

FROM GAMBERI

Volume 1, Issue 3

BOOM!

ANA CONDUCTS D-30 HOWITZER EVALUATION



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Afghan National Army, 201st Corps, soldiers conduct a live fire field artillery training exercise using a D-30 Howitzer, April 18, 2013, at Forward Operating Base Shinwar in Nangarhar Province. The ANA soldiers were evaluated by U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hilda Clayton, 55th Signal Company (Combat Camera))

This installment of FROM GAMBERI features pictures of Afghan National Army soldiers conducting a live fire training exercise using D-30 Howitzers at Forward Operating Base Shinwar. Military police officers make their mark at FOB Gamberi by joining the 1,000 lb. Club. A female Soldier went above and beyond the 600 lb. standard set for women and became the first female on the FOB to lift 800 lbs.

A story with pictures of the Canine teams that protect FOB Gamberi shows they do not just guard the entry control point but perform other duties proving they a vital part of base security measures.

Bagram Batman is keeping Soldiers and civilians safe at Bagram Airfield and videos of his heroic antics have gone viral.

Last but not least is a set of pictures of Soldiers playing basketball on the outdoor court at FOB Gamberi show some friendly competition amongst the Soldiers here.

If you wish to contribute to this newsletter with a picture or have a story idea contact Maj. Miller or Staff Sgt. Andrade in the Public Affairs Office on FOB Gamberi.

You can also reach the editor at the Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs Office at:

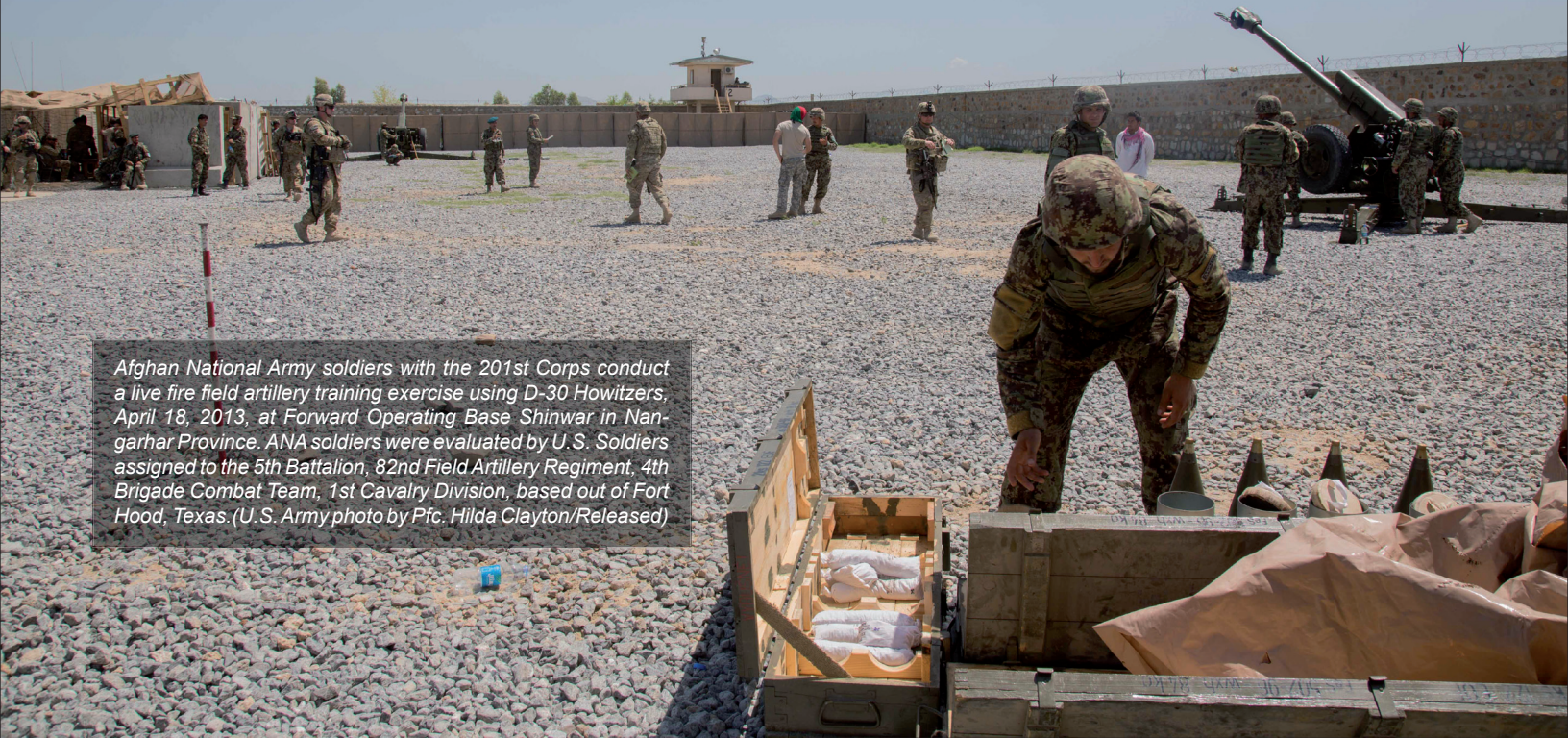
DSN 303 552 9741

richard.j.andrade@afghan.swa.army.mil

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ANA EXECUTES D-30 HOWITZER EVALUATION



Afghan National Army soldiers with the 201st Corps conduct a live fire field artillery training exercise using D-30 Howitzers, April 18, 2013, at Forward Operating Base Shinwar in Nangarhar Province. ANA soldiers were evaluated by U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hilda Clayton/Released)



An Afghan National Army soldier with the 201st Corps prepares to load a D-30 howitzer, during a live fire field artillery exercise April 18, 2013, at Forward Operating Base Shinwar in Nangarhar Province. The ANA soldiers were evaluated by U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hilda Clayton/Released)



Afghan National Army soldiers with the 201st Corps write down coordinates, for a D-30 howitzer target area, given from forward observers during a live fire field artillery exercise, April 18, 2013, at Forward Operating Base Shinwar in Nangarhar province. ANA soldiers were evaluated by U.S. Soldiers assigned to 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hilda Clayton/Released)



MPs RAISE THE BAR, JOIN 1,000LB CLUB

U.S. Army Pfc. Dannesha Jones holds up her certificate of achievement presented to her for exceeding the 600lbs. Club and lifting a total of 800lbs. during a '1,000 lb. Club' challenge hosted by Morale, Welfare and Recreation, at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26. Jones and the rest of her squad serve as military police officers assigned to the 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N.Y. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

By Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade
Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs

As the sun set and the orange full moon rose over the Afghan mountains, the number of people gathered at the gym slowly increased as they waited to see the first female join the '1,000 lb. Club,' at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26.

U.S. Army Pfc. Dannesha Jones, a native of Lake Elsinore, Calif., has been lifting weights since the age of 16. When she saw the '1,000 lb. Club,' flyer up, the competitor inside wanted her to take part. She stopped weightlifting for a while and recently got back into the sport because she realized how much she loved it.

Jones and the rest of team serve as "Guardian Angels" at FOB Gamberi and have been in Afghanistan for almost seven months. She and her squad of military police officers are assigned to 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N.Y.

"When we first arrived at FOB Gamberi, Sgt. 1st Class Crossman took part in the '1,000 lb. Club,' said Jones. "I wondered if female Soldiers could do it or if they had a different standard set for us."

Once she found out there was a competition for females, Jones said, "I'm definitely doing it."

Kenneth Longmire is a Morale, Welfare and Recreation, coordinator, and is always looking to host activities so Soldiers and civilians can have something fun to do on FOB Gamberi. Longmire is a Logistics Civil Augmentation Program, Fluor Corporation employee and created the FOB Gamberi '1,000 lb. Club,' challenge. It is divided into three categories based on weight class and requires the participants to lift a total of 1,000 pounds. Every contestant has to reach that figure by combining their individual weight lifted in the squat, bench press, dead lift.

When he started the '1,000 lb. Club' challenge, Longmire didn't think females would want to take part, until he met Jones.



U.S. Army Spc. Ryan Stinson, a native of Charlotte, N.C., attempts to perform a squat during a 1,000 lb. Club challenge hosted by Morale, Welfare and Recreation, at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26. Stinson and the rest of his squad serve as military police officers assigned to the 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N.Y. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

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U.S. Army Pfc. Dannesha Jones attempts to perform a dead lift during the '1,000 lb. Club' challenge hosted by Morale, Welfare and Recreation, at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26. Jones and the rest of her squad serve as military police officers assigned to the 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N. Y. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



U.S. Army Spc. Ryan Stinson, a native of Charlotte, N.C., attempts to perform a bench press during a '1,000 lb. Club' challenge hosted by Morale, Welfare and Recreation, at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26. Stinson and the rest of his squad serve as military police officers assigned to the 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N. Y. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)

“I always see her working out at the gym,” said Longmire. “She is one of the top female weight lifters I have ever seen, and I’ve been doing this for eight years.”

The ‘1,000 lb. Club’ challenge is set up to motivate others to improve their physical fitness. Another military police officer who has earned the bragging rights of being in the club is Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Crossman, assigned to the 543rd MP Co., 91st Bn, 16th MP Bde.

“I encourage the Soldiers to compete in weight lifting, I want them to be physically strong,” said Crossman, also the Guardian Angels, noncommissioned officer-in-charge.

In his opinion, Crossman said the ‘Guardian Angel’ job requires Soldiers to be strong and able to respond to an incident or attack at any time. Crossman currently holds the FOB record in the three combined weight categories. Adding that even though his unit is not a part of 1st Cav. Div., or with the 101st Airborne Division he hopes to compete with them and anybody else on FOB Gamberi.

Crossman, a native of Hancock, N.Y., called Jones “a phenom,” and said he has never met another female Soldier as strong as her.

“I’ve been practicing, preparing to compete, and today I accomplished lifting, altogether, 800 pounds,” said Jones. “I’m going to keep training and hopefully reach 1,000 pounds before I leave Afghanistan.”

The crowd went wild after Jones reached her goal, congratulating her and shaking her hand. Following her accomplishment, Longmire presented her with a certificate of achievement. She held it proudly standing in the center of her squad as they took a group picture for posterity.

“I implemented the ‘600 lb. Club’ so Jones can participate and still have it be competitive,” Longmire said. “As you can see, she surpassed the 600 pound mark and got close to 1,000.”

When Jones surpassed her goal to lift 600 pounds, and reached 800, it motivated another Soldier enough to take part and become the third member in her squad to join the ‘1,000 lb. Club’.

Her supervisor, Spc. Ryan Stinson, took all the steps to reach that goal at

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CANINES, HANDLERS KEEP FOB GAMBERI SAFE

By Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade
Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs

With their intimidating presence and an extraordinary sense of smell, canines are one of the best force protection assets used at Forward Operating Base Gamberi.

Any vehicle entering FOB Gamberi is not only examined by security guards but also inspected thoroughly by American K9 Detection Services explosive/narcotics detection teams at the entry control point.

AMK9 is a civilian dog handling company contracted to keep civilians and Soldiers out of harm's way. The two dog teams use their heightened sense of smell to detect narcotics and explosives before vehicles enter the FOB, and in so doing, help save lives.

Mark Ahrents and Fox, his canine partner, are a Narcotic Detection Dog team working at the ECP on FOB Gamberi. Fox is a German shepherd and both are expertly trained and licensed by the Drug Enforcement Agency. They also conduct patrols throughout the FOB looking for illegal substances.

While on patrol around FOB Gamberi, the dog sometimes brings a smile to people's faces, some even stop to pet Fox.

During their patrol they check around build-

ings, mail packages that arrive via helicopter, and basically any area where people congregate on the FOB.

When Ahrents walks around the base and Fox detects a trace of what he is trained for, the dog sits and looks at his supervisor. Sitting down during a search is one of many ways Fox communicates with his handler.

In his opinion, Ahrents said he feels lucky working at FOB Gamberi. At other bases they have worked prior, dog detection teams have found hashish and even explosive residue during vehicle inspections.

During his time here, Ahrents said FOB Gamberi is quiet but said he does not get complacent. He constantly tests Fox's proficiency. The native of Capetown, South Africa, said he regularly hides small amounts of contraband in various places to keep Fox's skills sharp.

Once he finds the hidden paraphernalia, Fox is rewarded with a plastic chew toy. Ahrents tosses the toy to praise Fox, letting him know he has done a good job.

Ahrents and Fox do not go near a vehicle before his partner, Carlos Liriano, and his dog gives him the green-light. Liriano is an AMK-9 Detection Services handler. He and his canine, Arco, are an Explosive Detection Dog team,

sometimes referred to as bomb dogs.

During a vehicle inspection the driver must shut off the engine. Next, the occupants are asked to step out of the vehicle to a secured location at the ECP. Liriano then dons his protective gear so he and Arco can conduct a methodical inspection of the vehicle.

"After he comes back from his inspection and tells me it's safe, I go out and do my search," said Ahrents. "I trust his dog 100 percent."

Ahrents slowly walks around the vehicle while Fox smells inside and under the vehicle. Once the vehicle is cleared by the two teams the occupants can reenter the vehicle and are allowed into the base.

U.S. Army Pfc. Demorria Clark, works at the ECP, controlling the gate that allows vehicles to enter FOB Gamberi. Clark Serves as a field artillery automated tactical data systems specialist, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas.

Clark said the AMK9 EDD Teams working at the ECP next to him have a good sense of humor.

"They like to joke around but they also take

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Mark Ahrents, a native of Capetown, South Africa, and his canine partner, Fox, conduct a patrol on Forward Operating Base. Ahrents and Fox are a Narcotics Detection Dog team with American K9 Detection Services constantly looking for illegal substances on the FOB. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife)



Carlos Liriano, a native of Santiago, Dominican Republic and his canine partner, Arco, conduct a vehicle inspection at the entry control point on Forward Operating Base Gamberi. Liriano and Arco are an American K9 Detection Services Explosive Detection Dog team. They work at various bases throughout Afghanistan and are an effective part of force protection. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife)

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their job seriously,” said Clark.

He said he sometimes helps the dog handler teams test the sensitivity and responsiveness of the canines by hiding small quantities of fake explosives or narcotics around the ECP.

“I try to find a new and difficult spot, but the dog finds it every time,” said Clark.

Ahrents said he likes working with Soldiers, he calls them “kids,” because of the age difference.

He said it is a pleasure working with his partner, Fox.

“He is a very good dog, very friendly. If you are having a long day, if you just see the dog is happy...wow.” Ahrents said, as his smile turned into a laugh. “They are just wonderful creatures to work with.”

Clark said the dog teams are on-call and are used a lot around FOB Gamberi.

“They do their job to keep the FOB safe, and that’s all that matters,” said Clark.

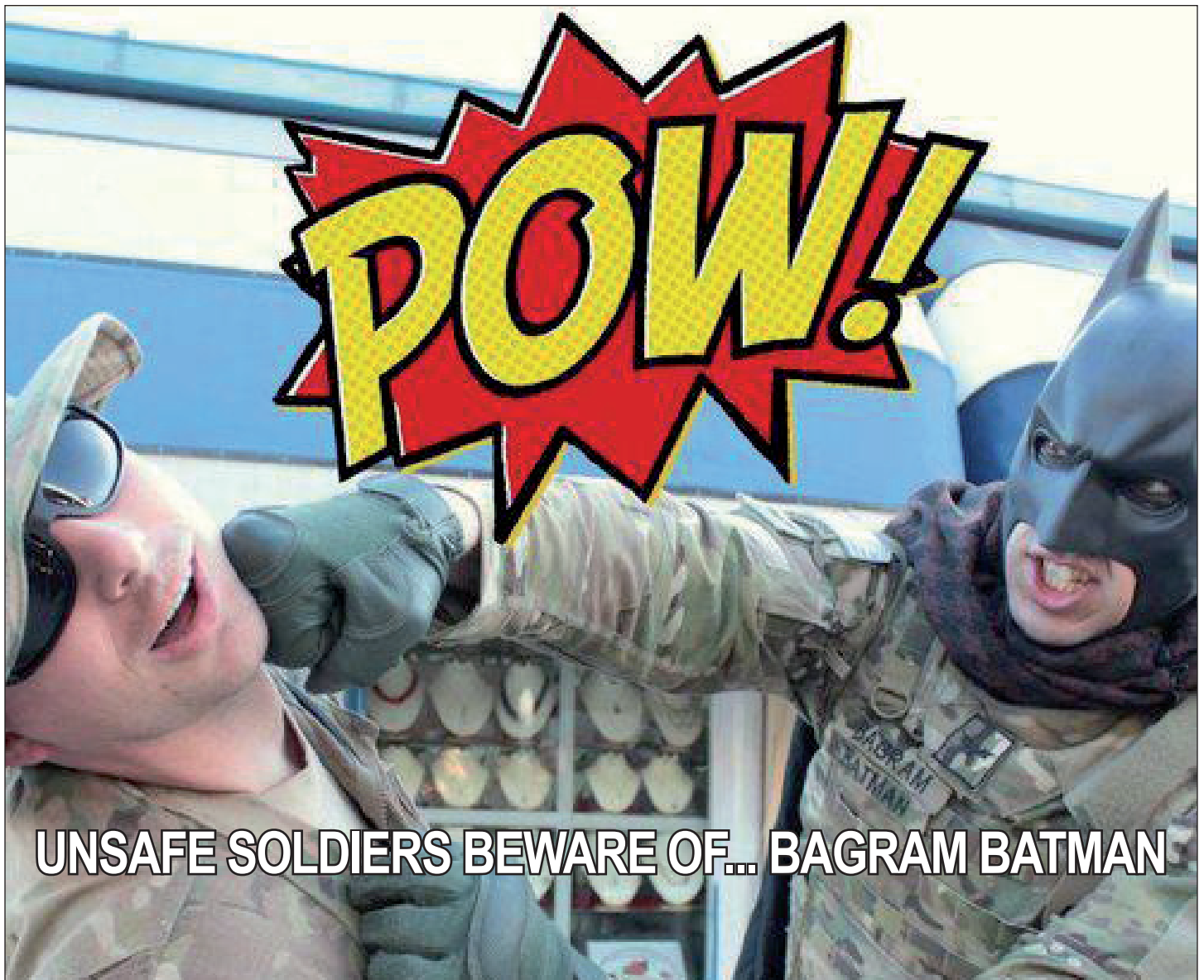
Liriano, a native of Santiago, Dominican Republic, said he enjoys his job. He said he has also deployed to Iraq as a dog handler. He said he was always on call, he has been called numerous times, after his shift was over, to go to the ECP to inspect a vehicle.

He and Arco are not limited to the ECP. When U.S. and Afghan National Army soldiers plan to meet, they call Liriano to inspect and clear the building for explosives prior to meetings.

The explosives and narcotics dogs and their handlers stay busy at FOB Gamberi and are an effective part of the force protection measures employed on the base.



Mark Ahrents, a native of Capetown, South Africa, and his canine partner, Fox, conduct a patrol on Forward Operating Base Gamberi. Ahrents and Fox are a Narcotics Detection Dog team with American K9 Detection Services can detect the smallest trace of illegal substances on the FOB. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife)



UNSAFE SOLDIERS BEWARE OF... BAGRAM BATMAN

By Nathan Hodge
Wall Street Journal

In fictional Gotham City, Batman protects citizens from crime. Here, at the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, another Dark Knight is on a different kind of crusade: making sure soldiers carry their rifles and don't get run over at night.

"Bagram Batman" is the star of a recent series of public-service announcements broadcast to troops deployed in and around Afghanistan. The camouflaged superhero—and his catchphrase, "SWEAR TO ME!"—have become an unlikely hit, winning a cult following among soldiers, and going viral on the Internet.

"He acts just as well as Adam West did," marvels Maj. Crispin Burke, an Army officer and military blogger, referring to the star of the original Batman movie and TV series in the 1960s.

While his do-it-yourself costume—rubber Batman mask, black cape and reflective belt over combat fatigues—may look like a joke, Bagram Batman has a very real mission: reminding the troops about the do's and don'ts of life on a forward operating base like Bagram, a small American town planted in the middle of a war zone.

A series of campy ads star 'Bagram Batman,' who implores troops in Afghanistan to remember their gear—and not to shoplift at the exchange.

Well, mostly the don'ts. Don't forget your weapon; don't wear headphones while jogging; and don't shoplift at the base exchange. Bagram Batman also enforces the most important rule of all: Don't forget your reflective belt, lest you be hit by the hulking Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles that roar in darkness through the base's main drag.

Bagram Batman debuted in early March with a 30-second TV ad on smoking safety. In the American Forces Network spot, the caped crusader catches a soldier sneaking a cigarette near a fuel tank and wrestles the offender to the ground.

"I swear, Batman, I'll never do it again!" the soldier protests. "SWEAR TO ME!" barks Bagram Batman.

DC Entertainment, the Warner Bros. Entertainment company that owns the Batman character, had no official statement regarding the videos.

The man behind the masked military version is an Army broadcast journalist, a military specialty known under its code 46 Romeo. Bagram Batman recently agreed to let a reporter accompany him on his rounds as he prowled the base for soldiers committing uniform violations.

"I'm glad to see you've got your eye-pro on," he growled at one group of soldiers, noting their ballistic eyewear.

A sprawling base in a high plain north of Kabul, Bagram is the ideal Gotham for a rules-enforcing Caped Crusader. Built by the Soviets, the base was severely battered during Afghanistan's civil war in the 1990s. Rebuilt by the U.S. military after the fall of the Taliban, Bagram now resembles a highly fortified strip mall—a brightly lit, well-paved outpost of America, complete with posted speed limits and mandatory seat-belt regulations.

It is also a hat-and-salute zone. An amused-looking soldier saluted Bagram Batman as he walked past, as he would a superior officer. "What's your rank?" a reporter asked.

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Left to right, U.S. Army Sgt. Manda Walters, Sgt. First Class Theanne Tangen and Sgt. Julieanne Morse, all are public affairs specialists assigned to the 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment based out of Rapid City, South Dakota pose for a picture with Bagram Batman at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan (Courtesy photo)

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Bagram Batman pegs his rank at “O-6 and half,” giving himself a fictional rank between full colonel (O-6) and brigadier general. “There’s lieutenant colonel, then full-bird colonel, then me.”

Bagram Batman also pokes gentle fun at one of the military’s biggest obsessions—the dreaded reflective belt. For many service members, the reflective belt is the symbol of the military’s overzealous enforcement of safety rules. A missing glow-belt is the surest way to invite a reprimand from a command sergeant major.

“Heck, wear two or three!” Bagram Batman suggests on his Facebook page. “It’s like a CSM forcefield!”

The Bagram Batcave is hidden inside the nondescript Building 415, where Bagram Batman and his sidekicks in uniform plot their public-safety campaigns. That is where the crime-fighter agreed to unmask. By day, Bagram Batman is Staff Sgt. Jesse Dyer, a 36-year-old Army broadcast journalist from Robbins, N.C.

Sgt. Dyer oversees a small team that shoots television spots that air on the Freedom Channel, an Afghanistan-specific American Forces Network channel, and helps run an FM radio station. A self-confessed Batman fanatic, Sgt. Dyer owns a full Dark Knight costume that he bought from UD Replicas, a company that makes licensed studio-quality costumes. At his home station in Vicenza, Italy, he dresses in the

costume to volunteer at a children’s hospital.

The idea for Bagram Batman emerged from a brainstorming session in the bullpen, the small office where military broadcast journalists think up ideas for public-service announcements.

“We were joking about how you should get your Batman suit over here,” said Petty Officer First Class Xander Gamble, 28, a Navy mass communication specialist.

The Bagram Batman spots are a lively contrast to the typical fare that airs on military television. Military public-service announcements are legendary for hit-or-miss production values and scripts that often seem lifted from classroom scare films. Classic PSAs include exhortations to stay healthy while deployed (“Make sure you wash your hands thoroughly before going into the dining facility”), steer clear of Christmas-tree conflagrations (“Make sure to get a freshly cut tree”) and avoid hypothermia while swimming (“¡El agua fría mata!”)

So, after the U.S. Army posted a link to the weapons-carrying video—featuring Bagram Batman yelling “WHERE’S YOUR WEAPON?” at a clueless soldier—on an official Twitter account, @USArmy, Bagram Batman went viral.

When a Twitter parody, called @BagramBatman, surfaced, Sgt. Dyer responded by creating his own Twitter handle, @IamBagramBatman. The name is an homage to the campy television

series. His profile has a thumbnail portrait of Bagram Batman knocking out a rule-breaking trooper with a “POW!”

Bagram Batman also started to attract a crowd here on base. Senior Airman Stephanie Palmisano, 24, an Air Force broadcaster who works with Sgt. Dyer, said public service announcement shoots usually drew a crowd of 20 or 25 people standing around watching and taking cellphone videos.

“That’s why it’s so important for him to stay in character the whole time,” she said.

Despite the lighthearted approach, the risks of living and working in a combat zone are real. One of Bagram Batman’s public safety spots features a soldier cranking up Taylor Swift tunes on his headphones before going out for a run. In doing so, he fails to hear the message over the base public address system warning of incoming fire. Batman pounces. “Never wear your headphones while you’re running!” he exhorts. “I’m sorry Batman, I swear I’ll never do it again!” the soldier says. Bagram Batman’s response: “SWEAR TO ME!”

When shooting that segment, Sgt. Dyer said it finally hit home that Bagram Batman had achieved celebrity status.

“There were some guys who were about 100 meters away or so, and they were like, ‘SWEAR TO ME!’”

“That’s my line!” Bagram Batman replied.

NOTHING BUT NET

Outdoor basketball court photos by U.S. Army Pfc. Hilda Clayton



Parting shot



Soldiers play an early morning game of 5-on-5 on the outdoor basketball court at Forward Operating Base Gamberi. All are assigned to 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, based out of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hilda Clayton, 55th Signal Company (Combat Camera))

MPs RAISE THE BAR, JOIN 1,000LB CLUB

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the gym. He serves as a military police officer, also assigned to the 543rd MP Co. 91st Bn, 16th MP Bde.

“I saw my Soldier, Jones, join the 600 pound club and she excelled and did 800 pounds,” said Stinson. “I thought since my Soldier did it, I should try it too.”

The twenty-three year old, and native of Charlotte, N.C., said he has been lifting weights since he was in high school. The rest of his squad was there to show support and witness Jones reach the milestone.

“She is the first female here to do it on the FOB, I’m very proud of her,” said Stinson.

After he reached the goal, he became the second male and third in his nine Soldier squad to say they have joined the ‘1,000 lb. Club’. Stinson said before he redeploys to Fort Drum, he would like everyone in his squad to be able to do it.

“I feel that if more and more people do it, it shows that it is not something impossible,” said Stinson. “It could be done if you just try.”

A large attendance of civilians and Soldiers’ senior leadership showed up to show their support. Longmire said the event proved to be very successful and hoped more people men and women would be motivated and want to join “the club.”



U.S. Army Spc. Ryan Stinson, a native of Charlotte, N.C., attempts to perform a squat during a ‘1,000 lb Club’ challenge hosted by Morale, Welfare and Recreation, at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, April 26. Stinson and the rest of his squad serve as military police officers assigned to the 543rd Military Police Company, 91st Military Police Battalion, 16th Military Police Brigade, based out of Fort Drum, N.Y. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Andrade, Task Force Long Knife Public Affairs)



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The FROM GAMBERI editor can be reached at the Public Affairs office located on FOB Gamberi by phone: DSN 303 552 9741 or by email: richard.j.andrade@afghan.swa.army.mil

