

Battle Hand-Off at Ground Zero: Armor, Engineer Soldiers Relieved in Place

Armor Commander Praises Vanguard Troops

by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta, 138th MPAD, New York National Guard

NEW YORK CITY--With bombs falling in Afghanistan, operations here continue routinely with task force troops rotating out of the ground zero area of operations in lower Manhattan October 6.

Units such as the 152nd Engineer Battalion and two companies of the 1-127th Armor Battalion were relieved in place by the 1-69th Infantry Battalion, two companies of the 1-127th Armor Battalion and other units.

The 101st Cavalry, 69th Infantry and 258th Field Artillery were the New York Army National Guard's point units, joining the rescue and recovery efforts on September 11, the day terrorist attacks destroyed the World Trade Center—a fact not lost on 1-127th Armor Battalion Commander Maj. Carl Pfeiffer, who praised the units' work at establishing ground zero operations in the tense days following the towers' collapse.

“Our battalion is tremendously indebted to those units, and what they established here,” Pfeiffer said. “It was less complicated for us because of the work they had done.”

Pfeiffer said the 101 Cavalry, 258th Field Artillery, and the 69th Infantry has “solved an array of issues” which included supply, billeting, and safety problems.

“We were able to fall in on an array of things they had established,” Pfeiffer said.

Vietnam veteran Sgt. Daniel Shaffer, 1/127th Armor Battalion, didn't doubt the tankers could perform their duties at ground zero.

“Every National Guardsman is an infantryman, and every National Guardsman knows how to guard, so we're qualified for this,” he said.

Shaffer, 53, spent a year in Vietnam with the 107th Fighter Group, based in Niagara Falls, N.Y. He was about to retire from the National Guard when his unit was activated for the World Trade Center rescue and recovery operation.

“I decided to stay,” he said. “I had the thorough backing of my wife and kids.” With 10th Mountain Troops now in Uzbekistan, Shaffer was philosophic about where the frontline was--here or there.

“Is there a frontline anymore?” he asked rhetorically. “We don't know who the enemy is—that's one of the reasons we're here.”

Spc. James Wetherington, A Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, said his mission at ground zero is “to get New York City back to the way it was before this happened.”

“I'm glad to be back,” he said. “This is my job, this is my city—this is what I signed up for.”



Spc. Byron Okelberry, HHC/1-127th Armor Battalion, prepares to board a bus for home October 6.