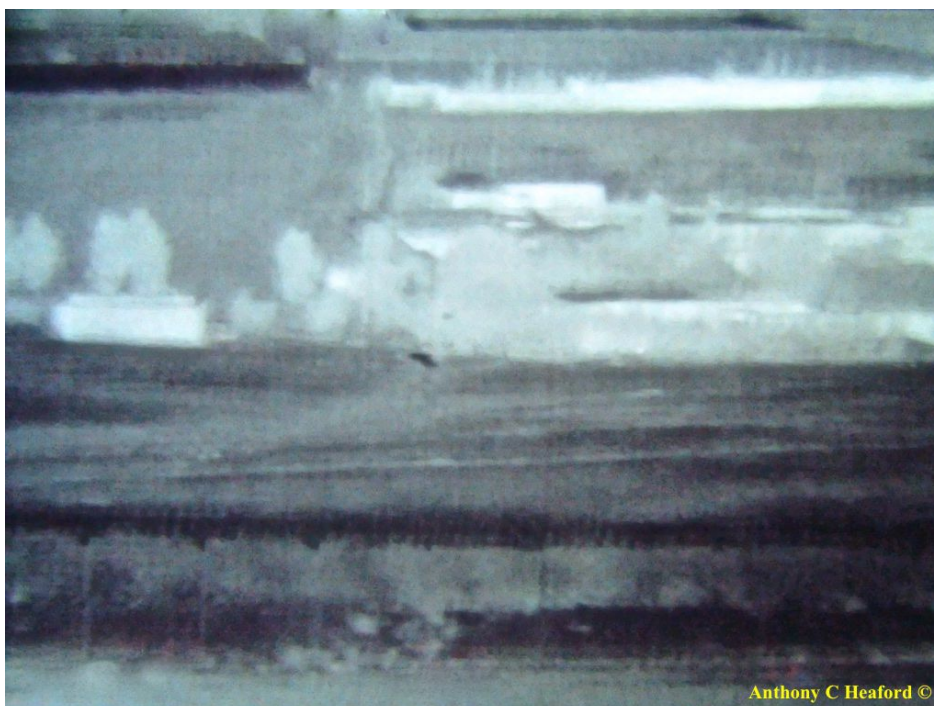
and

***“it would have been difficult to observe an approaching attacker who was attempting to conceal his movement, even on a night with better illumination, and even if the guard was constantly scanning back and forth with a night vision device.”***

I dispute this last statement and suggest it would have been virtually impossible to miss fifteen heavily armed figures crossing hundreds of metres of ground within 170-metres of the closest guard tower, **if of course** every guard tower had had night vision kit. My evidence is what I saw that summer, the photographs below and a couple of guard tower anecdotes.

If I am wrong on this point, and it would not have been possible to see the attackers approach or breach the fence then that would confirm the British command had left a section of the base completely unprotected - either way i consider it a criminal dereliction of duty by the British command.

This image shows the view from my guard tower using thermal imaging – the coils of razor wire one hundred metres away are clearly visible, as is the tree line and compound walls at about two hundred metres. The next compound wall and vegetation at about four hundred metres distance is also very



Anthony C Heaford ©



# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

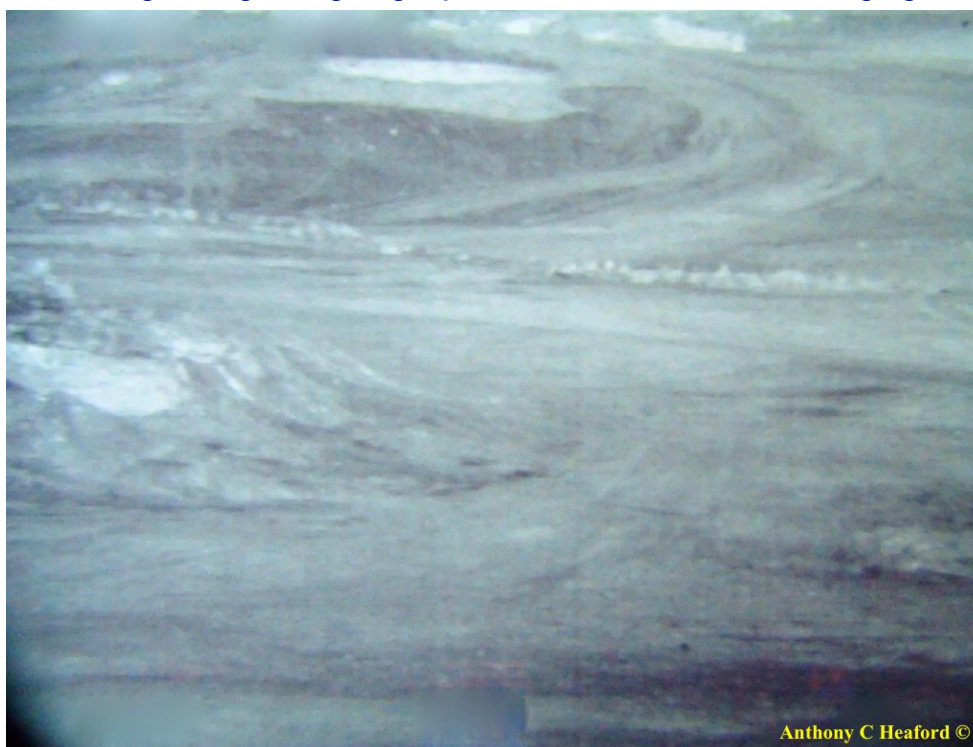
by Anthony C Heaford

clearly visible – it was in fact possible to observe to about eight hundred metres distance with greater clarity than in day light. I recall one night seeing a dog chase a hare across the nearest field in this image, at about 170-metres. Even that distance the clarity was enough to tell the difference between a rabbit and a hare, so again claims that it wouldn't have been possible to see fifteen men passing at the same distance beggars' belief. The figure I saw crouching in the ditch beside the road at about 2200 hours, 7 September, would've been in the top left of this image – at about four hundred metres distance.

This view across the valley shows the compound at four hundred metres distance in the foreground; the compounds in the distance are almost one thousand metres away and yet it was still possible to observe human movement at that distance.



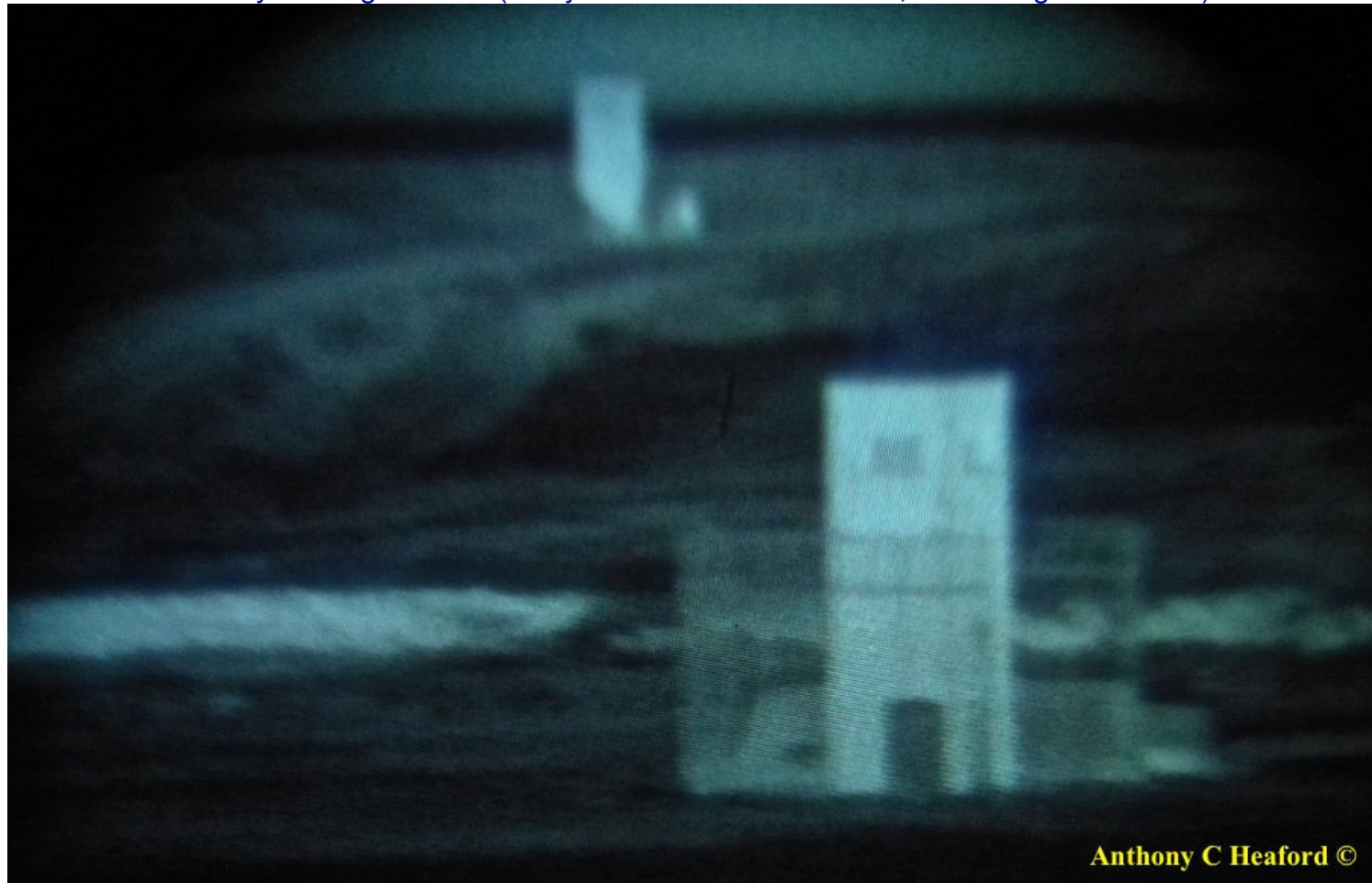
Even inside the wire, looking across the undulating terrain suggests it would have been almost impossible to miss fifteen figures, glowing brightly with heat in the thermal imaging view finder.



# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

The next image shows two guard towers besides mine, with similar spacing to the breach point. Again I ask, how could you move fifteen hot bodies from one side of this photo to the other without them being seen? The towers are bright here as the concrete is still warm from the heat of the day, as with the compound walls. A hot adult body would glow twice as brightly as the concrete or mud brick walls – as bright as you see in the countless attack helicopter kill videos on the internet that our society appears to have deemed family viewing material (freely available on the internet, without age restriction).



One telling piece of information from the de-classified US report is this, referring to the interrogation of the one surviving attacker:

***“the detainee reported Tower 17 trained a light towards the attackers once they were inside the perimeter. However, the attackers were able to move into a small wadi, and Tower 17 did not react further”***

This statement tells me three things:

1. The guard was alert enough to hear and react to disturbances around his tower
2. The guard was brave enough to shine a torch out in to the dark of a moonless night (providing a perfect aiming marker for any potential attackers), but was smart enough not to shine it twice
3. If the guard had had night vision equipment to view the disturbance he would have undoubtedly seen the attackers crossing the perimeter security track or moving between the towers and the attack could have been stopped before it had truly begun - all for the want of the right kit to do the job, mission critical kit - night vision.



# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

## So where were all the night vision goggles?

I know from my other duties as a recovery vehicle 'top-cover' (manning the machine gun mounted on the vehicle cab roof) that many of the logistic patrols done later that summer were done at night. This was because previous daytime patrols had encountered hostility from the villages we drove through - principally children throwing stones at us as we drove through their villages in convoy. We were effectively chased out of town by Afghan kids. This meant we switched predominantly to nighttime patrols, when each vehicle would need several sets (driver, commander and top-cover) night vision. Could this have led to the shortage of kit that meant the Tongans guards didn't get issued any NVGs? These are the questions that need to be asked in a new inquiry. Why didn't British guard towers all have NVGs, the most essential of kit? Was it because we were too scared to conduct logistic patrols during the day, even in 2012? Was it because of operational requirements in say Libya or Syria - the new conflicts we had started before finishing the job in either Iraq or Afghanistan?

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## Remote Weapons Systems

The British knew the problems of defending a main operating base from our experience in Basra, Iraq. But to their credit a solution was found – remote control imaging and weapons systems mounted to the top of the guard towers:



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The remotely operated ½” caliber machine gun has complex digital imaging and targeting capabilities, allowing tactical vision in all light and weather conditions plus automated surveillance and monitoring functions.

This system was exhibited to the press in September 2008 on Salisbury Plain training area. It was part of an Urgent Operational Requirement Security, surveillance and 'Super Sangars' package purchased for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan:

18th September 2008

A new 'Super Sanger' was unveiled at the UOR Day which plans to eradicate many of the security risks that can leave a base open to attack, creating a multi-layered surveillance and integrated strike capability. The Contingency Operating Base in Basra is acting as the testing ground for some revolutionary new equipment, the same as the systems used in Warrior and Bulldog vehicles, which have day and night Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition & Reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities combined with effective weapon systems.

Five Sangars around the perimeter of the COB have already been fitted with RWS's, which allow the operator to control not only return fire without physically putting themselves at risk, but also by being able to see a small screen inside the Sanger, the operator can monitor the area from a position of much greater safety.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100406115446/http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/EquipmentAndLogistics/SecuritySurveillanceAndsuperSangars.htm>



Photo by Terry Seward  
/ National Archive

The 'Enforcer' RWS enhanced base security and defence capability in Basra and were deemed enough of a success to be written up in official British army doctrine a few months later. A glossy type brochure entitled "Battle field manual" was even produced in the spring of 2009 to disseminate this new doctrine,



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espousing the use of remote weapons stations to protect main operating bases. But by 2012 this hard learnt lesson seemed to have been forgotten or simply ignored. We just went back to four-men living in cramped, fly infested oven-like concrete towers with battery operated night vision goggles if we were lucky.

So we knew how to protect a main operating base but appear to have simply chosen not to do it. One question would be were the remote weapons stations available - I believe they were based on a 2004 Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) order issued in 2004 for three-hundred-and-twenty-six Enforcer Remote Weapons System, and included options for up to four-hundred more:

**"August 2004** - In other news, BAE Systems Avionics Group of Basildon, UK, has received a £17 million contract for the supply of Enforcer Remote Weapons System for the Panther vehicle program. The contract covers the supply of 326 stations."

<https://www.photonics.com/Article.aspx?AID=19700>

This initial £17-million order was issued specifically to be mounted on the Snatch land-rover replacement, the Panther vehicle of which four-hundred were also ordered on an UOR in 2004. In 2009 the Panther vehicle finally arrived in theatre five-years after the 'Urgent' order was issued. Within a couple of months the Panther vehicle was rejected with its road handling ability being described as akin to a steam-roller. Its subsequent replacement, the Foxhound vehicle was immediately ordered but still didn't work when it finally arrived in Helmand in 2012 - a vehicle built for combat operations in Afghanistan broke down in hot weather due to over heating and the 4-wheel steering system didn't work, amongst numerous other problems with the £1-million/each vehicles (the Foxhound is still considered an unreliable vehicle by soldiers using it on European exercises in 2017). So theoretically, in 2012 there were approximately three-hundred remote weapons stations, suitable for mounting on guard towers or vehicles, sitting in a store room somewhere.

Despite the ministry of defence having had a media day event promoting the use of RWS's on guard towers, despite it being written in to British army doctrine and published in a wonderfully glossy brochure called "Battlefield Notes - Spring 2009", and despite hundreds of these units being sat in a store room somewhere gathering dust - the British command thought bored and ill-equipped soldiers in guard towers were the best way to defend our main operating base. This, to me at least, beggars belief.

The remote weapons system (RWS) would still have to be manned of course, but a remote operator would be in a far safer and more comfortable position than stood in the guard tower window. The RWS deterrent value just by its presence would be considerable too.

## My Allegations

- The British command decision to protect illicit opium harvesting besides the camp from interference by Afghan security forces was illegal – we were complicit in the production of a class A drug and this contributed directly to the surveillance and reconnaissance of the airfield by enemy forces.
- The British command decision not to formally punish soldiers caught sleeping on guard duty was a dereliction of duty.
- The British command instruction not to fire flares over the perimeter, 'because it disturbed the neighbours' was again a dereliction of duty.
- The British command decision not to provide all airfield guard towers with night vision equipment on a moonless night was again a dereliction of duty.
- To date these facts have been ignored, suppressed and even withheld from the inquiry investigating the attack. Those responsible for this criminal activity have since been promoted, received honours and even awarded titles such as Baron.

# Battle of Camp Bastion, 14/15 Sept 2012, Helmand Afghanistan

by Anthony C Heaford

The British command has told parliament that the principle cause of the attack was luck on the Taliban's part, whilst avoiding any accountability whatsoever for their failings,. The inquiry into the attack eventually concluded:

***"The MoD has been obstructive and unhelpful to us as we tried to establish the facts surrounding the attack."***

**I allege that there has been an institutional cover-up of the Camp Bastion attack failings, involving collusion at every level. I can (and will) add other charges of criminality, incompetence, corruption and dereliction of duty against the British command, but for now I hope to have presented enough information to justify a second inquiry, focusing on the circumstances leading up to the airfield attack.**

Men are dead, and they can't be resurrected. The campaign is over so some may say this report is just academic now. But to my mind there is nothing more urgent than addressing the points I have raised; the men responsible for this debacle are still commanding our forces and advising our government. If the British army fails to even acknowledge its mistakes, then they will never learn and the institution will be condemned to repeat their mistakes. How would you feel knowing that men with this level of competence and integrity could hold life and death decisions over your sons and daughters, fighting in tomorrow's conflicts?

As on the 7 September there is only one thing that still scares me about my military service – the stunning incompetence and unaccountability of an “arrogant, needy and slow” command.

## The Accused

David Cameron, de facto commander in chief of British armed forces at the time and who now considers himself qualified to command all of NATO forces. I wonder how the families of the dead US Marines feel about that?

Ex-General Richards, chief of the general staff at the time was made Baron Richards of Herstmonceux upon his retirement and given a seat in the House of Lords. He now advises governments (particularly despotic governments in the middle east) on their military policies but has never been made to answer for his failings throughout the Afghan campaign.

Philip Hammond, secretary of defence at the time has not even acknowledged my allegations, like an ostrich with his head in the sand, but he is still in government guiding our nation's future.

Group Captain Jeff Portlock, Bastion Base Commander at the time, was bizarrely promoted to Air Commodore after failing catastrophically to protect the camp and now is commander of British drone (UAVs) operations world wide. The fact that the man couldn't even secure a chain link fence concerns me greatly.

And there are others within the senior command who failed spectacularly in their duty to perform the most basic of military tasks - defending Camp Bastion. If these men can fail in their roles so catastrophically and yet suffer no consequences whatsoever then I struggle to comprehend the purpose of the chain of command. Shit might roll down hill, but accountability must start at the very top.

### Photographer & Report Author:

Anthony C Heaford, Craftsman in British Territorial Army 2009 to 2013, No.30088729.  
Six month tour of Afghanistan, April to October 2012. Based in Camp Bastion.



## Independent witness testimony

(Added 20 January 2021)

This is the text of the independent witness testimony supporting my allegations. This witness is a former soldier & counter terrorism assigned police officer who was working in Camp Bastion in 2011 as a senior PMC (private military contractor). This independent witness has given me permission to credit him with the quotes above - his name is Iain Reid, linkedin profile here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/iain-reid-4632111b/>

"I used to attend the Friday Morning GSM [Garrison Sergeant Major's] briefing in [Bastion]. People being caught gonking on stag going unpunished with the RMP [Royal Military Police] CSM [Company Sergeant Major] going ballistic and clearly stating that being caught asleep on stag in an Operational Zone was a Courts Martial Offence and receiving zero support. Another instance was an incursion that was spotted by ISTAR [surveillance] assets and not the sentry(s)... As for the tales of Horror re stagging on they are, unfortunately, true. The GSM was of the opinion that people caught sleeping on stag should be given a 'Firm talking too'. I had to armlock and pin down the RMP CSM (metaphorically speaking) on more than one occasion."

"It [Bastion garrison weekly meeting / Friday] was usually a discussion of such weighty matters as sleeves up or down, shirts tucked in or out and a weekly bun-fight of the '10 best reasons why my men can't do Sanger guard duty'. Sleeping on sentry was topic raised by the RMP commander almost weekly, him being of the opinion that offenders should be subject to Court Marshall. The garrison commander however thought a 'stern talking to' would sort that problem."

"Unfortunately, It was a 'mindset' issue, [Bastion] was 'never going to be attacked' snigger and forcing people into Sangars when they could be stuffing themselves with KFC and Pizza whilst 'chillin' was the overriding factor. The GSM was fighting a losing battle and there were quite few WOs [Warrant Officers] around that table who were complicit and quite happy for him to do so as long as they looked good in the eyes of their guys. Couple that with the totally slack attitude to being caught asleep on stag, failing to observe / detect \*\*\*\*\* incursions through the wire prior to the attack (and lack of any disciplinary action) and you have a major clusterfuck just waiting to occur. To be honest, I'm surprised it didn't happen years ago."

"People didn't pull their weight and were ably assisted by their Senior NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] and WOs. As stated in a couple of threads I had to attend the Friday Morning GSMs meeting in [Bastion]. Slagging off aside, I sat and listened as the same, tired old excuses, were dribbled out by people who should damn well know better as to why 'their lads' couldn't possibly get their arses in a Sangar for two hours, whilst the GSM was virtually reduced to begging for bods."

"Go on then, tell me which bit I've got wrong? The sleeping sentries, the blokes who couldn't give a \*\*\*\* or the ones watching videos on their laptops?? It got to the stage when I was out there that 'Sleeping on Sentry', in a \*\*\*\*\* War Zone was, by the GSMs definition, something to be dealt with by a 'stern talking to' rather than the \*\*\*\*\* Courts Martial that it deserved,"

"So not unlike the two or four man teams breaching BASTION for months before the Talibs got stuck in??? Nah, they were only stealing vehicle batteries and the sentries weren't really asleep / \*\*\*\*\* non existent\*, were they. • Insert pathetic Regimental excuse here"