

Freedom Watch Afghanistan

Combined Forces work to clear insurgents from Logar Province

December 2011

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Afghan National Army Soldiers hand out "I am Afghan" bracelets to stimulate national pride in Apakhan Village in Logar province during Operation Shamshir Oct. 18. Operation Shamshir was a joint effort conducted in order to disrupt insurgent activity.(Photo by U.S. Army Pvt. Courtney Ropp, Joint Combat Camera Afghanistan)

Water treatment team works behind the scenes

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John Zumer
Task Force Duke PAO

According to the U.S. Army, water pollution from raw sewage is the most significant environmental problem and health threat to deployed personnel in Afghanistan.

A U.S. study of bacterial contamination in water sources found that 65 percent of protected, closed wells and 90 percent of open wells were contaminated with coliform bacteria.

U.S. Army Spc. Jeremy Seamon, a water treatment specialist with 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, said the daily routine of ensuring water safety at Forward Operating Base Andar, in eastern Afghanistan, isn't something most people usually think about.

"It's our job to make sure people can take it for granted that the water will be there when they need it," said Seamon, a native of Hillsboro, Ill.

Drawing water from a well on-base, Seamon and co-worker, U.S. Army Spc. Charles Duenas, a Guam native, oversee a facility capable of treating 30,000-40,000 gallons of water daily. Andar is the only coalition installation in the TF Duke battlespace with its own treatment facility.

Although the treated water remains non-potable, it can be used for showers, flushing toilets, washing clothes and cleaning kitchen utensils.

While Seamon's team may operate out of sight and out of mind for most, their efforts haven't gone unnoticed by those responsible for making FOB Andar function effectively during the deployment.

"We never have the fear of losing water capacity here like a lot of other places," said U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Walter Tagalicud, a native of Orlando, Fla., 3rd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.

Tagalicud said the two unsung heroes make daily living not only possible and more comfortable than it would otherwise be.

"[The water capacity] gives the Soldiers the benefit of a longer shower and not just a combat shower," he said.

Before Seamon and Duenas can begin the treatment process, a preventive medicine team checks for contaminants such as fecal or e-coli bacteria. If contaminants are present and left untreated, outbreaks of dysentery or diarrhea could result.

Once the preventive medicine team clears the well, Seamon and Duenas then test for any nuclear, biological or chemical contaminants. If the testing proves negative, water purification can begin.

Fortunately, according to Seamon, the process is made significantly easier by the initial quality of the product.

"The well water here is pretty good to begin with," said Seamon.

The team treats the tanks of well water with calcium hypochloride tablets to effectively kill or neutralize any remaining contaminants. Water samples are then evaluated for turbidity, pH and chlorine levels using what Seamon refers to as a "wasp" kit.

Turbidity refers to an acceptable level of dissolved solids in the water, while pH measures whether a liquid is an acid or a base. Pure water, for example, is said to be neutral with a desired pH level of seven.

Upon being treated, the non-potable water is safe to be used across the installation for many high-volume uses, with the laundry and showers being the biggest.

As far as Tagalicud is concerned, Seamon and Duenas make FOB Andar work by eliminating those water-borne scares that have the potential to not only compromise mission effectiveness but harm lives.

"We know where our water is coming from and that it's safe," he said.



U.S. Army Spc. Jeremy Seamon, a native of Hillsboro, Ill. and a water treatment specialist with 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, watches the flow of treated, non-potable water at Forward Operating Base Andar Nov. 1.(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John Zumer, 3rd BC T, 1st Inf. Div. PAO)



A farmer demonstrates planting wheat seed for the Indiana National Guard's 4-19th Agribusiness Development Team in Jaji Maidan Nov. 4. The ADT visited several villages in Jaji Maidan district to assess wheat seed planting techniques.(Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Brian Foster, 4-19th ADT)

Wheat seed distributed to Khowst farmers

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ben Navratil
Task Force Duke PAO

The Indiana National Guard's 4-19th Agribusiness Development team funded the purchase of 142 metric tons of certified winter wheat seed to be planted throughout Khowst province Nov. 8.

The purchase was made by the ADT through the U.S. Army's Commander's Emergency Response Program and was intended to help combat a projected shortfall in wheat production and increase domestic supply.

In Khowst province, agriculture is the primary industry and wheat is the staple food. It accounts for over half the caloric intake of the population and covers roughly 16,000 hectares of land.

According to a May 2011 report published by the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, this year's projected cereal production was estimated to be 1.25 metric tons below last year's.

The Khowst province's Office of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock will take the lead in distributing the certified wheat seed to local farmers in the 13 districts of Khowst province just in time for planting season.

Once the seed is distributed, it is up to the farmers to sustain and harvest a good crop.

"This project is very important because it will help increase wheat production in Khowst province," said U.S. Army Capt. Marc Blue, of Wonder Lake, Ill. and 4-19th ADT CERP project manager. "This project gives the [Director of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock] and his staff a mechanism to expand upon year after year as well as to increase the support and sustainability of [the Afghan government]."

In order to receive the certified wheat seed, a beneficiary farmer must agree to join the Khowst Province Wheat Seed Association headed by the DAIL's staff.

They must accept the guidance and technical assistance from the local DAIL agricultural extension agent and exchange improved wheat seed from harvest with neighbors.

The DAIL's office will form the Khowst Province Wheat Seed Association. Staff members will select district leaders who will identify wheat seed farmers in their districts to form the association's base membership.

"It is important to get this wheat seed distributed quickly to the village co-operatives and farmers so they can have a successful harvest in the spring," said Faisal Rahim of the Khowst province DAIL's office.

Operation Shamshir turns up heat

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. John Zumer
Task Force Duke PAO

Afghan National Security Forces and U.S. Soldiers worked together in Khowst and Paktya Provinces during Operation Duke Blitz, a mission to push Haqqani Network insurgents out of the area Oct. 13-21.

The operation was part of an even larger operation spread across the two provinces. It was led by the ANSF and supported by several battalions from the Fort Knox, Ky.-based 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke.

The main effort of Duke Blitz was dubbed "Operation Nike IV," and was assigned to the 3rd BCT's 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment.

"This operation showed that Afghan forces can extend the reach of their government into the most remote, mountainous areas of Afghanistan to provide security for the populace," said U.S. Army Maj. Ed Hollis, a native of San Rafael, Calif. and the operations officer for the 1st Bn., 26th Inf. Regt.

"The ANA put a great foot forward in an area that has been controlled by insurgents," added U.S. Army Capt. Joshua Wiles, commander of Company D, 1st Bn., 26th Inf. Regt. "The locals were very receptive to a permanent [Afghan Security Force] presence in the area," he added.

Insurgent attempts to respond to the coalition efforts have had little success. The failed Haqqani efforts to lash out at coalition forces didn't surprise U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jesse Pearson a Chicago native and commander of the 1st Bn., 26th Inf. Regt.

"This is a center of Haqqani support operations and that's why they're fighting so hard to retain it," said Pearson. He added that much was learned about the Haqqani network and how they operate in the area.

"[Operation Nike IV] was a very successful operation," Pearson continued. "We captured some very important weapons caches and detainees."

Shamshir, meaning "sword" in Dari was the name of the mission that brought the Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment to the forefront of the fight. This operation was aimed at disrupting insurgent freedom of movement and targeting locations associated with insurgent leadership in the Zormat district of Paktya province.

Shamshir was extremely successful in all respects, said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Chuck Booze, a Norman, Okla. resident and commander of the Oklahoma National Guard's 1st Bn., 279th Inf. Regt. He added that the lingering benefits of moving unhindered into Haqqani Network headquarters, while experiencing no harassment, may prove to be the most lasting impact.

"This operation demonstrates the continued development and capabilities of the ANSF in taking the fight to the insurgency," Booze said.

ANSF and several companies of TF Creek Soldiers collaborated to remove weapons caches, IEDs and safe havens that had been used by insurgent forces. The efforts were directly responsible for the capture of a known Haqqani sub-commander.

Booze echoed the sentiments of fellow Operation Duke Blitz officers, noting the greatest benefits of the related operations may have been the reception offered by local citizens to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan troops and that reception's effect upon the Haqqanis.

"We continue to see that when Afghan security forces move into an area the population responds favorably and the insurgency is powerless to stop them," Booze said.



U.S. Army Pfc. Daniel Love, an infantryman from Dacono, Colo., attached to Company D, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Duke, descends a hill in Musa Khel District Oct. 15. Love was participating in Operation Nike IV, meant to counter Haqqani influence in Khowst Province.(Photo by U.S. Army 2nd Lt. James Hodges, Task Force Duke PAO)

Troop C, 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, TF Raider, began their operation before the sun rose on Oct. 19. Air-lifted by helicopter to the Qalandar area, the troopers moved on to the village of Star Kot.

"In the village itself we ended up finding some anti-tank mines, grenades, a lot of [machine gun] ammo, three AK-47s and numerous magazines," said U.S. Army Capt. Mark Snowbarger, a native of Mogadore, Ohio and commander of Troop C, 6th Sqdn. 4th Cav. Regt.

on the Haqqani Network in Khowst

Snowbarger credits good intelligence for leading them to the house where the cache was discovered.

“The intelligence was very good and the source was very descriptive," said Snowbarger, who further explained that according to villagers, the homeowner had left several days earlier, allegedly for Pakistan.

Another cache was discovered in northern Nadir Shah Khot, consisting of eight mortar rounds, a recoilless rifle, rocket-propelled grenade rounds and small-arms ammunition.

In addition to praising the performance of his troops, Snowbarger also felt the ANSF performance was noteworthy, not only by providing security, but in responding to the needs of the people.

"The ANA did a very good job with the outer cordon part of the objective areas,” he said. “[In Starkot] the [Afghan Uniformed Police] conducted about a 45-minute key leader engagement at the end with village elders, ensuring they knew who to contact for security concerns.”

The cavalry was also there to support the main effort, with Troop A setting a blocking position to the west of TF Spader's objectives in Musa Khel, said U.S. Army Capt. Dean Carter, the commander of Troop A.

Carter, a native of Oviedo, Fla., said the blocking position prevented any insurgents from fleeing to the west.

"The ANA were in the lead on the blocking position, searching all vehicles and personnel moving through the position. We mentored them in the procedures and they took the mission from there,” said Carter.

Insurgents may find it increasingly more difficult to fund next year's fighting season, said Carter, due to the ANA’s destruction of almost 30 acres of hashish.

Overall, the operation lasted more than a week, but U.S. Army Maj. Adam Rudy, operations officer for the 6th Sqdn., 4th Cav. Regt., and a native of Tomball, Texas, summed up its success in one simple sentence.

“We got our elements into areas we hadn't been before and engaged some of the population in these areas,” said Rudy.

**U.S. Army Maj. Travis Dettmer and 1st Lt. Paul Jackson also contributed to this report.*



U.S. Army Pfc. Rion Vest, a medic from Colton, Ore. and a member of Troop C, 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Raider, climbs a trail in Star Kot village, Qalandar District Oct. 19. Vest and his fellow troopers were participating in Operation Raider Earthquake, part of a large-scale operation to eliminate the Haqqani network’s threat to the area.(Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Mark Snowbarger, Task Force Duke PAO)



Photo Watch



A young boy tries to sell eggs to members of the Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team while on a patrol in Mehtar Lam district of Laghman Province Oct. 8. The PRT visited with the social affairs committee to discuss building a second orphanage to provide care to children who have lost their family. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Crane, Laghman PRT)

PRT walks among local people

By U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Jeff M. Nagan
PRT Nangarhar PAO

For the first time during this deployment, members of the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team walked the streets of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, Oct. 10, and asked local shop owners about the economy and their opinions on their government.

Although previous PRTs in Nangarhar have conducted market assessments, the current team has focused largely on provincial level governance and development. After more than three months here, however, it was time to see how things were shaping up on the ground, said U.S. Army Capt. James Hanson, PRT civil affairs team leader.

"We gained a snapshot of the local economy and what is really going on in the market place on a daily basis," said Hanson, a native of Cornell, Mich. "We also gained an understanding of the local businesses and how the government is helping [them] or not."

The PRT relies primarily on key leaders for information about activity in the community, but getting a true sense of what is important or impacts the local citizens of Jalalabad requires talking with everyday people, said U.S. Army Sgt. Kristin Goehler.

"We gained real atmospherics by interacting directly with locals rather than relying on information second-hand," said Goehler, a Milwaukee native. "We also portrayed a positive image of coalition forces by direct interactions with the locals."

The market patrol was comprised of several small teams of civil affairs Soldiers broken into two-person groups along with a PRT security force to ensure the safety of the civil affairs teams as they performed their mission.

"This was a group effort with civil affairs, security forces and headquarters elements to pull this all off," said Hanson, who is deployed from the 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion, an Army National Guard based in Green Bay. "There are many moving parts to this type of mission and everyone has to do their part to conduct this type of mission successfully."

As the two-hour mission progressed, the market became increasingly more congested with shoppers, added Hanson.

Likewise, the team attracted a lot of attention from children and others interested in what the servicemembers were doing.

"We had a good plan and were able to move the way we wanted to despite how crowded the market was," said Goehler. "It is a testament of how good the different elements worked together."

With more people, the team got a better feel for the economy, added Hanson. Nearly every shop had customers.

"A large number of people in the market indicate the area is secure," said Hanson. "People have faith in the economy and are not hoarding money for a rainy day. This is exactly what we were hoping to find while conducting our assessment."

There were also a large number of local women shopping, said Goehler, whose small team was designed primarily to engage women. Unlike many other areas, the women were without male escorts, which indicates an added sense of security.

"The interaction with the women was positive," Goehler said. "They felt very safe shopping in that market. It shows when women have the freedom of movement to shop without an escort. One woman we talked to has had her own shop for 10 years and supports her family with her sales."

Although this marked the first market walk for the PRT, plans are already in the works to conduct another one, said Hanson.

The goal is to assess various markets throughout the province, helping not only get a pulse for the important issues and the economy, but also to assist in market research for construction supplies, which is another area of PRT efforts.

"I did not experience any negative feedback and all the interaction was positive. The people were receptive to answering our questions and everyone was accommodating," said Goehler.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Justin Barnhill, a natuve of Phoenix and a tactical communications specialist on the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team, provides additional security as members walk down a densely populated street in Jalalabad Oct. 10. The team performed a market assessment and learned popular opinions of their local leaders.(Photo by U.S. Air Force 1st. Lt. Jeff M. Nagan, PRT Nangarhar PAO)

Learning the ropes as a crew chief

By U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Eric Pahon
Task Force Poseidon PAO



U.S. Army Pfc. Craig Lewis (left) and Spc. Jared Yoakam, both with the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, watch for signs of mechanical issues with the main rotor on their UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter as it shuts down. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Eric Pahon, Task Force Poseidon PAO)

A young instructor, strapped into a Black Hawk helicopter jump seat, glues his eyes to his younger student.

"See how even simple tasks become complicated with all your responsibilities up here?" crackled U.S. Army Spc. Jared Yoakam over the headset. "All you have to do is drop that grenade out the window. It's as simple as that."

U.S. Army Pfc. Craig Lewis, head out the window, holds a smoke grenade in a death grip as he circles around and around a bomb crater in the sand far below. When you're responsible for everything in the helicopter, to include the cockpit, rotors, people and equipment, nothing is simple.

Lewis, from Crescent City, Calif., a Black Hawk mechanic with the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, is under some serious stress; trying to do everything right and earn a job that gets him out of the repair hangar and into the gunner's seat as Black Hawk crew chief.

The crew chief is in control of the helicopter; when passengers climb in, they says who goes in what seat, where the cargo goes and have the final say in just about everything related to the trip.

While Lewis throws his smoke grenade, he must also look for aircraft in the area, watch for enemies on the mountainsides, maintain control of a machine gun in front of him and still get the grenade to land in a hole a hundred feet below and passing by at 40 knots.

As they pass the target yet again, the Soldier waits, bites his lip, then finally pulls the pin and tosses the grenade. It falls straight down, hits the wheel and lands about 200 yards from his target.

"Don't hesitate," says Yoakam. "It's important to get it right. You're marking a safe [landing zone] for us."

Lewis nods his bulky flight helmet, which makes him look a little like Darth Vader. Yoakam, of Yellow Springs, Ohio, decides to try another approach to calm his student's nerves.

"Lets have a contest," says Yoakam over the headset. "We'll see who gets closest… you get one run, one shot at this."

He tells the pilots to speed it up to "something realistic;" about 120 knots, or 138 mph. First Yoakam tosses, then Lewis. As the pilots head in a wide arc, the two plumes of smoke, one yellow, one purple, stream from two tiny specks of grenades far below. Yoakam, the yellow, is about 50 feet from the target. Purple smoke rises about 200 feet further away. It's easy to see who won, but both are smiling.

Becoming a fully qualified crew chief is a three-step process. Lewis is "Readiness Level III," or the most basic level. The relationship between him and Yoakam is similar to that of a student driver and instructor.

"We're there to teach, but also to perform the duty as well," said Yoakam. "So when I'm with an RL-III guy, like today, then even with something as simple as turning the aircraft right, I'm there to make sure the aircraft is free of obstructions. Now, I'm going to let my crew chief I'm training call it, but I'm responsible for it. If he doesn't do it right, I jump in, call it, and give the 'all clear' or trump him when his call's wrong."

Once prospective crew chiefs master the very basic skills, they move on to the second phase of training. They work on getting proficient with the door weapons, transporting machinery and cargo beneath the helicopter and other tasks, such as night vision training, which might be required on a real-life mission.

Graduation time comes at RL-I status, when a new crew chief is born. He becomes part of the crew, loses the instructor shadow and sits in control of a machine worth nearly $6 million.

"It's nerve-wracking," said Lewis. "Knowing you're responsible for so much and having someone sitting there staring at you the whole time. You've got all that information you've got to retain and you're trying to bring it back out. But you know everything depends on you and you just do it."

Yoakam's teaching method is working for Lewis, who by his own account has never been much for traditional schooling.

"I like Yoakam because of the way he has everything broken up into sections. He makes it fun and funny. He's a funny guy. He doesn't yell at you for messing up. He just explains it," said Lewis. "He doesn't get upset, which makes it easier to learn. He has a good time with it too, which makes it better."

In the air, Yoakam is still busy nudging Lewis.

"Not everybody makes it," said Yoakam. It's usually retention; retaining the information and situational awareness. Not everybody gets to do this."

Yoakam is sure Lewis isn't one of those people, although he's got a long way to go before he'll fly without his shadow in tow.

"You've got 90 days at the most, but I don't think it's going to take me too long, because… Yoakam's a good teacher. There's still a lot of stuff to learn, but I've got this," said Lewis.



Aref Mohammad, a wildlife trainer, holds a falcon to deter birds away from the flightline at Bagram Airfield Oct. 10. Other wildlife dispersal methods include using pyrotechnics, cutting grass and brush and implementing bird traps.(Photo by U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Krista Rose, 455th Expeditionary Wing PAO)

BASH program saves lives, wildlife

By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Mary Davis
455th Air Expeditionary Wing PAO

Military aircraft aren't the only fliers in the Afghan skies. They share the air with migratory birds flying to the Bagram area in the spring and summer months.

Although there is enough room for both to exist, it can be deadly if their paths cross. That's why the Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard program is important in keeping all fliers safe.

The Bagram BASH plan is in place to support combat operations by minimizing risk of aircraft damage and hazards from bird strikes and other wildlife in the Bagram Airfield vicinity, said Mr. Ernie Colboth, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"The BASH program establishes operating procedures to identify and avoid high-hazard situations involving birds by providing guidelines to decrease airfield attractiveness to birds in accordance with Air Force guidelines for dispersing birds when they are present on the airfield," Colboth said.

Bird activity at Bagram increases during March through May and September through December. Several bird species are common at Bagram, he said. The smaller species include House Sparrows and Crested Larks. Medium-size birds include Black-Billed Magpies, Myna and Black Kites, which are considered large hawks.

"Most smaller birds do not cause damage, but can if hit in large numbers," Colboth said. "Both medium and large birds could cause damage and even take down an aircraft."

Unlike operations at home, Bagram missions aren't always afforded the opportunity to reduce flying or change takeoff and landing times due to bird activity, he said.

"The BASH program is the key to keeping aircraft flying and completing the mission," Colboth explained. "If an aircraft is damaged or lost due to a wildlife strike, it is no longer in the fight and unable to provide its critical combat support."

According to the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Safety Office, Bagram had approximately 245 wildlife strikes in fiscal year 2011 causing $19,800 worth of reported damages; fortunately there weren't any significant aircraft mishaps. Proactive and preventative efforts are in place to mitigate these issues, said Colboth, a Pleasantville, Iowa, native.

"Central to this approach is to maintain an airfield free of attractants such as insects, seeds and cover," he said. "Continual education of wildlife hazards keep aircrews vigilant and knowledgeable of proper procedures to be used during periods of increased bird activity."

The second echelon of attack, said the USDA wildlife biologist, is a responsive effort to harass birds with pyrotechnics, lethal control and the use of a local falconer, while at the same time minimizing exposure to the BASH threat by limiting their traffic pattern of activity.

"BASH contributes across the Air Force in a similar way as it does at Bagram," said Colborth. "A key concept to remember is that each wildlife strike can create an aircraft mishap. The Air Force cannot afford to lose aircraft or priceless, highly-trained aircrew.

"Even if an aircraft is not destroyed, reducing the amount of damaging wildlife strikes saves the Air Force millions of dollars every year," Colborth added.

The BASH program is truly a force multiplier for Bagram's combat operations, said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Paul Malachowski, 455th AEW chief of safety.

"Units from across the airfield work together to prevent and reduce wildlife strikes. Any individual strike could severely damage an aircraft or even cause a catastrophic mishap. This year, the BASH team has reduced strikes by more than 50 percent compared to last year and ensured that our wing can provide the best close air support, airlift and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance support to our troops outside the wire," he concluded.

F-16 Phase Dock keeps aircraft in the fight

By U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Mary Davis
455th Air Expeditionary Wing PAO

The thundering sound of F-16s slicing though the air is the sound of freedom and safety for many people, but for a handful of Bagram Airfield maintainers on the ground, it's the sound of success and hard work. The 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron F-16 Phase Dock maintainers play a huge part in enabling the Fighting Falcons' mission to remain "Responsive and Precise."

After 400 flying hours, all F-16 aircraft go through an extensive inspection to repair and prevent problems, said U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Matt Thornburg, F-16 Phase Dock chief. His team performs a seven-day inspection in only four days.

"Phase is important to give the jet adequate downtime to identify or prevent future problems. We coordinate with various shops on a daily basis and schedule them to perform work around the clock to complete the work within a 96-hour time frame," said the maintainer from Bridgman, Mich. "I ensure the shops have all the parts and supplies they need to ensure the work is performed smoothly."

Thornburg schedules several aircraft maintenance shops. With so many shops waiting to perform their tasks, he has to arrange them in some semblance of order to keep maintenance flowing.

"There is little room for error during the 96 hours we have the jet," Thornburg said. "I schedule multiple shops to come in without interfering with each other. The ultimate goal is to never let the aircraft stand still. When your phase flow comes to a stop and you get backlogged, that's how I envision failure."

The Aircraft Maintenance Unit tracks the aircraft's hours and prioritizes the jets. They schedule the right jets to fly so they receive their scheduled maintenance.

Thornburg often goes to the flightline to observe jets to see how they're running prior to it arriving at the phase dock. That way, he can see the aircraft and do any research on maintenance issues.

"We created our own file to track the maintenance that occurs on each jet," Thornburg said. "That way we can keep an eye on a malfunction and have a historical record of what we've done and any reoccurring problems we find."

The team also implements Time Compliance Technical Order changes as well; so if there is a change in the aircraft, they perform the necessary maintenance to meet the new standard, Thornburg said. Even with this added responsibility, the team is able to "out phase" jets - fixing them faster than they come in. Their average completion time is 68 hours and they maintain a 90 percent pass rate.

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Cade Jackson, an F-16 Phase Dock team member, helped inspect the critical areas of the aircraft known for having prior maintenance issues.

"We inspect the aircraft for discrepancies that would hinder it from doing its job. Safety of flight is a big issue," said the airman from Athens, Texas. "We don't want to give pilots a plane they can't depend on. They need a reliable aircraft to bring the fight to the enemies on the ground."

Keeping the Fighting Falcons in top-notch shape in Afghanistan is a difficult task due to the fast-paced, manual labor involved, not to mention working 12 hours a day, six days a week, Jackson said.

"It's difficult to stay focused as well. After working on so many aircraft, they start to blur together - especially at my level where you are performing a lot of maintenance tasks," he said. "You still need to take it down to the basics and stay focused, even if you've done the job 100 times."



U.S. Air Force Airmen First Class Michael Jordan and Adam Sexton, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chiefs, secure rivets on the wing of an F-16C Fighting Falcon Oct. 4.(Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht 455th PAO)

Being a mechanic is second nature for Jackson, who came from a family of mechanics. His father works on heavy equipment and his grandfather worked on automobiles.

"I love being a mechanic. I'm the first one in my family to join the military," he said. "I asked for an aircraft maintenance job when I joined the Air Force. It's in my blood."

Thornburg and his experienced team from Aviano Air Base, Italy, face the challenges of repairing aircraft under a short timeline, performing TCTO changes and training a new crew of phase dock maintainers who will deploy from the Washington, D.C. Air National Guard in the near future.

"We operate under a lot of pressure, but we always get the job done and normally quicker than the time allowed," Thornburg said. "There are three things we strive for: To meet our AMU contract, meet the timeline and leave a better product. If we can meet all three, we're doing our job well."

Completing phase inspections is critical for fighters to complete their mission, said U.S. Air Force Col. Geoffrey Bacon, commander of the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Group.

"Our goal is to complete the process within four and a half days to be able to deliver good, quality airplanes back to the flightline," he said. "Our Airmen are out there focused on doing it right, so that when a pilot climbs into a seat, he knows the airplane is ready to do the job…and that is critical."

Afghan recruits learn the basics,

By U.S. Army Sgt. April Campbell
ISAF HQ PAO

The graduates walked proudly across the stage Oct. 20, not yet knowing where they would work, but certainly knowing for whom.

Dressed not in caps and gowns, but berets and their military uniforms, these 1,400 Afghan Soldiers from the 4th Basic Training Kandak at the Kabul Military Training Center had trained long and hard for this day.

For Afghan National Army Pvts. Mohammad Ghamy and Imran Hashmaei, this moment marked the culmination of an eight-week transition from civilian to Soldier.

"There has been a big change. When we first came, we were civilians, so we didn't know anything. Now, after eight weeks, we are in the frame of mind of the army," said Ghamy.

As a civilian in Kandahar province, Ghamy had seen the effects of insurgents in his community.

"There were no jobs and I saw so much fighting going on in my district, so I wanted to come and join the Ministry of Defense – come and serve my country," Ghamy said. "My family encouraged me to join the military, serve the country, get the enemies out of our country and help rebuild it."

Where Hashmaei lived in Kunduz province, the responsibility for security has transitioned largely into the hands of the Afghans. The sight of ANA Soldiers in the local media encouraged his decision to serve Afghanistan.

"When I saw the Afghan National Army training on the TV, I really liked the uniform. I talked to my family and said I wanted to join the military. My family supported me and said I could join," Hashmaei said.

After signing up to join the ANA, Ghamy and Hashmaei made the journey to KMTC to join their peers from around the nation as they learned to be Soldiers.

"When the Soldiers come to KMTC, we tell them about their appearance and the way of living in the army. We tell them how they need to be disciplined and how they need to appear as long as they are going to be Soldiers in the future," said ANA Lt. Col. Habib Rahman Wardak, KMTC's 4th BT Kandak commander.

That new way of living only seemed to strengthen their desire to make it through training.

"I felt like my fellow countrymen were beside me," said Ghamy. "They all spoke Dari and Pashtu. I didn't feel nervous or scared."

Donning the uniform for the first time inspired the Soldiers even more.

"When I wear my uniform, I don't feel different, but I have the passion to serve my country," said Hashmaei.

That courage and passion served these Soldiers well as they tackled the challenges of basic training. These challenges are great as these Soldiers must first learn to read and write.



Afghan Army Lt. Col. Habib Rahman Wardak (left), commander of the 4th Basic Training Kandak at the Kabul Military Training Center, shows ANA Pvt. Imran Hashmaei how to clear an M240B machine gun Sept. 20. During basic training, the ANA instructors taught Hashmei, who had never handled a weapon before, to disassemble, reassemble and fire the M16A2 semiautomatic rifle, the M240B machine gun and the M249 squad automatic weapon. Hashmaei, of Kunduz province, and his fellow 4th Basic Training Kandak Soldiers from around the country, graduated Oct. 20.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. April Campbell, ISAF HQ PAO)

, train to be Soldiers at the KTMC



An Afghan National Army drill instructor watches as ANA Pvt. Imran Hashmaei, of Kunduz province, fires a M240B machine gun at Kabul Military Training Center Sept. 24. For Hashmaei, who had never handled a weapon before, learning to fire weapons was the most interesting part of basic training. He and his fellow 4th Basic Training Kandak Soldiers from around the country graduated Oct. 20.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. April Campbell, ISAF HQ PAO)

"The majority of the United States Soldiers come in the military with a 12-year education, but the Afghan Soldiers come in with zero education. By the time they leave basic training, they will have received up to 60 hours, which will train them to read at a third grade level, so they can read, write and basically understand more than they could when they got here," said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jaymon Bell of Company A, 3rd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment.

Bell, of Lebanon, Tenn., advises the commander of the 1st Basic Training Kandak at KMTC.

"It helps them tremendously," Bell added, "when they can understand what's written on the signs here and what's written about Afghanistan and how Afghanistan is one nation."

This opportunity to read and write was the first for Ghamy.

"This is the first time I am getting literacy training," Ghamy said. "I was a desert boy, a country boy, and I'd never seen it until I came into the ANA."

He hopes the education he receives in the military will help give him the opportunity to offer the children he will one day have a better future.

"I did not have an education, so I joined the service as an enlisted Soldier," he said. "If my children become educated, they will be doctors or engineers and be able to serve Afghanistan that way."

Following their initial reading and writing lessons, the Soldiers were able to move on to the more tactical side of basic training. With the International Security Assistance Force service members primarily filling an advisory role, ANA drill instructors, like 1st Sgt. Hammidullah Hamad, conducted their training.

"This training is very useful in the field after the recruits become part of the regular army," Hamad said. "When they graduate, these tactics are useful against the enemy."

And his recruits seemed to be paying attention.

"We have learned everything they have taught us completely – the basic fundamentals of marksmanship, assembling and reassembling weapons, the grenade range, a ten-kilometer ruck march and live shooting with the M16," Ghamy said.

Of course, each Soldier finds some parts of basic training more interesting than others.

"The urban training and the live-fire were the most interesting for me," said Ghamy. "And I will remember them forever."

As for Hashmaei, the novelty of the weapons range has yet to wear off.

"Everything I've learned here is interesting to me because I want to be a Soldier, but the most interesting part was shooting the M240B automatic rifle and the M249 squad automatic weapon," Hashmaei said. "When I got here, I had not shot a weapon. The first time I got a weapon, I became more encouraged and I get braver every day."

Upon their graduation, the Soldiers were told where they will serve and employ their new skills. "I am really proud of them," said Wardak. "On the first day when they came here, they were villagers who didn't know how to read, how to write or how to shoot the weapons. Since they've been at basic training, there have been a lot of changes in their lives."

The Soldiers also appreciate these changes in themselves.

"I am much different," said Ghamy. "I have been through two months of training and I have learned a lot. I can use this training to save my life and save my country."

With that salvation, these Afghan Soldiers, who have trained well to fight the enemy today, hope to see a lasting peace in Afghanistan's future.

"The people are tired of war, and I don't want war anymore either, so I will serve my country to solve that problem," Hashmaei said. "There will be no more fighting in my country and I will do my best to make sure of that."

Afghan youth Taekwondo team

By U.S. Army Sgt. April Campbell
ISAF HQ PAO

From front side, tornado to crescent, kicks flew as the Afghanistan National Taekwondo Federation Junior Team put on a show at the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters gym Oct. 22.

With a crowd of ISAF servicemembers cheering them on, the team of six Afghan girls and 11 Afghan boys demonstrated their athletic abilities to kick, break boards and work as a team.

"It was a great demonstration of tremendous athletes, tremendous sportsmanship and young people that are doing important things for their country," said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, of Tampa, Fla., who serves as the ISAF HQ Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications.

As the team chief for Sports and Youth Outreach, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Terry Love, of Soperton, Ga., headed up the effort to organize the event.

"This demonstration shows the partnership that exists between ISAF servicemembers and Afghanistan – a long standing partnership," Love said. "This is all about building the capacity within the government of Afghanistan."

In a country where the age of youths ranges up to 30, they are considered crucial in building that governmental capacity.

"We understand that with youth and sports, if you compound that or make sure that's part of your outreach strategy, then you're reaching all of the population because in Afghanistan 68 percent of the population are considered youths," said Love.

According to Kabul native Samir Jaihoon, chief of the Afghan team's exhibition committee, these youth are responding.

"This is a very good opportunity that, day-by-day, we are having most kids come and say that they are really keen to come and do the sports instead of doing the wrong things or taking a gun in their hand and doing something wrong for the community," Jaihoon said.

Instead, Afghan youth like Ahmad Walid and Saja Sohrabzada, who participated in a friendly sparring match during the demonstration, are honing their athletic abilities.

"The entire program was good, but the best part was the competition between the two of us," Walid said. "It was a competition between friendly combatants."

For Sohrabzada, the demonstration only deepened his desire to continue practicing Taekwondo.

"I hope that someday," said Sohrabzada, "I win a world competition and bring Afghanistan up in the world."

With or without a competition, 16-year-old Laila Houssaini, who has been practicing Taekwondo since she was four, has no plans to quit.

"I want to go to the end," she said. "My favorite part is breaking the boards. It makes me feel strong."

That dedication and determination is nothing new to Love, a father of five who has coached youth sports, including track and field, basketball and football back in the U.S.

"All of my children are athletes and I played a lot of sports coming up in high school and college," Love said. "I love athletes, I love sports and I love working with youth."

With the help of the Afghan Junior Team, Love was able to share his appreciation with service-members throughout ISAF headquarters.

"This is a diplomacy effort," Love said. "This is not about one section—this is about all of ISAF understanding what we are doing because we are trying to reach out to Afghans."



A member of the Afghanistan National Taekwondo Federation Junior Team flies through the air to break a board held by his teammate at the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters gym Oct. 22. The team of six Afghan girls and 11 Afghan boys demonstrated their athletic abilities to kick, break boards and work as a team. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. April Campbell, ISAF HQ PAO)

shows ISAF Kickin' good time



U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, far left, of Tampa, Fla., watches a dramatization by the Afghanistan National Taekwondo Federation Junior Team at the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters gym Oct. 22. Through the Youth and Sports Outreach program, ISAF is working with the Afghans to reach the Afghan population who are below the age of 30.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Anthony Murray Jr., ISAF HQ PAO)



Sajad Sohrabzada, left, kicks at Ahmad Walid, during a friendly sparring match during a demonstration with the Afghanistan National Taekwondo Federation Junior Team at the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters gym Oct. 22. Sports programs are a healthy alternative for youths like Sohrabzada and Walid, who may be at risk of being influenced by drug use or enemy insurgents. (Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Anthony Murray Jr., ISAF HQ PAO))

Warrior Watch

Maj. Timmy helps relieve battle stress for deployed Soldiers



Maj. Timmy, assigned to 520th Medical Detachment, plays with his green soccer ball thrown by servicemembers and civilians who came to visit him at the American Red Cross center Oct. 5. Servicemembers and civilians come and visit Timmy so they can relax and play with a dog much like they would be able to do at home. (Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Cody Barber, RC-East PAO)

By Army Spc. Cody Barber
RC-East PAO

On the roster of the 528th Medical Detachment, Combat and Operational Stress Control, you'll find a servicemember whose main mission is to help Soldiers around Afghanistan manage with the effects of being deployed. This servicemember has become almost famous around Bagram Air Field.

"Every Wednesday we have a celebrity that visits," said Kathleen Butler, team leader for the American Red Cross. "The celebrity is Maj. Timmy."

Maj. Timmy, a three-year-old yellow Labrador, has been in Afghanistan for over a year now and can be found at the American Red Cross Center on BAF every Wednesday around 6 p.m.

Unlike most working dogs for the military, which are used to detect bombs or drugs, Maj. Timmy's purpose is to be played with, petted and loved on by anyone, said Butler.

Army Capt. Christine Beck, a native to Shamokin, Pa., and officer in charge of the Warfighter Restoration Center on BAF, is the handler for Timmy. Beck and Timmy visit units throughout Afghanistan whenever they are needed.

"We help Soldiers get back to their activities in their life," said Beck. "Our mission here is to get servicemembers back to a functional level so they can return to duty."

It is important to talk about the stresses of combat and not holding it inside because it is often therapeutic, said Beck. She recalled an unforgettable moment when Timmy had a comforting effect on a unit that had suffered casualties from combat. Timmy visited a Soldier from that unit who was suffering from a state of shock.

"You could tell in his face that he was still in that numb state. He knelt down and started petting Timmy," said Beck. "I thought he was going to pet the fur off of him."

"I could see his face soften up and I could see him almost come out of that state. Then, he started talking about the event and started talking about how hard it was and what a rough week it had been," Beck added.

There is a definite benefit from having Timmy in theater, Beck said. Timmy makes servicemembers that are away from their pets happy and gives them the feeling of being a pet owner back home.

Spc. Aerick Gomez, from El Paso, Texas, a signal support specialist assigned to 313th Joint Movement Control Battalion, spent time with Timmy on his last day in theater. Gomez had a Husky named Shadow, but, before deployment, Gomez had to find her a new home.

"Seeing Timmy gives me a sense of home," said Gomez. "Timmy is definitely a morale booster. Being able to pet a dog is not the everyday norm in Afghanistan."

People are always excited to see Timmy when he runs up to greet them, said Beck.

"People tell me that 'he made my day,' or 'I was in such a bad mood,'" Beck said when reflecting on Timmy's impact on servicemembers.

"We don't know the trickle-down effect of when someone is in a bad mood here," Beck added. "Timmy can pull them out of that state."



Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Christina Richardson, from Orange County, Calif., assigned to American Forces Network, and Spc. Aerick Gomez, from El Paso, Texas, a signal support specialist with 313th Joint Movement Control Battalion, pet Maj. Timmy at the American Red Cross Center's 'living room' Oct. 5.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Cody Barber, RC-East PAO)



Spc. Aerick Gomez, from El Paso Texas, a signal support specialist assigned to 313th Joint Movement Control Battalion, rubs the ears of Maj. Timmy at the American Red Cross center Oct. 5. Gomez used to have a dog named Shadow before he deployed to Afghanistan.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Cody Barber, RC-East PAO)



Afghan Army Command Sgt. Major Shahwali and U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Binyam Mengestu, of the 172nd Support Battalion, and a native of Ethiopia, share a laugh during a meeting Nov. 3.(Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Zackary Root, RC-East PAO)

Logistical partners discuss their future success

By U.S. Army Pfc. Zackary Root
RC-East PAO

With the Afghan National Army and U.S. Forces training and conducting missions together across eastern Afghanistan, leaders from Regional Command- East are taking a more in-depth look at battlefield support.

ANA logistic Soldiers and U.S. Army leaders from the 172nd Support Battalion met to discuss training and the needs of the ANA Nov. 2, at Forward Operating Base Lightning.

"Having key leader engagements is vital in facilitating our relationship with the ANA," said U.S. Army Maj. Ebony Lambert, a native of Cairo, Ill. and battalion executive officer for the 172nd BSB.

Discussions centered on having ANA troops work in the U.S. Army's tactical operation center, allowing them to see how the Americans receive real-time operational information and process it to meet the needs of the battle spaceowners.

"It is going to give them a better understanding of our military decision-making process and what each company does to execute the commander's intent," said U.S. Army Command Sgt. Major Terry Burton, and a native of Roanoke, Va.

Along with the future, they discussed prior training events, focusing on improvements that could be made and how to enhance the training to support the needs of the ANA, as they become more proficient.

The week prior to the meeting, ANA Soldiers participated in joint medical training and a joint Soldier of the month board. According to Lambert, these events provided them with skills necessary to improve as a fighting force.

"I think we were successful in articulating what the goals are for training and getting an assessment from [the battalion commander] and his way forward for his battalion," said Lambert.

Meeting and sharing knowledge with their Afghan counterparts helps the Americans strengthen the relationships that they have established, allowing for closer ties and making it easier to communicate and work together.

"These meetings improve our partnerships and increase our ability to do training with them," said Lambert.

As a rapidly improving ANA is poised to take over RC-East's battlespace, discussions are a vital part of the process of transitioning the ANA to take over Afghanistan security.

Serving up inspiration at Waza Khwa DFAC

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Luke Graziani
RC-East PAO

On the short list of things every Soldier needs, food is pretty high up there. The Army provides Soldiers with everything to fight and win wars, to include the sometimes good, sometimes not-so-good, Meals Ready-to-Eat.

An MRE has all the ingredients a Soldier needs to sustain him for one whole meal – an entrée, a side dish, a snack and even two pieces of minty fresh gum.

What an MRE doesn't have, however, is the love and care that three dedicated Army cooks provide four times a day, seven days a week to over 250 satisfied customers per meal at the Combat Outpost Waza Kwa dining facility.

U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class James Nichols, a native of St. Louis, assigned to Battery C, 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, Task Force Blackhawk, assisted by two junior enlisted Soldiers and two local nationals, takes on this challenging task to the best of his abilities.

"Balancing the workload, at the beginning, was a challenge," said Nichols. "Eventually continuity came into play and it all worked out."

Nichols and his crew prepare, cook and set out the meals on their own. There is no morning shift or night crew, there are no days off and free time is scarce.

"I joined the Army intentionally to become a cook," said U.S. Army Pfc. Tyus Hymes, a native of Hemet, Calif., assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 172nd Inf. Bde., TF Blackhawk. "I love it when they come in and compliment me on the food that I make. Every time I get a compliment it puts a smile on my face and makes me want to try harder."

It's hard work, yet they find comfort in knowing they are providing a necessary service for those who otherwise would simply not get it without them.

"Providing hot meals as much as we can for as long as we can increases and sustains morale," Nichols explained. "Everyone deployed deserves and likes a home cooked meal."

A warning used to be given by some before coming to Waza Khwa to bring an MRE or two along because the dining facility only served one hot meal a day.

The tireless Soldiers at the dining facility have taken it upon themselves to provide three hot meals and midnight chow every day.

"It's not about me," said U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Isaac, a native of Staten Island, N.Y., assigned to Btry. C, 1st Bn., 77th FA. "It's about the Soldiers. It's about giving the same attention that I was given and 100 percent more to them."

Nichols and his crew may have the best dining facility in theatre, according to some of its patrons. Unfortunately, the Waza Khwa dining facility will be closing its doors for good soon.

These three motivated food service specialists are slated to pack up and move to a different forward operating base, Super FOB, also in Paktika. There, they will join forces with whoever is already there and add their skills and motivation to the mix.

"We can use our skills that we built up as a team and move on to help that team over there [at Super FOB]," Isaac said, unfazed by the move. "We can take our joint skills and make things better."

COP Waza Khwa is one of the first to be handed over to Afghan forces. It won't be the last.

"Our goal was to do the best we can do each and every day, day in and day out [and] leave a reputation and a mark," Nichols reflected. "This is our passion - this is what we love to do. Our satisfaction is when we see a [customer] come in to our facility to consume a good quality meal and walk away with a smile on their face."



U.S. Army Pfc. Tyus Hymes, a native of Hemet, Calif., Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, Task Force Blackhawk, moves steaming-hot chicken from a cooking pot to a serving pan at Combat Outpost Waza Khwa.(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Luke Grazini, RC-East PAO)

Combined forces work to clear

By U.S. Army Spc. William Begley
RC-East PAO

Historically, Logar province has been a Taliban stronghold. Almost all Afghan and Coalition Soldiers who have entered the province in the past have come under attack.

Looking to change this, Soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, Task Force Black Scarves, assisted Afghan National Security Forces during a five day mission in support of Operation Shamshir Oct. 17-21.

The goal, according to U.S. Army Capt. Michael Roesler, of White Bear Lake, Minn., Co. B commander, was to disrupt insurgent activity, facilitate Afghan governmental control, as well as expand ANSF influence.

Landing in the middle of the night just outside the village of Kut Kay, the combined forces took their first enemy contact.

"It was a pop shot with an AK-47 assault rifle or a PK [machine gun]," said 1st Lt. Laurent Lundy, of Everett, Mass.

After the enemy quickly broke contact, the troops went ahead and cleared the location; finding a large weapons cache.

"We found approximately 13 rocket-propelled grenades, 23 detonators, three RPG boosters, several feet of detonator cord and a few sticks of TNT," said Lundy. "It was the biggest one we have found so far since we have come to Logar province. It felt pretty good, the guys were excited and you could see it in their eyes."



U.S. Army Sgt. Jon Allen, from Rock Hill, S.C., a medic with Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, provides aid to an Afghan National Army Soldier injured by a blast from a rocket propelled grenade during Operation Shamshir Oct. 19.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. William Begley, RC-East PAO)

The second day began early with the goal of clearing the area inside the Maani bazaar. Once again, the unit came under enemy fire. While a team was in the bazaar, an RPG struck a hillside near an over watch team; landing just five meters from the element.

"Everybody was stunned right at first, so we hopped over our makeshift fighting position and took cover down the other side of the hill," said Spc. Benjamin Brock, from Ankeny, Iowa, a sniper with headquarters platoon. "We got everybody together and figured out everybody was all right, then we went back up and tried to get eyes on whoever shot the RPG."

The Soldiers returned fire, later intercepting insurgent radio chatter saying they killed one insurgent and injured another.

Speaking with locals in the bazaar, Afghan National Army Capt. Hukmyar Namutllah, commander of 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Brigade, ANA 203rd Corps, appealed for peace.

"[Let us] seize the opportunity to end the destructive influence of the Taliban and to embrace the opportunity that the government of Afghanistan is providing for them," he said. "It is up to you. It is your responsibility to make this positive change for the future."

Day three began establishing an outpost above the village of Omarkhel. After occupying a hilltop, Black Scarves Soldiers took contact early that morning from the west and a ridgeline from the northeast that overlooked the entire area. What ensued during the fire fight was a unique display of firepower that they could deliver.

With a .50-caliber machine gun mounted on a six-wheeled vehicle, and a grenade launcher mounted on another, the ANA and Black Scarf Soldiers returned fire. Forcing the fight, they moved quickly to claim the ground the firing had come from. While there were no bodies recovered, insurgent radio chatter reported they killed two Taliban and wounded one.

With memories of the previous day's fight still fresh, the Soldiers headed out early to a small village called Azurkhel. With the high ground well covered, the forces moved in to quite a different mood than the day before.

"Kids came out to greet us, the elders and the rest of the villagers came out to greet us," said Lundy. "We were able to maneuver easily about in the village, which is typically not the way it goes."

With the villagers' cooperation, the clearing operation began and ended in a relatively short period of time.

"[The ANA] were actually sitting and breaking bread with the locals, which is a good sign," said Lundy. "Nonetheless, the threat remains the same. We (did) have chatter (that day) saying that they are going to try to shoot down a helicopter and continue attacking Coalition forces."

Lundy's words proved ominous and, once again, they took contact.

"Some Soldiers were on a ridgeline west of the village of Azurkhel when they started receiving fire from about five enemy insurgents from the south; four to six hundred meters away,"

insurgents from Logar Province



Afghan National Army Capt. Hukmyar Namutllah, commander of 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Brigade, 203rd ANA Corps, speaks with locals in the Maani bazaar during Operation Shamshir Oct. 19.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. William Begley, RC-East PAO)

said 1st Sgt. Todd Bair, of Bountiful, Utah. "There was a small amount of intermittent fire going back and forth between the U.S. Coalition and insurgents, which lasted about an hour."

"We did end up shooting an insurgent in the leg that was on a motorcycle fleeing the area with a weapon," Bair said. "Later on the ANA destroyed the motorcycle."

Afterwards, the forces moved on to their last task, the village of Muchkhel, just a few kilometers away. That afternoon, an outpost was secured from an old set of ruins in the village. The forces spent the rest of the evening there without incident.

On the final day, the mood around the camp was much more upbeat than the previous four days. The men were ready to finish their mission and return to Forward Operating Base Altimur for a hot shower and a warm meal. Laughter could be heard all around the camp as the Soldiers recanted stories and told jokes.

While the ANA and Black Scarf Soldiers made their rounds clearing the village, Roesler purchased a sheep from the village cleric. Afghan troops bought vegetables and bread, and began to prepare dinner.

"I think things like this go a long way in our relations with the ANA and the people," said Roesler. "It shows them that we aren't much different than they are. I think this actually makes us a little more human to them."

While the troops could almost see the helicopters coming to pick them up, the insurgents weren't ready to let them go so easily. Shots rang out and once again, the Black Scarves took action. Rolling the .50-caliber and the grenade launcher into position, they returned fire.

As the insurgents ran for cover, darkness settled in and the forces prepared to come home.

While his company took enemy fire almost every day, Bair was happy that all his Soldiers returned unharmed.

"The biggest thing for all of us is that we took a lot of contact during the last four days and everybody's okay. No injuries or scrapes and that's due to individual Soldier discipline."



U.S. Army Sgt. Juan Restrepo, from Greenville, S.C., an infantryman assigned to 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, returns fire with a .50-caliber machine gun Oct. 20. Soldiers came under heavy enemy fire on their third day, and held off the insurgents.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. William Begley, RC-East PAO)

Combined Forces participate in Soldier of the Month board

By U.S. Army Pfc. Zackary Root
RC-East PAO

The Army is steeped in tradition and ceremonies that Soldiers have helped shape throughout history. One of those traditions is the use of promotion boards in order to cultivate and identify leadership characteristics and potential in Soldiers. With the help of U.S. Soldiers, the Afghan National Army is developing traditions of their own.

ANA Soldiers, from the 5th Coy, 2nd Kandak, 203rd Corps, and U.S. Soldiers from the 172nd Support Battalion, 172nd Infantry Brigade, combined for a joint promotion and Soldier of the Month board Oct. 29.

"The one thing I liked about this board is the exchange of ideas," said Afghan Capt. Mohammadin, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Coy, 2nd Kandak. "It showed that we are partners and we can learn from each other."

The military members that attended the board consisted of two Afghan Soldiers, one noncommissioned officer, one private and nine U.S. Soldiers. The president of the board was U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Terry D. Burton, 172nd Support Battalion command sergeant major. Also sitting on the board was Afghan 1st Sgt. Amrodin, HHC, 5th Coy, 2nd Kandak.

The ANA and U.S. Soldiers faced a multitude of questions from the board and Amrodin interacted with the Soldiers, asking questionws from an ANA viewpoint to gain U.S. Soldiers' perspectives.

"We had the ANA first sergeant there and he asked questions," said Burton. "It gave him his own insight through his own experience of asking American Soldiers how do you see us as we develop."

The ANA Soldiers performed facing movements and answered questions on military knowledge and military history. This was the first promotion board for the ANA Soldiers and, according to Amrodin, they performed well, but there is always room for improvement.

"It is good that our Soldiers are coming here and learning from the American Soldiers," said Amrodin. "It shows that our army can do this stuff and we will get better in the future because of it.

The 172nd Support Bn. assisted their brothers-in-arms, translating a study guide into Pashtu, allowing them to study the questions beforehand and setting a standard for promoting their NCOs in the future.



Afghan 1st Sgt. Amrodin, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Coy, 2nd Kandak, 203rd Corps, poses a question to a U.S. Soldier during a combined ANA and U.S. Army Soldier of the Month and promotion board Oct. 29.(Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Zackary Root, RC-East PAO)

"Soldiers want to look up to someone, they want someone to lead them and the best examples are noncommissioned officers," said Burton. "The Soldier of the Month board helps prepare [the ANA] to take our place when we are gone."

As Afghanistan's armed forces continue to increase their capabilities and assume the lead for their country's security, U.S. forces are assisting the ANA in building traditions of their own to help enrich theirNCOs.

"We see a nation before us that is strong, but in order to get them stronger, we provided selfless service in assisting them to get where we are," said Burton. "Not make them the U.S. Army, but helping them be the Afghan army."



Thomas Bevier, field program officer for the U.S. Agency for International Development, points out the watershed to Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, during a visit to Sra Kala Oct. 11. The watershed in Sra Kala is scheduled to undergo restoration during the winter. Local villagers will plant trees and grass while working the land.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Andrea Merritt, RC-East PAO)

Watershed revival to come to Sayed Abad

By U.S. Army Sgt. Andrea Merritt
RC-East PAO

In the 1970s, Afghanistan, then known as the "Orchard of Central Asia," was an agricultural goldmine that thrived as a major exporter of dried fruits and nuts.

After decades of war, drought and deforestation, much of the land became unsuitable for farming. The hills in many areas, once lined with rich green vegetation, are now a dry, barren shadow of the country's former glory.

Through the years, government, non-government and military organizations have assisted Afghans in restoring the agricultural climate through watershed projects in various regions.

A watershed is a landform with highpoints and ridgelines that descend into lower elevations.

After rainfalls and snowmelts, the water flows down into soil, groundwater, creeks and streams to larger rivers, eventually channeling into the sea.

Members of the Global Partnership for Afghanistan, the U.S. Agency for International Development and Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, visited Sra Kala village in the Sayed Abad district Oct. 11 to assess a watershed selected to undergo restoration this winter.

"There is a need for water and watershed programs can increase the water supply and improve the ecosystem," said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Christopher Davis, mortar platoon leader and battalion civil affairs officer, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Regt.

Since 2010, the GPFA has launched 17 small water projects in 19 villages in Wardak Province. In partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, USAID and other agencies, the GPFA water projects have helped more than 15,000 families in the province.

"In 2008, we travelled to different provinces like Wardak and Logar," said Thomas Bevier, USAID field program officer. "Throughout many studies we heard the same theme from people who worked on farms and it all came back to water.

"The civil affairs cell conducted assessments and found there was an over demand on natural resources. There is a critical water shortage and we looked to different solutions, one being to re-establish watersheds."

Due to deforestation, overgrazing and other factors, 98 percent of the trees have disappeared in the last 30 years. Since there aren't many trees or other types of vegetation, soil is exposed to the elements causing erosion.

As a result of erosion, farmers are unable to cultivate the land and grow crops. In a country where 85 percent of the population relies on agriculture as their main source of income, restoring the watersheds could help rebuild the economy, Bevier said.

"The great thing about this program is it's not temporary. It can create trees, rivers and grasslands," said Davis, a native of Victorville, Calif. "The area could start seeing results in just five years. In 10 years, there will be large trees, more water and more arable land."

To generate local interest in the watershed program, GPFA members engage local leaders and farmers to teach them different ways to increase farm productivity.

Jawid Ahmad, a native of Sayed Abad and GPFA member program support services manager, is glad to be a part of the project and help his community.

"In the past there were lots of forests in Sayed Abad. The hills were covered in trees," said Ahmad. "Nothing is impossible if we try to get back to that level. We just need to support and to teach people how to do that."

A key component to the program is community involvement. The locals will be actively engaged in the restoration process.

"The watershed project will employ the locals," Davis said. "They will work the land and have property rights to the land as long as they keep working it."

If the project is a success, the people of Sra Kala will be able to sustain themselves with the crops they produce, rebuild their economic status and build a brighter, greener future.

"It will provide them dignity, a sense of accomplishment and pride in themselves," Bevier said. "The quality of life will get better. It will lead to a capacity to rebuild the economy and increased health; but the key thing is hope. It will give them hope."

ANA Soldiers learn life saving skills

By U.S. Army Sgt. Andrea Merritt
RC-East PAO

In a medical course at Forward Operating Base Shank, a group of Afghan National Army Soldiers learned combat life saving skills Nov. 1.

During the course, ANA Soldiers practiced basic patient assessments, advanced airway management, controlling blood loss and treating shock.

"This course was originally developed as sustainment training for medical personnel, but the curriculum has been converted to include non-medical personnel and help them achieve a combat lifesaver level," said Jose Gonzalez, a medical instructor with Military Professionals Resources Inc.

Since the class has a mixture of tribes and ethnicities, the interpreter often has to switch between Dari and Pashto to make sure everyone understands the material. When words seem to fail, a visual aid usually comes to the rescue.

For an example, Gonzalez stabbed a full bottle of water so Soldiers could see what happens when an organ is ruptured and he lit a piece of gauze on fire and covered it with a glass to show that fire needs oxygen to spread.

"You have to be creative when teaching this class because sometimes medical terms don't translate," said U.S. Army Sgt. Nigal Buchko, a Killeen, Texas native and assistant instructor, Company C, 125th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division. "We use a lot of visual aids and hands-on training."

ANA Soldiers are greatful for the training.

"I am thankful for training," said ANA Pvt. Gul Nabi, medic, 5th Kandak. "It is good for our country and army to have medics so we don't lose ANA Soldiers."



Afghan National Army Pvt. Gul Nabi, medic, 5th Kandak, applies a field dressing during the hands-on portion of a medical training class Nov. 1 at Forward Operating Base Shank.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Andrea Merritt, RC-East PAO)



Afghan Army Pvt. Gul Nabi, 5th Kandak, applies a field dressing during the hands-on portion of a medical training class Nov. 1 at Forward Operating Base Shank. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Andrea Merritt, RC-East PAO)

ANA participate in Nijrab community outreach



Afghan children receive school supplies during the first visit to Nijrab district by Afghan National Army troops from the 201st ANA Corps Oct. 17. The visit to the Zarshoy School for Girls marks the start of a community outreach mission to the district to strengthen and improve ANA relationships. (Photo courtesy of Task Force La Fayette Public Affairs)

By French Army 1st Lt. Aurelie
Task Force La Fayette PAO

For the first time in Nijrab district, Afghan National Army Soldiers began community outreach missions to better connect with area citizens Oct. 17. A patrol consisting of elements of the ANA's 33rd Kandak, advised by French Soldiers, visited the Zarshoy School for Girls.

The aim of this mission was to evaluate, with the principal and the academic inspector, requirements for building new classrooms and toilet facilities for girls.

The visit also allowed the ANA Soldiers to learn about civil-military operations by distributing gifts to students and teachers, school supplies and volleyball kits. Volleyball is a national sport in Afghanistan.

This was a new way for the Afghan army to reinforce its credibility among the local population.



Afghan National Security Forces and members of the Coalition Provincial Development Stabilization Team assess the aftermath of a suicide attack at Forward Operating Base Lion in Panjshir Province Oct.15.(Courtesy photo provided by U.S. Army)

Insurgent failures mark start of winter operations

By RC-East PAO

Tactical mistakes by insurgents in eastern Afghanistan in the last month resulted in at least four failed attacks against Afghan and coalition targets.

"This is a direct demonstration of the increasing effectiveness of the Afghan security forces in eastern Afghanistan," said Brig. Gen. Gary Volesky, deputy commading general, Regional Command-East. "Frequently, the insurgents are coming up against a more professional and committed Afghan force."

Afghan Uniformed Police prevented a complex attack against the Gardez municipal building in Paktya province Oct.16. Insurgents attempted to attack using a vehicle bomb and suicide vests.

AUP officers shot and killed all three insurgents wearing suicide vests. The vehicle detonated, martyring one AUP officer and a municipal worker.

On Oct. 15, Afghan security forces prevented a complex attack against Forward Operating Base Lion in Panjshir province.

Five insurgents were killed after they attacked the base with a vehicle bomb and suicide vests. Afghan security forces shot and killed four of the attackers, the fifth detonated his vehicle bomb with little effect against the base.

Two Afghan civilians were martyred in the vehicle blast and two Afghan security guards were injured during the attack.

Afghan and coalition forces killed 17 insurgents after a complex attack near Nari District in Kunar province Oct.14. Insurgents attacked with small arms and mortars. There were no reports of Afghan Army, coalition or civilian casualties.

Coalition aircraft and artillery fire, Oct.8, killed at least 25 insurgents in the largest coordinated attack against coalition bases in Paktika province since 2009. Insurgents unsuccessfully used indirect fire from multiple locations in Gormal, Sarobi and Barmal districts against Afghan and coalition bases.

One coalition member was slightly wounded during the attacks.

"Insurgent failures demonstrate an increase in the capability and capacity of our Afghan partners," Volesky said.

Operation Counter Flow prevents insurgent movement

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Steven T. Berry
Task Force Thunderbird PAO

Soldiers with Company D, 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Creek inspected any people or vehicles crossing the Pakistan border Oct. 24.

The mission, Operation Counter Flow, was part of a larger effort to prevent insurgents from crossing the border.

"Our main mission today was to deny insurgent forces the ability to openly cross the border," said U.S. Army Sgt 1st Class Brook Koch, a native of Tulsa Okla.

Troops searched both vehicles and personnel as they entered Pakistan from Afghanistan.

In addition to the searches, U.S. forces also took the opportunity to conduct some humanitarian engagements.

Soldiers made connections with local residents by handing out wristbands, pens, pencils, blankets and radios.

"These people have so little," said U.S. Army Sgt. Jeremy Aston, a squad leader and a native of Glenpool, Okla., "so they really appreciate a small gift and it gives the Afghan and Pakistani people a chance to see that we are not that different and that U.S. forces care [about their well-being]."



U.S. Army Sgt. Jeremy Aston, a Glenpool, Okla. native and a squad leader for Company D, 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Creek, gives a blanket and some toys to an Afghan boy in Paktya Province Oct. 24 during Operation Counter Flow. The intent of the operation was to deny insurgents the freedom to move across the border into Pakistan.(Photo by U.S. Army Cpl. Ruth Howe, Task Force Thunderbird PAO)



U.S. Army Cpl. Joseph Rentie, a squad leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Creek, and a native of Tulsa, Okla., concludes a search of a truck at a Pakistan border crossing in Paktya Province Oct. 24. The search part of TF Creek's Operation Counter Flow was intended to deny insurgents the freedom to move across the border. (Photo by U.S. Army Cpl. Ruth Howe, Task Force Thunderbird PAO)

ANSF, Coalition SOF conduct

By U.S. Army Spc. Ashley Bowman
Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force PAO

Afghan National Army commandos, Afghan National Police and coalition Special Operations Forces conducted an operation in the Deh Chopan district Oct. 16-17.

The operation was aimed at clearing the Larzab bowl to disrupt a known insurgent planning and staging area.

More than 50 males were questioned as the partnered forces began clearing the area after arriving in the district. The intent of the questioning was to identify potential insurgent locations or weapon caches in the area.

Later that afternoon, while on a patrol, Afghan National Security Forces and coalition SOF team members received sporadic fire from insurgents; however, no injuries or casualties occurred.

The next day, insurgents again engaged ANSF and coalition SOF team members with Pulemyot Kalashnikova Machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire before again retreating.

During their patrol, several compounds near the bowl were found to be uninhabited and reinforced with concertina wire.

"These appeared to be insurgent bed down and supply locations as well as fighting positions," said a coalition SOF team member.

Uniforms, RPG primers, batteries, radio components and large amounts of PKM brass were found in the compounds.

After clearing the compounds, the partnered forces proceeded to the bazaar where they were once again engaged by insurgents using PKM and small arms fire, resulting in four enemy combatants killed in action.

The patrol ended in the Kishmarak village where commandos held an unplanned shura with village elders.

"The villagers claimed that they forced the insurgents to leave their village and that the fighters were still in the hills," said a coalition SOF team member.

During the shura, commandos reiterated the Afghan government's dedication to the security of the people of Afghanistan.

In addition to the four enemies killed in action, two persons of interest were detained by the ANP and one radio was recovered during the operation.



An Afghan National Army commando pulls security in the Deh Chopan district of Zabul province Oct. 17. Afghan commandos partnered with coalition Special Operations Forces conducted clearing operations in the Larzab bowl to disrupt insurgent safe havens and promote security in the area.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Palermo, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force PAO)

operations in Deh Chopan



Afghan National Army commandos conduct a foot patrol in the Larzab bowl, Deh Chopan district of Zabul province Oct. 17. Afghan commandos and coalition Special Operations Forces conducted clearing operations, disrupting insurgent safe havens and promoting security in the area.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Palermo, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force PAO)



During clearing operations in the Larzab bowl in Zabul province, an Afghan National Army commando pulls security Oct. 17 for other Afghan commandos and coalition Special Operations Forces conducting clearing operations.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Palermo, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force PAO)



An Afghan child talks with an Afghan National Army Soldier after completion of the Now Ruzi bridge in the eastern Zharay district Oct. 11. The bridge was destroyed three decades ago during the Russian invasion and repaired by welders from Combined Task Force Spartan's 710th Brigade Support Battalion.(U.S. Army Courtesy Photo)

710th BSB bridge gap between Now Ruzi, Bagh-E-Pol

By U.S. Army Capt. Kevin Sandel
Task Force Spartan

Two bridge spans in eastern Zharay district, that were destroyed during the Russian invasion nearly three decades ago, were finally joined together by a metal walkway built by welders from Combined Task Force Spartan's 710th Brigade Support Battalion Oct. 11.

During a rainy day on the border between the villages of Now Ruzi and Bagh-E-Pol, Afghan and coalition security forces first secured the site, then moved two large metal bridge pieces on a flatbed truck and assembled them on site. Welders had to fuse the pieces together and then pull the foot bridge across the gap using a crane.

The absence of a usable bridge connecting the two villages forced residents and children trying to walk to school to often cross the treacherous riverbed below. The Arghandab River flows underneath the bridge and its rising waters were perilous for anyone attempting to cross.

Once the operation was complete, the local villagers, who had gathered to watch the construction process, immediately began using the walkway and thanked the Afghan and coalition forces as they crossed.

Leaders with the 710th BSB said the bridge's emplacement was extremely successful in providing the people of Bagh-E-Pul and Now Ruzi access and freedom of movement between the communities.

Soldiers on site also installed a vertical pole on each end, indicating the bridge was only for foot traffic and also welded ramps on each end for easy entrance to the bridge.

An official ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Now Ruzi bridge was held Oct. 22 and featured the Zharay District Governor, ANA leaders, the District Chief of Police and several key influencers from the area as special guests.

156th Military Police Detachment lays down the law

By U.S. Army Sgt. Richard Wrigley
1st Air Cavalry Brigade PAO

The primary objective of the 156th Military Police Detachment, attached to the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, is to keep law and order in Regional Command North.

They have done that … and so much more.

With 45 Soldiers in the company, it is amazing that they are able to successfully complete this mission and the multitude of other tasks that they took on, said Capt. Kenneth Murray, a native of Fairmont, W.Va. and company commander for the 156th MP Det., an Army National Guard unit out of Monaville, W.Va.

Soldiers] are doing a terrific job," said Murray.

Investigator Shane Bryant, a native of Logan, W.Va., and team chief of investigations at Camp Marmal, also said the unit has made significant advances since the beginning of their deployment.

"It's all about building a strong foundation and then building on top of that … we're only the second MP unit to be here [at Camp Marmal]," Bryant said. "Looking back to what it was like when we first got here and to what it is now, our unit has made leaps and bounds."

Success can also be seen in the relationship that has been fostered between the 156th MP Det. and its operational parent



Investigator Shane Bryant, a native of Logan, W.Va. and team chief of investigations at Camp Marmal, 156th Military Police Detachment, attached to the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, performs a retinal scan of a local Afghan prisoner in the Balkh provincial prison Oct 23. Soldiers of the 156th MP Det. were at the prison in order to fulfill just one of their many mission sets by enrolling the local Afghan national prisoners into a biometric system, enabling coalition and Afghan forces to create a viable database to forensically identify criminals.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Richard Wrigley, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade PAO)

Some of these additional responsibilities include mentoring and training the various Afghan National Security Forces and helping with the biometric enrollment of Afghan national prisoners, workers and security forces, said Murray.

Protecting coalition forces while conducting route reconnaissance, area and point security is also a top priority, he added.

"All of the Soldiers here have gone to schools and are meant to perform in specialized roles, such as criminal investigators and traffic and accident investigators," said Murray. "Generally, a law and order detachment is augmented by another MP company which would handle the patrolling, but here we're forced to be the road MP as well as the investigator," he added.

"To be dealt all the different mission sets that we've been assigned, with the minimal amount of people that we have … [the

unit, the 1st ACB.

"Working with the 1st ACB has been fantastic," said Murray. "The support we've received from the 1st ACB has been outstanding. They've taken us under their wing and treat us just like any of their other subordinate units."

The effect of the MP' has had a positive effect on the 1st ACB, said Lt. Col. Michael Burns, a native of New Brockton, Ala., and deputy commanding officer of the 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division.

"The 1st Air Cavalry Brigade has definitely benefited from its relationship with the 156th MP Company," said Burns. "There is no doubt in my mind that Soldiers and civilians enjoy a safer and more disciplined environment because of the presence of Capt. Murray and his Soldiers."

Leader Watch

Grading Your 2011 Leadership

Commentary by U.S. Army Chaplain (Capt.) Jim Fisher, Ph.D.

Every Soldier is a leader. While there are official titles and positions for leaders, labels are not necessary. Desiring a title in order to engage leadership reveals an impaired understanding of purpose. Rejecting leadership opportunities due to lack of a title may well be an excuse to minimally survive.

A person must first lead themself. Humans are prone to judge those who lead, but the one being led must grasp the first-order responsibility. The reflection in the mirror belongs to someone who necessarily leads self, is led by others and leads others. The equation is inflexible and unforgiving. The progression must not be short-circuited.

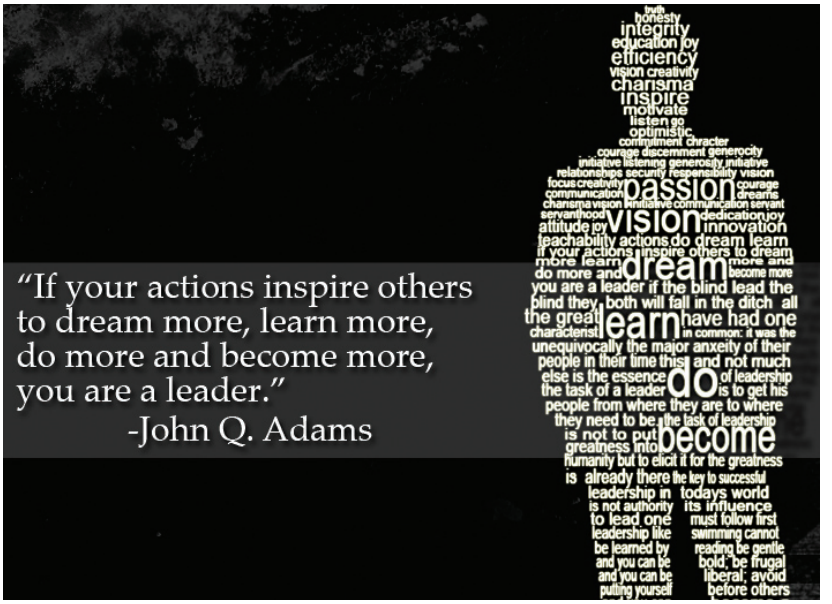
In an all too often scenario, a Soldier leads others while their own life is in shambles. By focusing on their subordinates, the Soldier diverts attention to others, ignoring personal reality.

Leadership-proper is often detailed via principles, processes and incorporates personality-driven elements.

Yet, there are problematic trends of leadership that must be clearly marked.

An evaluation of what should be avoided is necessary. While self-grading is a difficult assignment, diligent homework will result in high marks on life's daily test.

Soldiers must meet opportunities, obstacles and options with measured decision-making. Contemplation must be engaged before reaching the needed conclusion.



Some leaders believe they have earned certain rights, roles and riches, even if the goal is negated ethically. One's assessment is determined by the ability to misuse rather than through careful thinking.

"Why not!?" becomes the means of blind appraisal and mistaken action and this comment is a flippant exclamation, not a serious inquisition. It proclaims an entitlement that will not be denied. "I can do it and therefore, I will do it."

Such unchecked, self-awarded privileges result in an undoing. The only principal question is "Why?" The reasoning behind a leader's claim of reward must be self-dissected.

Soldiers naturally know the basic role of battle buddies. Leading is enhanced by a healthy peer group. As one has wisely said, "Show me your friends and I will show you your future."

Choosing associates based on their blind support is incredibly naïve and unwise. "Yes" is not always the correct answer. Leaders must hear what is needed, not what is wanted. To avoid danger, choose friends who care enough to tell the truth.

There are various sights that ignite the heart and mind. Such a fire can cause many burns and demolish lives. The Soldier's direct access to electronic information and images is not without impact.

Like many tools, the Internet can be healthy or hurtful. Late night, private surfing can entice the unprepared to engage scenes they hope will never be brought to light.

When confronted, firm counsel is met with blatant justification. The instant claim is the paradoxical "public life vs. private life." What a person does behind closed doors does shape their world outside the front door therefore accountability to self and others is a primary responsibility.

The realization of mistakes made can cause the Soldier to create an altered reality in which to escape. Lies are more frequent, stories more inflated and fault is readily dismissed.

A refusal to own the issue creates a deception of trickery in order to walk away without blame or scratch from the incident. Confrontation is avoided by rearranging the facts and misinterpreting the events.

When given solid advice on the matters at hand, it is ignored. Rejecting the wisdom of others is to discard the compass. Deflection and defection become fruit from a diseased tree.

Dismissal of the commands provided by superiors is an indicator of deep-seated rebellion. It is manifested in a denial of leading self from the grips of isolation and preservation. This insubordination stems from a vain philosophy concerned only with three individuals: me, myself and I.

It is only a matter of time before such ignorance results in discipline or dismissal.

The elephant in the room can be seen, albeit in different forms. Body language, idle effort and wandering eyes communicate louder than words. Soldiers admire the leadership position, but not its current occupant.

The orders will be followed and fulfilled, but not without bitterness and resentment. The one being led embraces selective authority.

Often, a Soldier is asked to perform a duty that is normally reserved for those of a higher rank. A superior will likely see potential and capability in a subordinate. The challenge is set before the individual to stretch beyond normal job performance.

Push-back may be the immediate response, claiming an inability to engage such an unfamiliar job. Reluctance to embrace a superior's trust may simply be contentment. Caution must be issued: complacency and carelessness are lurking close by.

MEDICAL WATCH

Holiday Eating Tips: You can have your pie and eat it too!

Commentary by U.S. Army Maj. Renee E. Cole, PhD, RD

The holidays are tough for most people considering the abundance of special holiday foods served and the care packages received.

Let's think about some strategies to get through the holidays without the excess weight gain and associated guilt.

Moderation is key! You can definitely have your pie and eat it, too, if you practice moderation. Use smaller plates or smaller portions. Reduce your portion size by 25 percent to save calories and have room for dessert. Take your dessert to go and eat it one to two hours later.

Honor your hunger! Don't starve yourself during the day in anticipation of "pigging out" at dinner. Plus, when we are ravenous, we tend to crave higher fat and higher sugar food options.

Going more than four to five hours without food teaches your body to store fat and leads to lowering your metabolism.

If you're hungry two hours before a meal, have a small snack (100-150 calories), such as a handful of trail mix, piece of fruit with peanut butter or a granola bar. This will help you to control how much you eat during a meal and to make better choices.

Feel your fullness! It takes 20 minutes for the stomach signals to reach your brain. If you eat too quickly you won't be able to recognize that you've eaten too much until it's too late.

Pay attention to how your body cues change throughout the meal. Slow down and assess how you feel every couple of minutes. The goal is to stop when you are no longer hungry, but feel comfortable.

Many of us joined the "Clean Your Plate" club as kids and have learned to ignore our fullness signals. Fullness means your body has enough fuel to exist. No matter how healthy the food is, excess food will be stored as fat. So if you "pig out" you'll be carrying that excess holiday meal as a new addition to your hips or stomach.

Don't deprive yourself! For those of us that feel we have to avoid specific food items or forbid ourselves from a having a dessert, you may be sabotaging your efforts.

Typically when we deprive ourselves, temptation for that food grows day by day. It's only a matter of time before we cave and over indulge.

Enjoy your food! If you decide to have dessert, take less food initially and then savor the flavor.

Studies show that when a person pays attention to flavor, temperature and texture by eating slowly, they are able to enjoy and eat less. You might find you are satisfied with less of the usual amount. Remember, you don't have to finish it.

Become a mindful eater! Awareness is one of the most important factors in weight management efforts. When we eat while completing another task, our attention is diverted to an unconscious event.

This is an easy way to consume excess calories, contributing to weight gain. Next time ask yourself if you're really hungry; if so, separate a portion of that food item before sitting down.

You can enjoy the holiday season and all of the foods available by practicing the simple techniques of moderation, listening to hunger and fullness cues and mindful eating.



Chaplain Watch

Men's greatest need: respect

Commentary by U.S. Army Chaplain (Maj.) Eddie Kinley
CJTF-1 Family Life Chaplain

Last month we discovered that women basically need expressions of love – open communication, open affection and focusing on the small things.

Men, on the other hand, operate from a completely different vantage point than their spouse. Men are relatively simple and are wired differently than women. Men do not operate based on emotions and do not communicate their feelings in order to maintain productivity.

So where do we go wrong communicating in marriage? The primary commandment we continually break in marriage is we love from our perspective and from our needs. Consequently, men love their wives the way they believe women should receive love and women demonstrate their love toward their husbands in a manner in which they interpret love.

I once had a wife tell me in sheer exuberance that she was sending her husband a dozen roses for Valentine's Day. My attempt to convince her otherwise was in vain. She was presenting a gift to her husband in a manner in which she interpreted love. The bottom line is simple: Love your husband the way he expects to be loved.

So what do men really need from their wives? Respect. It's that simple.

A survey was taken a few years back in which 100 men were asked a simple question: "Is it more important for you to hear your wife say 'I love you' or 'I respect you?'" Ninety-eight men said, without hesitation, 'I would prefer my wife communicate to me how much she respects me.'

Now, let us examine this concept carefully; men already know they are loved by their wives. Women are natural lovers and all the members of the family feel the intensity of her love. Have you ever wondered why a child runs to mom instead of dad when they are emotionally or physically injured? Mom has a unique way of emotionally connecting with pain and suffering; men are not built this way.

Countless men have walked into my office communicating the fact that their wives do not respect them and often find themselves trapped in the marriage. Women are under the assumption men must earn their respect. Unfortunately, this thinking is a no win situation.

You place a double burden on your husband by first demanding his love and, secondly, he must earn your respect. He is left to do all the work, emotionally, while the wife sits back and does nothing.

Why do men have affairs? I conduct marriage counseling with a lot of couples and spouses who have fallen prey to infidelity. Usually I will ask the man, if he is the guilty spouse, what led him to having an affair. The most common answer is never the answer we consider as very few men have affairs for the sole purpose of sexual fulfillment.

Men have affairs because they meet women who meet and affirm their manhood. You will usually hear the man describe how much his lover or ex-lover affirms and respects him, how she always listened to him and never put him down or challenged his ego.

Men are less likely to find respect outside of the home when they are continually supported inside the home. Unfortunately, women find it difficult to respect their husbands because they are under the assumption that respect is earned.

Think about this concept for a moment. Men lose on both fronts. The husband must show his wife how much he loves her and he must earn respect. So what is the wife responsible for?

Wives must learn to respect their husbands even if they do not believe he deserves it. Likewise, men must demonstrate love for their wives regardless of the circumstance or situation.

In order to demonstrate respect for your husband, tell him how much you appreciate his hard work and dedication to his family. Men need to know their hard work and labor are not in vain. He feels great when his wife acknowledges how hard he works and how much he is willing to sacrifice for the safety and security of his family.

Try practicing this simple method and watch how it works wonders. If he is not used to your compliments, he may first look with suspicious eyes, but continue to affirm him and watch how eventually he begins to warm up.

Secondly, always lift him up in public; men love public affirmation. Tell your friends in your husband's presence how valuable he is to you and how much you love and honor him. Also, lift him up in front of the children. Tell them how lucky they are to have a dad who works hard and who is faithful to his family. Applaud his promotions and acknowledgments.

In all my years, I can truly say that I have never heard my mom say one negative comment about my dad. Never criticize what he fails to perform. I know how easy it is to get upset when he forgets to empty the trash or pick up his clothes, but remember men's brains are different. We really have every intention to do what is right, but we are easy to forget.

However, it does little good to talk to your husband like a child; this will not motivate him to do better. Try these simple and practical steps, and I guarantee it will transform how your husband treats you.

Interesting facts about married men. Did you know…

- Married men are more successful at work, getting promoted more often and receiving higher performance appraisals?
- 50% of men are both physically and emotionally satisfied by their wife?
- 59% of the population is married?
- Only 22.4% of homes where only the husband is employed?
- Only 25% cite an affair as an actual reason for divorce?

Quote for the month -
"The more you invest in a marriage, the more valuable it becomes."
- Amy Grant

Unit Watch

Dignity, Reverence and Respect: Quartermaster Soldiers Honor the Fallen

By Spc. Cody Barber
RC-East PAO

They are the behind-the-scene heroes, the ones who don't serve for money or glory, but for honor.

The 54th Quartermaster Company out of Fort Lee, Va., is one of two active duty mortuary affairs units that deal with casualties. This 15-person detachment supports three of five regional commands in Afghanistan regardless of the servicemember's home country.

"We take care of all fallen heroes that pass away here in theater and we send them back to their families," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jesus Munoz from Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and a Mortuary Affairs Specialist with 54th QM Co. "The Soldiers take a lot of pride in the work they do."

The unit is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week and resides in an isolated compound because they have to be ready at all times for casualties of war.

"It means a lot to us when we do our job," Munoz continued. "I'm proud to be the last person who sends [families] their loved ones home from theater."

In the area where the Soldiers work, a sign hangs up on the wall that reads three words: Dignity, Reverence, and Respect – fitting traits that best describe the character of these men and women.

"I instil those qualities in my guys," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Carlos Quintero an Aguadilla, Puerto Rico native and the non-commissioned officer in charge of the 54th QM Co. "That is what we live by."

This is a fallen hero's last stop before returning home.



Spc. Jennifer Martinez, a native of Houston, Texas, and a Mortuary Affairs Specialist with the 54th Quartermaster Company, irons out the U.S. flag Oct. 15. Martinez processes the personal effects that come with each casualty, but everyone in the unit helps out with all tasks.

Quintero ensures that his team gives them the dignity, respect and reverence they deserve for making the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their nation.

"I'm here and these guys are out there, these heroes, and they are risking their lives and getting killed," said Quintero. "I just want to give them as much as I can of my respect, dignity and reverence."

Munoz said that giving these brave men and women the proper honors is the main thing that motivates them and then all the technical aspects of the job just fall into place.

"Its three qualities we take when we do this job," Munoz added. "We see the aftermath of war but it's not the last thing that happens. We have to take care of the family by making sure the [fallen heroes] make it back home."

They have flags for every country that has troops deployed in Afghanistan supporting the Global War on Terror. No matter where the fallen hero comes from, they put the same amount of detail into preparing each respective flag they cover the fallen with.

"The flags represent the country which that fallen hero died for," said Quintero. "We do the same for every flag, every country we drape the flag the same way."

As soon as a call comes in, they start ironing out any kinks and wrinkles in the flag so that it is pristine and crisp when they dress it over a silver transfer case.

"The flag is like their uniform and you should have pride in it," said Munoz. "We have to make it as sharp as possible."

Spc. Jennifer Martinez, a native of Houston, Texas, and a Mortuary Affairs Specialist with the 54th QM Co., explains why it is so important to make sure the flag that covers the fallen hero is perfect.

"It's disrespectful to have a messed up flag," said Martinez. "They gave their life for [their country] and it's very disrespectful to let someone leave with a flag that's dirty or messed up."

"The flag will be the only thing that will be seen by the family when the fallen hero first arrives back home and we want it to be flawless," Martinez added.

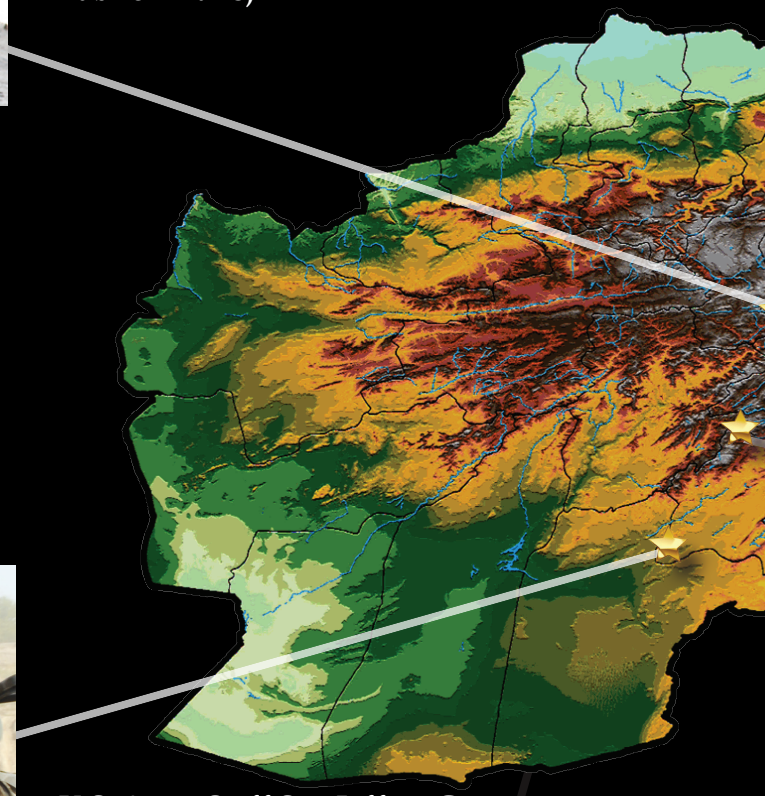
Quintero added that since thier compound is the last stop a fallen servicemember will have in country, it's important make sure everything is done to a high standard. He ensures that every single fallen servicemember going home is properly prepared for their families.

"At the end of the day, [we] know the fallen hero is going home to the families the right way," said Quintero. "It gives me a sense of satisfaction because I know I took care of them at their last stop in country."

Goodwill across Afghanistan:



Spc. Justin Phillips, a Bossier City, La., native, with Bravo Company, 2nd Squadron, 38th Cavalry Regiment, 504th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, chats with a child during a key leader engagement mission in Ganjitsu Kalay Sept. 30. Key leader engagements allow coalition forces the opportunity to meet with local elders and leaders of tribes to learn about issues in their communities and offer help in finding solutions. U. S. Forces cleared 14 improvised explosive devices from this child's town.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Kristina L. Truluck, 504th BSB Public Affairs)



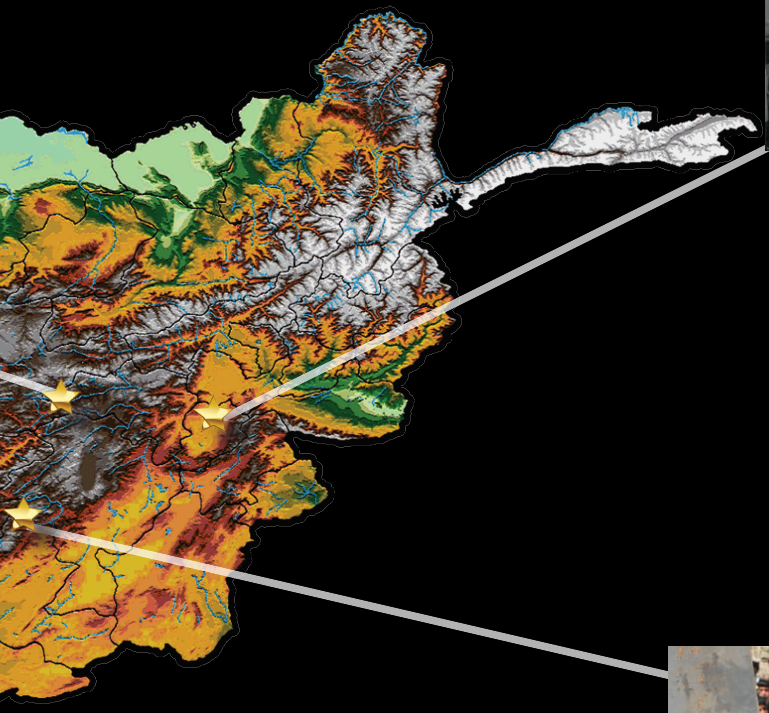


U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Gogue, a native of Sinajana, Guam shakes the hand of a local villager in Talukan village in Kandahar province Oct. 22. Gogue, a weapons squad leader with 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, helps provide security for coalition forces who are working on roads throughout the area. On an almost daily basis, Gogue takes time to talk with the local villagers.(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler, ISAF Joint Command Public Affairs)

ISAF and ANSF Reach Out



Air Force Capt. Rashida Graves of the U.S. Forces - Afghanistan Civil Affairs Directorate, helps unload donated supplies at the Bibi Mahrow school in Kabul Oct. 12. Troops from USFOR-A and the Medical Embedded Training Team at the New Kabul Compound delivered supplies and handed them out to students and teachers.(Photo by Erika Stetson, U.S. Forces Afghanistan Public Affairs)





Local schoolchildren cross the Bagh-E-Pol Bridge in Kandahar Province for the first time at the official ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 24.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Melissa Stewart, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division Public Affairs)

STORY SNAPSHOTS



Visiting

Staff members with the Sergeant Major of the Army wait to depart Forward Operating Base Sharana after spending an afternoon visiting Soldiers in Paktika province Oct. 17. Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III hosted a town hall meeting at the FOB where Soldiers were able to ask him questions about the future of the Army. Task Force Blackhawk is responsible for all military action within Paktika province, which shares a border with Pakistan.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Robert Holland, TF Blackhawk Public Affairs)

Watching

U.S. Army Pfc. Michael Ridgway a native of Omaha, Neb., serving with Task Force Black Knight, 3rd Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, provides security during Operation Shamshir in Zardad, Paktika province Oct. 18.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Jacob Kohrs, Joint Combat Camera Afghanistan)





Illuminating

A U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle is illuminated by a lightning bolt during a storm near Bagram Air Field Oct. 6.(Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht, 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard Public Affairs)



Leaning

A young boy leans over a wall trying to get the attention of U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jayson Allen, commander of the Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team, as he hands out school supplies to a group of children in the Mehtar Lam district of Laghman province Oct. 14. The PRT traveled to the village of Deh E Ziarat to meet with the village elder and the people to talk about their community. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Crane, Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)



Searching

Afghan National Army Soldiers search a local Afghan while patrolling the village of Shaykhan in Logar province during Operation Shamshir Oct. 18. Operation Shamshir was a joint effort conducted in order to disrupt insurgent activity.(Photo by U.S. Army Pvt. Courtney Ropp, Joint Combat Camera Afghanistan)



Learning

Afghan National Army Sgt. Zahir Atifi, 52nd Medical Company, applies an intra-venous saline lock to a fellow Afghan Soldier during a week-long medical training event on Forward Operating Base Sharana Oct. 26.(Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Zackary Root, RC-East PAO)



Patrolling

Afghan National Army commandos conduct a foot patrol during a clearing operation in the La'pur district of Nangahar province Nov. 4. Afghan commandos, partnered with coalition special operations forces, conducted the operation to disrupt a known insurgent safe haven and promote security in the area.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Anderson Savoy, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan Public Affairs)



Reconning

U.S. Air Force Staff Master Sgt. David Vinatieri, a civil engineer deployed out of F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo., attached to the Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team, inspects a school from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter in the Alingar district, Laghman Province Oct. 7. The PRT conducted air reconnaissance due to the unforgiving terrain and known insurgent activity in the area.(Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ryan Crane, Laghman Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)



Guarding

U.S. Army Pfc. Alexander Padilla, of Chicago, a member of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, guards the perimeter of the Achin District Center in Nangarhar province, with his partner, Bruno Seven, Nov. 5.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Ken Scar, RC-East PAO)



Training

Afghan National Civil Order Police explosive ordnance disposal technician Sgt. Nasrullah Mohammad Sharif probes the ground where a possible pressure-plate improvised explosive device is buried, during training Oct. 23. The training was facilitatd by the 466th Expeditionary Squadron EOD team.(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division Public Affairs)



Clearing

An Afghan National Army commando pulls security during a clearing operation in La'pur in Nangahar province Nov. 4. Afghan commandos, partnered with coalition special operations forces, conducted the operation to disrupt a known insurgent safe haven and promote security in the area.(Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Anderson Savoy, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan Public Affairs)

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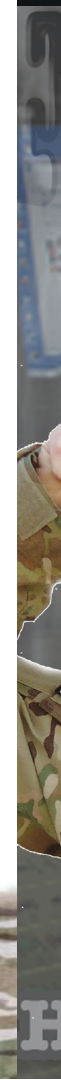
- Qualify for a Secret Security Clearance
- Meet Army HT/WT Standards IAW AR600-9
- Valid Drivers License w/no alcohol related violations in past 5 yrs
- Cannot be Pregnant at time of selection or prior to attending ARC
- GT Score of 110 (Waiverable to 95 GT w/ 95 ST)
- No Visible Tattoos that may be perceived as offensive/distasteful

More Information:

For More Information Please Contact the First Cavalry Division Outreach NCO

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Bagram, Afghanistan
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Cell: 079-731-2426

America's First Team



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THE FINAL WATCH



Spc. James Doran, a native of Oregon City, Ore., and a UH-60 Black Hawk crew chief for Company C , 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Task Force Spearhead inspects a tail rotor after a flight Oct. 10.(Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Richard Wrigley, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade Public Affairs)