

December 3, 2007

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN



'Care Strikes' ■ Hot Lunch ■ Ambush Alley

Defense Digest

News from the DoD

DoD

Officials explain recoupment policy for wounded troops

WASHINGTON (AFP) – If you are wounded in combat and discharged as a result, you will not have to pay back your enlistment bonus, Defense Department officials said.

“Bonuses are not recouped simply for one’s inability to complete an enlistment or re-enlistment agreement through no fault of the military member,” a policy statement said.

Pentagon officials re-stated their policy after a wounded Soldier in Pennsylvania received a bill from the Army. Jordan Fox was a private first class in Baqouba, Iraq, when he was wounded in the explosion of an improvised explosive device. Fox was partially blinded in his right eye and suffered a back injury when the bomb went off.

Fox was medically discharged and went to his hometown near Pittsburgh. The Army sent him a letter asking him to repay \$2,800 of his \$7,500 enlistment bonus. He received a second letter telling him he would be charged interest if he didn’t make a payment within 30 days.

“Department policy prohibits recoupment when it would be contrary to equity and good conscience, or would be contrary to the nation’s interests,” according to the Defense Department policy statement. “Those circumstances include, for example, an inability to complete a service agreement because of illness, injury, disability or other impairment that did not clearly result from misconduct.”

Department policy on recoupment also establishes that, to the maximum extent permitted by law, the secretaries of the military departments “shall remit or cancel any and all theater debt incurred by military members who were medically evacuated from a combat zone due to injury or illness, except in the event of clear misconduct.”

Army officials said Fox will not be required to pay back any enlistment money he received. “By all accounts, his case seems to be an isolated one,” Army officials said.

Anyone who has an issue can call the Wounded Soldier and Family Hotline at 1-800-984-8523.

Air Force

Officials announce new selective reenlistment bonus list

WASHINGTON – Following a selective reenlistment bonus review, Pentagon officials have released the latest SRB list, effective Dec. 15, containing 43 Air Force specialties.

“Our SRB analysis process proved invaluable and we were able to modify the list to apply bonuses to our most critical needs,” said Senior Master Sgt. Douglas Byrd, manager of enlisted force management. “Balancing the enlisted force is a constant challenge, and the SRB is the most effective program we employ to retain our number one priority: our Airmen.

“The SRB analysis process objectively identifies SRB candidates and recommends the best allocation of funds while staying within budgetary constraints,” said Byrd.

The process, which also includes a “human-in-the-loop” review,

ensures the right skills are targeted with the most cost-effective multiples. All enlisted skills were reviewed. The new program has about the same budget – approximately \$46 million – as the previous program, which necessitated careful application of Air Force dollars to shore up critical Air Force Specialty Codes. As a result, Air Force officials will offer bonuses to Airmen in 43 specialties versus 37 previously.

The criteria used to determine which enlisted skills will remain on or be added include current and projected manning levels, retention trends, career field force structure changes and career field stress level. Bonuses are authorized in 0.5 increments, or multiples, and in three re-enlistment zones for people with 17 months to 14 years of service. The Air Force is also testing a fourth zone, Zone E SRB for explosive ordnance disposal Airmen with 18-to-20 years of service.

“After careful analysis and consultation with career-field managers, we added 15 zones, 22 increased, 75 remained unchanged, 18 decreased and nine were removed,” said Byrd. To view the SRB list, visit the <http://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil/> and type “SRB” in the search box, then select the “Updated – List of Air Force Specialty Codes Receiving Selective Reenlistment Bonuses.”

Navy

Tips offered to increase advancement opportunity

MILLINGTON, Tenn. – With advancement results released, many Sailors are celebrating, while others look for steps to increase their opportunities during the next advancement cycle.

“Superior performance is still the most important factor in getting advanced,” said Vice Adm. J.C. Harvey, chief of naval personnel. “The weight of the performance mark average from a Sailor’s evaluation promotion recommendation has increased by seven percent. The weight of service-in-pay grade and pass-not-advanced points has decreased by approximately one-half.

“It is extremely important for commanding officers, executive officers and command master chiefs to communicate with those who did not get advanced this cycle,” Harvey added.

According to the CNP, one thing the chain of command can do to assist Sailors not selected for advancement is schedule a career development board. A CDB provides personnel the opportunity to discuss their career progression, the health of their rating and their short-and long-term goals for the future.

It allows a Sailor and his or her chain of command to review the Sailor’s record and identify ways to improve competitiveness in future advancement cycles.

According to the Navy Center for Career Development, some questions a Sailor should ask during the board include:

- What can I do to gain more authority and responsibility in my current position to make me more competitive for the next pay grade?
- I passed but didn’t advance the last advancement exam. What changes can I make to improve my chances next time?
- What can members of this board do to assist me both professionally and personally in order to help me achieve success?
- What is the status of my rating? (Advancement is extremely limited in overmanned rates and Sailors may want to consider a rating conversion to increase advancement opportunities.)

Every Sailor should have a mentor and should also look for opportunities to mentor other Sailors who can benefit from their diverse experiences, according to Chief Navy Counselor Kelly L. Strickland, a career counselor at CCD. “It is extremely important to have a mentor. “It’s great to have that person in your career to receive information and points of view from.”

For more career information, visit <http://www.npc.navy.mil/CareerInfo/EnlistedCareerProgression/>.

Freedom Watch Staff

Commander

Air Force Maj. Elizabeth Ortiz

NCOIC

Tech. Sgt. Aaron Cram

Print Chief

Air Force Staff Sgt. Daniel Bellis

Editor

Air Force Staff Sgt. Sarah Gregory

Staff Writer

Senior Airman Christine Collier

Visit the CJTF-82 Web site at
www.cjtf82.com

Freedom Watch is a weekly publication of
Combined Joint Task Force-82.

CJTF-82 Commander Army Maj. Gen.

David M. Rodriguez

RC East Public Affairs Officer Army Lt.

Col. David A. Accetta

Freedom Watch, a Department of Defense
publication, is published each Monday by
the American Forces Network – Afghanis-
tan Print Section, Bldg. 415, Room 205 at
Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Printed circula-
tion is 5,000 copies per week.

In accordance with DoD Instruction
5120.4, this DoD newspaper is an authorized
publication for members of the U.S. military
overseas.

Contents of the *Freedom Watch* are not
necessarily the official view of, or endorsed
by, the U.S. government or the Department
of Defense.

Deadline for submissions is noon local
each Friday. All submissions are subject to
editing by the AFN-A Print Section. We can
be reached at DSN 318-431-3338.

COVER: Air Force neurosur-
geon Lt. Col. (Dr.) Randall
McCafferty performs surgery
on a young Afghan girl suf-
fering from an arachnoid cyst
or “water on the brain” at the
Craig Joint Theater Hospital at
Bagram Airfield. The girl, who
is now in good condition, was
not expected to survive. *Cour-
tesy photo*

BACK COVER: An Afghan girl
waits at the entrance to the pe-
diatric clinic at the Egyptian Field
Hospital at Bagram Airfield. The
Egyptian health-care provid-
ers treat many of the children
for chronic blood disorders and
malnutrition. *Photo: Air Force
Staff Sgt. Daniel Bellis*

Freedom Watch

Dec. 3, 2007

- 4** **Elite force**
Unique Afghan fighting team neutralizes Taliban
- 5** **Marching on**
Afghan National Army Soldiers complete basic training
- 6** **Hot lunch**
Tagab Valley Soldiers eat a Thanksgiving meal
- 8** **Ambush Alley**
Soldiers clear the road to Zerok Combat Outpost
- 11** **Victory lane**
Afghan Commandos return home to welcome cheers
- 12** **A healthy start**
Afghanistan works to improve national health care system
- 13** **Citizenship**
College basketball player turned Soldier becomes U.S. citizen



4



7



11



Commandos from 3rd Company, 1st Commando Kandak, Afghanistan's elite fighting force unit, rehearse insertion techniques during pre-mission training near Kabul. Photos: CJSOTF-A Combat Camera

Elite Afghan force continues to neutralize Taliban



A 3rd Company, 1st Commando Kandak, Soldier fires from a rooftop position during pre-mission training.

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force-82 Public Affairs

KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The Afghan 3rd Company, 1st Commando Kandak, conducted an air-assault raid at dawn on the compound of a high-level Taliban facilitator, kicking off Operation Commando Fury, a four-day offensive in Tagab Valley, Kapisa Province.

Upon receiving credible intelligence, the commandos quickly mobilized and launched on a flight of five Coalition helicopters. As the sun broke over the Sur Ghar Mountains, the Taliban knew the unit was upon them. Within moments, dust swirled as the helicopters set down within feet of their target building. Taliban fled in every direction as the commandos leapt from the aircraft. From the tumult emerged 30 plus commandos. Seconds later, the assaulters breached the entrance and cleared the first of many enemy compounds.

“The valley has long been plagued with insurgent activity, people living in fear

of violence at the hands of Taliban extremists,” said Army Maj. Chris Belcher, Combined Joint Task Force-82 spokesman. “The commandos sent a message that there will be no refuge for extremists in Kapisa.”

The Taliban scurried to escape the pursuit, but a convoy of more than 30 commando vehicles blocked the enemy retreat. A joint effort by the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army assisted the battalion in disrupting the Taliban hold on the Tagab Valley as commandos hit target after target.

“The 3rd Company reinforced the sterling reputation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s most elite fighting force. The fact is there will be no safe haven for Taliban or place where these elite warriors will not pursue the enemies of freedom and stability,” Belcher said. “The company took no time for celebration. They refitted and rearmed. They are always vigilant, always ready to respond, at a moment’s notice, to the call of freedom.”

Generals express gratitude for Paratroopers’ service

By Sgt. 1st Class Jacob Caldwell

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

JALALABAD AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Two generals made a point to thank Task Force Bayonet Soldiers for their service Thanksgiving Day here.

“You are indeed the front line of the effort that’s going on here in Afghanistan for the NATO Alliance, the United States and all freedom-loving nations,” said Army Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, during a speech in the dining facility.

“I know it is difficult. It’s separation. Every day there is danger out there. You know it. You live it,” said Craddock. “You

are making incredible progress and a significant difference in the lives of the people of Afghanistan and also for this entire NATO Alliance.

“As you go about your duties today, when you give thanks in your own special way, know there is an alliance out there of 26 nations, 2.2 million in uniform ... they are supportive and thankful for your efforts and for your sacrifice,” concluded Craddock.

Army Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, Combined Joint Task Force-82 commander, also visited Soldiers at JAF. With little fanfare, he went straight to serving Paratroopers their Thanksgiving meal in the JAF dining facility alongside the senior officers and noncommissioned officers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

Afghan National Army Soldiers complete training

Story and photo by

Army Capt. Vanessa Bowman

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LIGHTNING, Afghanistan – Duty, honor and service are principles familiar to military personnel around the world as demonstrated by more than 400 Afghan National Army basic-training graduates who are ready to put training into practice.

“I’m glad we are finally graduating. It makes me feel happy,” said Baba Khan, 2nd Company, Training Battalion, ANA 203rd Corps. “We’ve been training; now I want to and am ready to serve.”

The class is part of the third cycle of ANA basic training. The course is organized through the Kabul Military Training Center, which is part of the Afghan National Security Forces’ partnership with the U.S. Afghan Regional Security Integration Command is embedded training-team mentorship program.

The basic-training course trains recruits from across Afghanistan. Some of the trainees come alone, but many are actually from the same province and joined together.

“Ten of us joined from our province,” said Sarajuddin, 4th Company, Training Battalion, ANA 203rd Corps. “We joined to serve our nation.”

Similar to the U.S., the recruits are drawn to the ANA through a variety of influences. Some cited advertisements, others had family members in the service, but all expressed strong personal desires to serve their nation.

“We heard a lot about the ANA, some of us through the T.V. and newspapers, others from our families so it was why we were interested,” said Noor Agha, 2nd Company, Training Battalion, ANA 203rd Corps. “We wanted to bring peace and stability and a good life.”

The initial commitment of the newest additions to the ANA is three years, but many say they are interested in making a career out of the military.

“My parents are happy that I have joined,” said Mateullah, 4th Co., Training Bn., ANA 203rd Corps. “I have four brothers and two sisters; my older brother is already in the ANA, but to join was my choice. I joined to serve my country and I want to stay in the service.”

After graduation, the Soldiers will stay with the 203rd ANA Corps. Wherever their Kandak, which is an ANA battalion, is dispatched is where they go.

“I joined because I want to serve my country. All of Afghanistan is our country so



The Afghan National Army’s newest Soldiers graduate basic training at Forward Operating Base Lightning in Gardez Province.

I am ready to serve my country anywhere,” said Atigullah, 2nd Co., Training Bn., ANA 203rd Corps.

Once the trainees get the basics down, they will get further training at their units. The ETT mentors find that working with ANA trainees requires a slightly different approach than those they work with in the U.S.

“I was a drill sergeant for three years before this,” said Spc. Emanuel Sanchez, ETT mentor, 201st Corps KMTC. “We’re successful with training because we use a lot of patience. There is a bigger need for patience because of the cultural differences and the language barrier, which is our greatest challenge.”

Another difference is the ANA doesn’t have separation between the officers, non-commissioned officers, drill sergeants and recruits. “This is due to the cultural differences where loyalty is based first on family, then tribe, local-area associations, affiliations, then rank,” explained Sanchez.

The mentors help the primary trainers who are ANA.

“This is my third year with the ANA. Before this, I served with the presidential guard,” said Capt. Niamatullah, company commander, 4th Co., Training Bn., ANA 203rd Corps. “This is my fourth company command in the 203rd Corps training battalion.”

Like the Soldiers they train, the instructors often also have military service as part of their family tradition.

“My father is a colonel and a helicopter pilot,” said Niamatullah. “One of my younger brothers is in the military training academy and another is in 207th Corps. We are proud to serve our nation by being and training our Soldiers.”

The ETT mentors are impressed with the training cadre and the progress they have

made with each successive rotation.

“Each rotation gets better because the cadre has gotten more experienced with each rotation,” said Sanchez. “The cadre is strongest in teaching weapons.”

Tactical training, which emphasizes weapons familiarity, is an important part of the course and was often cited as the favorite part of the course by the Soldiers.

“We train on formations, drill and ceremony and range training,” said Niamatullah. “We also trained for mounted and dismounted patrols and building clearance. My company is a success in every part of this training.”

Basic is also an opportunity to identify those who are eligible to become non-commissioned officers. Of the trainees, 50 were selected to go to the NCO academy. To be eligible for selection, the trainee must have graduated from 12th grade. Those eligible attend the training in rotations in order to develop and maintain the strength of the corps.

The Soldiers are dedicated to doing a good job, not just for themselves, but for their country.

“We are trying to do our best to make sure we maintain the good name of the ANA by being good Soldiers,” said Agha. “I want to get promoted from NCO to officer. I plan to stay in the ANA as long as I live. It is in our interest to serve our nation’s interests.”

These Soldiers hope to bring a better future to the people of their country.

“I want to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan by eliminating terrorism,” said Khan. “For the last three decades, there has not been any peace, no stability, no schools. I hope to help bring peace and stability so the next generation has things better.”

Fighting, living in the Taliban's backyard: Tagab Valley Soldiers eat first hot meal in months

Story and photo by
Senior Airman James Bolinger
Combined Joint Task Force-82
Public Affairs

TAGAB VALLEY, Afghanistan – Every day, U.S. Soldiers here face a very real threat of death. There have been more attacks on these troops than days their fire base has been in existence. Six Soldiers have been injured since the Coalition built two fire bases here earlier this year.

These Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division and 158th Infantry Regiment are working continuously with Afghan National Security Forces to secure the valley.

The Soldiers received their first hot meal in months when several turkeys with all the fixins' were flown in by helicopter for Thanksgiving.

"I visit these guys at least once a week," said Army Lt. Col. James Leary, Task Force Gladius commander. "It's important to me that they know they haven't been forgotten. They see me a lot, but I'm asking a lot of them."

The residents of these fire bases were sleeping on the ground in sleeping bags not so long ago, Leary said. They just installed showers and now have some B-huts to live in.

"The Soldiers in Tagab Valley are fighting in the Taliban's backyard," Leary continued. "The people who live here have family members in the Taliban. It makes the mission here even more critical to the stability of the region."

First hot meal

Turkey and stuffing was flown in by helicopter from Bagram Airfield for a feast.

"The white meat was magnificent," said Army Pfc. Matt Lorimer, 82nd Airborne Div. "I don't usually like the white meat but this was alright."

They took turns eating and standing watch and enjoyed a short break from their day-to-day struggle with the Taliban.

The goal was to feed every Soldier in the valley a hot meal and the mission was a success.

"There's even salad; I've got to get another plate," said one Soldier. "I didn't even know it was there."



Soldiers deployed in Tagab Valley enjoy their first hot meal in months, when several turkeys with all the fixins' were flown in by helicopter for Thanksgiving. The Soldiers, members of the 82nd Airborne Division and 158th Infantry Regiment, have been working with Afghan National Security Forces to secure Tagab Valley.

True infantry mission

Tagab Valley is an infantry mission, Leary said. Soldiers here are doing more than just mounted patrols. They are out there on foot, pushing the Taliban out of the valley.

"We are here to secure Tagab Valley," said Army Capt. Brian Forester, Fire Base Pathfinder executive officer. "These Soldiers are taking it to the enemy whenever we have contact. The enemy is seeing that we stay and fight; we don't run."

Contact with the Taliban is something these Soldiers face every day.

"We'll be out driving along and (rocket-propelled grenades) will come out of the wood line," Lorimer said.

Despite the regular attacks on Paratroopers in the area, the Soldiers haven't suffered severe casualties.

"We may have taken some casualties, but we've killed and injured many more of them," Forester said.

Building trust

The Afghan National Army and Police asked for our help in the valley, Leary said. They were having trouble building trust in the local community, which is sympathetic to the Taliban.

The Taliban have family here; this is where

many of them stay during the winter, he said.

To counter the Taliban's link to the local community, Leary's Soldiers work with the Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team, which is planning on building several schools in the area.

"We're building capacity," Leary said. "We are going to build several schools and we want to get a radio station out here."

Joint patrols are another step toward stability and safety in the valley.

"Almost every patrol we do is combined," Leary said. "These people need to see us with the ANA and ANP. We train the Afghan security forces where everyone can see. We want the people to know their government is capable of protecting them."

It is a difference the Soldiers stationed in Tagab Valley see every day.

"It's calmed down quite a lot," Anioa said, who has been involved in nearly 20 engagements. "We're not getting into as many firefights. Some of the locals like us being here; they wave when we pass by."

The American presence in the valley is an enduring one. Leary's goal before his people complete their deployment is to secure the entire valley, he said.

"We're here and we're gonna stay," Leary said.

Airmen launch 'care strikes' to spread cheer

Story and photo by Air Force Capt. Mike Meridith
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – For the last two months, a group of Airmen have been conducting what some are calling “care strikes,” to enhance morale among servicemembers here.

Air Force Capt. Ken Valardi, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing chaplain and his assistant, Air Force Staff Sgt. Aaron Smith, began the project in September with the delivery of frozen treats to wing Airmen. When the weather turned cold, the weekly deliveries turned to hot chocolate and coffee, especially valued by flightline maintainers and security forces Airmen working frigid night shifts.

“It accomplishes a lot of things,” said Valardi, who added that the operation usually reaches between 50 and 60 people each time. “It boosts their morale; it lets them know people care and it allows us to meet them and get to know them.”

In addition to Smith and Valardi, the visits also include Air Force Master Sgt. Ronald Lajeunesse of the wing’s military equal opportunity office, who often distributes phone cards and hand and foot warmers to the servicemembers he visits.

“The chaplain and I have a similar goal,” said Lajeunesse. “My goal is to get out to all the Airmen, assess their morale and the overall human-relations climate. So we partnered to meet those needs.”

According to Valardi, the visits aren’t only for the benefit of Airmen, but have included just about anyone working the night shift around the flightline, regardless of their service.

“I had a young Soldier tell me the visit ‘made her day,’” said Valardi.

“Once they start drinking the hot chocolate, they want to stay and talk. They’ll talk about their families, the deployment and their jobs – many are under a lot of stress and it’s good for them to blow off steam and talk to someone who is interested in what they’re doing.”

Airman 1st Class Candace King, a munitions systems ap-



Aircraft maintainers drink hot chocolate during a frigid night shift at Bagram Airfield. The drinks were courtesy of a group led by Air Force Capt. Ken Valardi, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing command chaplain, who regularly brings beverages and fellowship to wing Airmen on the night shift. The “care strikers” enhance morale.

prentice with the 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and one of the group’s recent “customers,” agreed.

“When you’re under stress it feels good to know that people care,” she said.

455th AEW command chief, Chief Master Sgt. Ray Clark, who accompanied the group on a recent visit added, “The important part is to make sure people know that what they do for the mission is important. It boosts their morale to know that someone cares about them.”

With the onset of winter, the visits have taken on added importance as a means to combat the “holiday blues,” said Valardi.

“Here they are; it’s freezing cold outside, they’re in the mountains of Afghanistan, they’re lonely, but they know people care about them and they are not forgotten,” Valardi said.

Retired SMA talks with Bagram senior leaders

By Sgt. 1st Class Krishna Gamble
82nd Combat Aviation Brigade
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The 12th Sergeant Major of the Army talked with senior leaders here about being prepared for retirement and remembering the first responsibility of all non-commissioned officers.

Retired sergeant major of the Army Jack L. Tilley spoke to an audience of command sergeants major, sergeants major, first sergeants, master sergeants and sergeants first class about the importance of planning for retirement.

“The Army changed my life and gave me many opportunities to advance,” said the

36-year veteran. “As long as you prepare yourself to get out of the military, you can do anything you want; education is key.”

Tilley continues to mentor Army leaders on all aspects of soldiering and NCO professional development. He continues to give back to the military through various charitable organizations and personal projects and plans to build a retreat for wounded Soldiers and families. One of the keys to Tilley’s success after the Army was his ability to go to work shortly after retirement.

“It was a tough transition, but I very quickly went to work,” Tilley said. “I stayed busy and I stay focused ... pay all your bills, get your degree, decide where you want to live, start networking before

you get out and have a resume.”

With the meeting open for questions, some expressed their concerns about the pressure on NCOs to train today’s Soldiers and how that is affecting the Army. Tilley told the NCOs to remember their first responsibility as an NCO: take care of Soldiers.

“Counsel them, correct them and put them out of the service if they fail to meet the standards. The young adults have stepped up to the plate ... it’s based on you, how you treat people, how you respect people and what you do. Positive leadership can make that happen,” Tilley said. “Most young people are looking for someone to give them some guidance ... you, the NCO, are the difference.”

Ambush Alley:

The road to Zerok Combat Outpost

Story and photos by
Spc. Micah E. Clare
4th Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs

ZEROK COMBAT OUTPOST, Afghanistan – It’s known to Coalition forces as “Ambush Alley.”

Despite the imminent threat of attack by insurgent fighters along the winding, narrow road surrounded by steep hills and large rocks on the way to Zerok Combat Outpost in northern Paktika Province, nothing the alley throws at them can deter the courage of the Paratroopers of 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

Army Staff Sgt. Timothy Hamilton, a mortar team squad leader in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, remembers one such attack – a day he will never forget.

The convoy was moving from Forward Operating Base Orgun-E to Zerok COP on a mission to secure a nearby pass while the battalion command group convoy traveled through.

Just as the convoy stopped to send a dismounted team into the hills, the attack began.

Hamilton stepped out of the passenger side of his vehicle to set up a mortar firing position with his Soldiers, when he heard a roaring noise somewhere behind him.

“I heard a big explosion,” he said. “I whirled around just in time to see a [rocket-propelled grenade] impact into the truck behind me. I immediately jumped back in my truck.”

On cue, a hail of small-arms fire came raining down on the convoy from that direction, and the gunners went into action immediately.

“My gunner opened fire with the [M-240b machine gun],” Hamilton said.

Left: Paratroopers from 1st Battalion (ment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Paktika Province.





A convoy from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, travels to Forward Operating Base Orgun-E through Ambush Alley in Paktika Province.

Left: Army Staff Sgt. Timothy Hamilton, a mortar team squad leader in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, dismounts his vehicle during a security halt near Forward Operating Base Orgun-E in Paktika Province.

“The enemy firing positions were so close though; his machine gun broke down after it was directly hit three-to-four times, so he switched to his M-4 and emptied about six magazines at the attackers.”

This was when Spc. Dillon Bergstad, a .50 caliber machine gunner, took a round through his upper arm while firing from the company commander’s vehicle.

“Suddenly I was knocked down,” Bergstad said. “It felt like somebody pushed me over, and I fell back into the truck. When I got back up, I looked around, but didn’t see anything at first, so I thought nothing had happened.”

He kept firing, and remembers killing several enemy fighters at close range.

As the convoy started moving forward to get away from the side attack, they started taking even heavier contact from the front.

Four RPGs hit the company commander’s truck.

“Every time we stopped, another pane of armored glass was ‘spider webbing’ as round after round cracked against it,” Bergstad said. “I couldn’t believe the intensity of this attack; they just wouldn’t stop coming. These guys weren’t joking around.”

Hamilton, back in his vehicle, felt something hit him in the back of his helmet.

“It felt like a jackhammer,” he said. “It

slammed my head down, and right about then, I heard another thump and a searing heat on my neck.”

Two rounds had punched through his truck. One had hit his helmet and another had grazed his neck. He could see a dent on the floor where that bullet had missed his thigh by inches and hit the floorboard.

It was during this time that the first sergeant’s gunner, Army Pfc. Thomas Wilson was killed.

Even though the loss of their teammate was awful, the rest of the platoon still had to concentrate on getting out alive, Hamilton said.

“We just couldn’t believe it,” he said. “In the moment, you kind of have to forget about it and just focus.”

The attackers retreated after about 10 minutes of sustained gunfire and the Paratroopers quickly worked to tow the severely damaged trucks and bring everyone back to Zerok COP. Three vehicles needed to be towed back and the other vehicles had broken glass, blown-out tires and other damage.

Once there, both Hamilton and Bergstad were treated by medics, who were amazed to find their wounds very minor.

Hamilton had barely escaped having his neck pierced and his thigh penetrated; Bergstad had a bullet lodged just under the skin near his bicep, which was easily

removed with little damage.

“I realize I could have lost my dome,” Hamilton said. “I was incredibly lucky.”

In his three deployments, Hamilton, a husband and father of two, says this is the worst ambush he’s ever been in. He was able to count 34 bullet strikes on his truck, including the two above his head that nearly killed him.

Three days later, the convoy was mission ready once again, patrolling on the way back to FOB Orgun-E.

The 1-503rd Paratroopers have made many more trips through Ambush Alley and have been attacked on most of them.

It doesn’t make any difference to the 173rd “Sky Soldiers,” though.

Sometimes Hamilton looks up at the bullet holes above his head, and sees the sunlight shining through them.

“When I see those holes, I think to myself, ‘a few more inches,’” he said. “It would have been a completely different story.”

Despite the loss of a comrade, he still knows they have a job to do.

“We’ll just keep rolling through,” he said.

Bergstad, looking over the ambush site from his turret, says he now sits a little lower in his seat than before.

“Still, somebody’s got to patrol this area,” he said. “It might as well be us.”

Air Force surgeon saves Afghan child's life

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force
- 82 Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – An Air Force neurosurgeon assigned to the Craig Joint Theater Hospital here saved the life of an 8-month-old Afghan girl.

The child, from Parwan Province, was originally taken by her parents to El Salem Egyptian Field Hospital with symptoms including excessive head growth, eye abnormalities and irritability.

After Egyptian physicians referred her to CJTH, Air Force neurosurgeon Lt. Col. (Dr.) Randall McCafferty diagnosed a congenital brain abnormality, “arachnoid cyst,” at the base of the girl’s brain.

“The cyst had caused blockage of the flow of cerebrospinal fluid, thus causing hydrocephalus [commonly known as “water on the brain”],” said McCafferty. “Left untreated, the condition could have eventually been fatal.”

With the recent deployment of neurosurgical assets to Afghanistan, McCafferty was able to operate on the child twice, removing



A young Afghan girl was treated for an arachnoid cyst which caused “water on the brain” at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital here after being referred from the El Salem Egyptian Field Hospital. She is in good condition following surgery. *Courtesy photo*

the cyst and leaving the girl in good condition.

“I was happy that I could bring specialized training to this region that did not previously exist and that with those skills I was able to provide an opportunity at a future

life for both the child and her family that likely would not otherwise exist. In addition, I was fortunate to have the support of command, my colleagues and the intensive care unit staff at CJTH to be able to deliver this care,” McCafferty said.

Task Force Pacemaker celebrates Thanksgiving

**Story and photo by
Army 1st Lt.
Kenya Virginia Saenz
Task Force Pacemaker
Public Affairs**

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SHARANA, Afghanistan – Task Force Pacemaker Soldiers from the 864th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) celebrated Thanksgiving with traditional food despite being away from home.

For some Soldiers, this was their first Thanksgiving away from home. Despite being without their loved ones, TF Pacemaker Soldiers had a lot to be thankful for. Cooks offered roasted turkey, honey-glazed smoked ham, shrimp cocktail and homemade mashed potatoes. Officers and senior noncommissioned officers had the opportunity to serve lower ranking enlisted



Army Lt. Col. Mark Deschenes and Army Command Sgt. Maj. Charles Turner serve the first Thanksgiving plate to a Soldier at Forward Operating Base Sharana.

Soldiers to thank them for their hard work throughout the deployment.

“Thanksgiving is a time to think back on the past year and be thankful for the blessings we have been blessed with,” said Army 1st Sgt. Eugene Russell, Headquarters

and Support Company first sergeant for 864th ECB (H). “I am grateful for my health and thankful for all our Soldiers who are serving our country and to me it is a great honor to be serving the Soldiers in 864th Engineer Battalion.

Soldiers from 585th Engi-

neer Company working at Forward Operating Base Jaji, now called FOB Herrera, also celebrated Thanksgiving. For the “Roughnecks,” this Thanksgiving was especially important. They suffered the loss of three Soldiers a few months ago: Sgt. 1st Class Rocky Herrera; Army Sgt. Cory Clark; and Army Sgt. Bryce Howard. The Roughnecks ate dinner with Army Brig. Gen. Rodney Anderson, deputy commanding general of support, Combined Joint Task Force-82. He initially carved pieces of turkey, which were dedicated to the fallen Soldiers.

“I am grateful to be part of an outstanding unit and on a winning team,” said Army 1st Lt. Jason King, 585th Company executive officer. “It feels good to see the Soldiers, who will be living on FOB Herrera, satisfied and thankful for the work we have done.”

Afghan Commandos return home victorious

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force-82 Public Affairs

KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The 3rd Company, 1st Commando Kandak, returned home victorious after four days of intense fighting during Operation Commando Fury in Tagab Valley, Kapisa Province.

During one firefight, the unit stormed the compound of a known Taliban leader in Mollakheyl Village. Upon capturing their six Taliban targets, insurgents besieged the Commandos in the compound.

While under intense machine-gun fire, the Commandos quickly and decisively positioned heavy-weapon systems to eliminate their enemies. As Commando snipers pounded enemy fighting positions with precision fire, the Taliban attempted a retreat. The 3rd Company directed air strikes to finish the fight, and rockets and machine-gun fire rained from the sky.

The Commandos emerged from the fire fight unscathed, captured six insurgents and killed another six.

Later in the campaign, the Commandos surrounded Taliban forces in Nowruzkhayl village, the site of a previous ambush of Afghan National Police forces. Under the cover of darkness, a platoon of Commandos infiltrated more than a kilometer, undetected, toward the enemy stronghold.

During the battle, Commandos seized



Children wave Afghan flags and cheer the 3rd Company, 1st Commando Kandak, home. The Commandos returned from Commando Fury, a successful four-day operation that captured several suspected insurgents in Tagab Valley, Kapisa Province. *Courtesy photo*

their target building and its inhabitants.

Upon their return to base, one Commando left a message for the Taliban: “You are no longer safe to terrorize Afghans or to stand in the way of prosperity for our people. As you sleep at night, remember this: One day, when you open your eyes, I will be there.”

“The Commandos were greeted and

cheered by local children as they returned to their home base,” said Army Maj. Chris Belcher, Combined Joint Task Force-82 spokesman. “The 3rd Company reinforced the reputation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s fighting force. Afghan National Security Forces continue to improve as a military and are willing to fight for a safe and stable Afghanistan.”

Deployed Thanksgiving offers a taste of home

Story and photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Mike Andriacco
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE HERO, Afghanistan – For many people, Thanksgiving is a holiday spent with family, food, some television and probably a nap on the recliner.

For Airmen here, the only similarity to that formula was the food.

Knowing that Airmen miss the comforts of home on this day more than most, food-service providers here did their best to give them a taste of home.

“The hardest part is not being able to spend the day with family,” said Airman 1st Class Bryan Anderson, an intelligence analyst. “But you can tell they really put forth an effort to make it nice for us.”

The menu included everything one might normally expect for a Thanksgiving feast, as well as a few surprises, including lobster and shrimp cocktail.

Thoughts of home were on a lot of minds, but like Anderson, many Airmen saw the positive side of deployment.

“I have a brand-new niece as of a couple of days ago,” said



Airmen at Forward Operating Base Hero stand in line to receive their Thanksgiving meal. Several enlisted and commissioned leaders took time to serve meals to Airmen and Soldiers to show gratitude for their service.

radio operator Senior Airman Mercedes Lee. “It is difficult being away when things like that are going on back home, but at least I get to spend the holiday with friends I have made here.”

Afghanistan improves health care system

Story by Army Capt.

Vanessa R. Bowman

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan—Afghanistan’s minister of public health and more than 45 military and non-governmental organization representatives met here for a health development conference.

“It is challenging to get all the regional and national representatives here,” said Army Col. Jeffrey Johnson, Combined Joint Task Force-82 surgeon and conference organizer. “What we are trying to accomplish is an open forum where we can exchange ideas. This is an opportunity to share what has worked and what hasn’t in developing the Afghan health sector.”

By working with NGOs and military capacity building forces, Afghanistan is accomplishing its goal to improve its citizens’ quality of life by developing a national health care system. Building the country’s medical capacity to provide increased and better-quality health care supports one of the central points of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. In support of this goal, as well as aiding economic and social development, the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health drafted a health-sector strategy.

In 2001, Afghanistan had health indicators that ranked among the worst in the world. The health system had an insufficient number of workers and health care facilities. There was also an inequitable distribution of health services with many rural areas completely lacking any access to health care and a general lack of coordination throughout the system.

“One mother in six dies from complications of childbirth and 37 percent of children die before the age of five,” said Army Col. John Mitchell, Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan Headquarters Combined Joint Surgeon Directorate. “Polio is still endemic; there are only three other countries in the world where that is true and there are many other mental-health issues, infectious and blood-borne diseases. Afghanistan has some of the worst health demographics in the world.”

To address these issues, the AMPH established a program of objectives to rebuild the health sector. The objectives of the program were explained by Dr. Abdul Qadir, minister of public health, who attended the conference.

“We are focusing our efforts on the rapid expansion of health services in rural areas, development of a basic package of health services to be delivered through a nationwide network of primary-care facilities, establish a clear government focus on stewardship of the health sector and development of assessment systems to measure progress and identify gaps in delivery of health services,” said Qadir.

The joint effort between the ministry, NGOs, CJTF-82 surgeons cell and military units in the field like provincial reconstruction

ceive adequate medical coverage.

“According to our estimates of access for all of Afghanistan based on population, location of health care facilities and travel time, 66 percent of the population lives within two hours walking distance from a health facility,” said Qadir. “Because populations in unsecure areas may have lower access to health services, this figure may be lower and this indicator does not reflect other important aspects of access, such as availability of female health workers at the health facilities.”

Some of the recommendations Qadir proposed to continue were to address health care issues including adding mobile health clinics, increasing the number of female health-care workers and decreasing transportation and geographical barriers.

“There is a need for the further expansion of the BPHS into underserved areas,

which requires sustained efforts and increased investments through development of sub-centers and mobile clinics,” said Qadir. “We also have to standardize health facilities’ infrastructure, continue regular capacity building for technical and administrative staff and strengthen mother-child health care activities.”

While there has been much progress, Qadir emphasized there is still much to do.

“We still have a long way toward our goal to achieve public health care in Afghanistan,” said Qadir. “We have to work together to do more to save the lives of the people of Afghanistan. Supporting each other will strengthen the health care system of Afghanistan.”

In a post-conflict country like Afghanistan, developing public services like health care takes a lot of time, dedication and cooperation. Establishing relationships and partnerships to achieve synchronization is key to the process, which is why events like the health care conference are important.

“We are partners here. At the national level, the CJTF-82 surgeons cell deals with the ministry of public health to work toward ensuring the health care system is meeting the needs of the people,” said Johnson. “Seeing all of you gathered here at this conference working together toward a joint goal, a joint mission in a fully integrated manner is impressive. The amount of positive thought, positive actions and synergistic effects is impressive and motivating.”

“One mother in six dies from complications of childbirth and 37 percent of children die before the age of five.”

— Army Col. John Mitchell,

*Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan Headquarters
CJ-Surgeon Directorate*

teams have had many positive results.

Since 2001, there have been 302 new health facilities. Since 2004, the percentage of facilities with at least one female doctor, nurse or midwife has increased from 38.9 to 76 percent. This has helped raise the proportion of institutional deliveries from expected deliveries from three percent to 14 percent and decreased the infant and under 5-years-of-age mortality rate.

Tuberculosis control has risen from four percent in 2001 to 66 percent with the number of cases receiving the required treatment growing from 9,581 to 25,443 as access to medical care has expanded.

Another area of success is the growth in the level of contracting coverage, which is the percentage of the population residing in districts with administrative and financial arrangements to implement plans. This has grown from nine percent in 2003 to 82 percent.

“The largest improvement is not in the increase in number of health facilities, but in the standardization, coordination, range of services, hours of operation, staffing, support and transparency,” said Qadir.

There are still some challenges in providing access to health care because of the amount of rural population who live in remote areas. Most of the rural population still has to travel more than an hour to reach a health care facility and, the more remote the area, the less likely people have the opportunity to ever re-

Former basketball player, Soldier becomes U.S. citizen

By Army 2nd Lt. Monika Comeaux
173rd Brigade Support Battalion

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – It was a very special day for Spc. Kinga Kiss-Johnson, Company A, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne), motor transport operator.

Not only did she spend Veterans Day weekend deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, but she also became a U.S. citizen during a ceremony at Bagram Airfield.

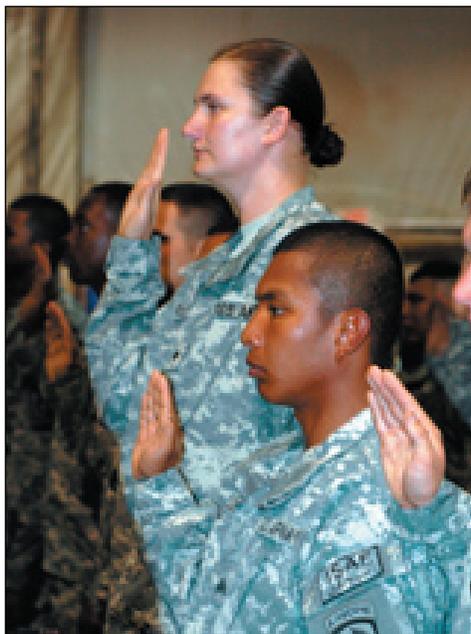
“When I walked across the stage, I was in the clouds ... To me it was a dream and a privilege to become a U.S. citizen,” Kiss-Johnson said.

Kiss-Johnson has seen communism collapse in Romania and UNICEF cars deliver humanitarian aid to the struggling country. As a child she said she thought, “One day, I will be the one helping others,” and here she is deployed to Afghanistan, serving what she now can truly call her country: the United States of America.

Kiss-Johnson arrived in the United States on a basketball scholarship in 1998. She barely spoke English at the time. According to her, her coach at Missouri State University had to draw pictures for her so she would understand what tactics to use during the game. She hit the ground running and learned English quickly. It was also where she met her husband.

“She would come to me in my computer lab for assistance,” said her husband, William Johnson, through an e-mail. “Over the time we struck up a friendship and things led to our eventual [nuptials] in 2001.”

Kiss-Johnson, who played on Missouri State’s 2001 NCAA Final Four basketball team, is grateful for the opportunities she has had in the United States.



Spc. Kinga Kiss-Johnson, Company A, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne) motor transport operator, takes her oath to become a U.S. citizen at Bagram Airfield. Photo: Pfc. Melissa Escobar

“During college, during Sept. 11, I wanted to join [the Army], but I was still in college. I couldn’t give up my scholarship. After I finished college, I had a secure job, I decided that now I can do my share, pay back something to the country,” she said.

Thanks to a program her employer has, she was able to take a military leave of absence from her assistant store manager job.

Her husband was supportive of her efforts. “After having done quite a few years of Army service myself, when my wife came to me ... I felt it would be hypocritical for me ... not to support her desires 100 percent.”

According to her company commander,

Army Capt. Michael Revels, Kiss-Johnson truly stands out in the crowd not only because she is the tallest Soldier in the company, but because she’s “a great Soldier with lots of character. She likes to talk to people and really listens to what they have to say.”

Revels felt proud that Kiss-Johnson asked him and her first sergeant to attend her ceremony.

“Kiss was so happy knowing that she was about to become a U.S. citizen, it made you want to be there to share her experience,” Revels said.

“The ceremony humbled me. It made me think about how so many people in America take being a citizen for granted,” he added.

There was only one other person Kiss-Johnson wished could have been there with her: her husband.

“I would have loved to have my husband there. I had his picture in my hand during the ceremony,” Kiss-Johnson said, pulling a laminated color-photo of a gentleman wearing a shirt and tie. “That was the hardest thing, I guess. We went through all the years of applying and he was there step by step helping me out and at the end he couldn’t be there, but he was there in heart,” she said.

“My wife is my hero. She has endured more in her lifetime that many could ever begin to comprehend ... Her humble demeanor inspires me and shows just how great her character is,” said her husband in his e-mail. He said he thinks it is a great thing that Soldiers like his wife are able to get their citizenships in an expedited manner.

“I feel if anyone deserves to be put at the front of the line, it should be Soldiers like her who are willing to put their lives on the line and make the kind of sacrifices we are willing to make for our country,” said Revels.

U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan visits Farah Province

By Chief Petty Officer
Robert Thornton
Farah Provincial
Reconstruction Team

FARAH CITY, Afghanistan – The honorable William Wood, the U. S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, visited Farah Province.

During the visit he dined with members of the provincial council and Mullah Rah-

anni, head of the provincial Ulama Council. Following the luncheon, the ambassador met with provincial Gov. Mawlawi Mohideen Baluch; heads of the Afghan National Security Forces; and Cmdr. Frank Hughlett, Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team commander.

During a late afternoon press conference, the ambassador’s message centered on the large amount of American assistance

provided to Farah Province.

“This province has been one of the largest recipients of United States economic assistance of all of the provinces of Afghanistan because of the importance of the province and we intend to continue our commitment to Farah Province,” said Wood.

Much of the assistance went into the construction of the Ring Road, which connects Farah

with Herat and other major centers. The U.S. has also funded hospitals, schools, irrigation canals and agricultural projects.

He also spoke of Afghanistan’s relationship with Iran.

“We want Afghanistan to be a source of stability for south and central Asia. We also hope that the other nations of south and central Asia will be sources of stability for their neighbors, including Iran,” he said.

Photos From the Field



Two 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Airmen on their way to Mike Ramp to paint new aircraft parking lines wait, in customized vehicles, to cross the flightline on Bagram Airfield. *Photo: Tech. Sgt. Jodell Lepley*



An Afghan contractor searches a burka-clad woman who waits to see health-care providers at the Egyptian Field Hospital on Bagram Airfield. The hospital staff sees more than 400 Afghan patients per day on average, all free of charge. *Photo: Air Force Staff Sgt. Daniel Bellis*



An F-15E from the 336th Fighter Squadron, Bagram Airfield, flies through the morning sky over Eastern Afghanistan. In two months, the 336th FS has flown more than 1,000 combat sorties, 4,000 flight hours and dropped more than 150,000 pounds of precision-guided ordnance in support of U.S and Coalition forces. The F-15E is the U.S. Air Force's premier strike fighter. *Photo: Air Force Lt. Col. James Gunn*



Have a photo you'd like to see in
Freedom Watch Afghanistan?

freedomwatch@swa.army.mil



December 3, 2007

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN



'Care Strikes' ■ Hot Lunch ■ Ambush Alley