

HOLD YOUR BREATH

It was a sweltering July day—over 100 degrees—in Afghanistan's Helmand province as Marine Corporal Alejandro Peña recorded a piece of Operation Northern Lion II.

Part of that exercise included the insertion and extraction of U.S. Marines assigned to Georgian Liaison Team-9 and Georgian soldiers from the 33rd Light Infantry Battalion.

"The mission was to insert via MV-22 Osprey, search and clear the area of any threats as well as gather human intelligence, and then move to an extraction point," he said, remembering how barren the landscape was at the site of the operation. "There was little if any vegetation and no escape from the heat."

Adding to the blazing heat, four Ospreys kicked up a



Corporal
Alejandro Peña

giant dust cloud as they landed at the extraction point.

With his Canon 5D Mark II camera, Peña captured this image of troops moving toward the Ospreys just before they disappeared into the dust.

"The dust cloud temporarily made it difficult to breathe and I remember the gritty feeling of dirt in my mouth," he said.

Peña is currently stationed at Camp Pendleton, California, and is assigned to 1st Marine Division Combat Camera. He has spent the past four years as a Combat Camera photographer and credits his job with allowing him to experience many perspectives of the Marine Corps, from combat to humanitarian missions. He said one of the most enjoyable aspects of the job is sharing his photos with others.

"I often give the Marines copies of my pictures so they can show their loved ones back home what they are going through."★

—Ashley Bernardi is a Virginia-based freelance writer.

