

THE Falcon Flyer

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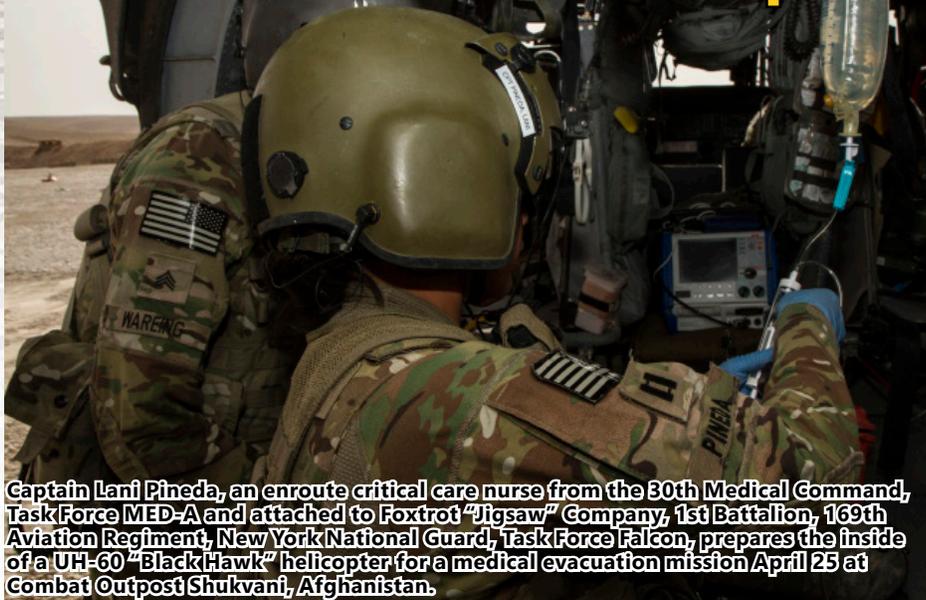
Story and photos by Sgt. Luke Rollins
COMBAT OUT-POST SHUKVANI, Afghanistan – It took a night medical evacuation mission in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, for all of Capt. Lani Pineda’s hopes and fears from becoming an Army enroute critical care nurse to materialize. She had left the Air Force a year earlier, she said, after seeing the Army nurses in Balad, Iraq, stepping off helicopters disheveled and triumphant from their successful missions.

“I saw them and I said to myself, ‘Oh – I want to do that,’” said Pineda, an Olympia, Wash., native, who deployed to both Iraq and Germany in a hospital setting before coming to Afghanistan.

A year later Capt. Pineda found herself in a Helmand poppy field, her UH-60 “Black Hawk” helicopter swallowed in darkness but an obvious target to any nearby enemy.

“As soon as they opened the door, the poppy just flew in and filled the inside of the helicopter,” she said. “I like to think

Flight Nurse Brings Hospital Care to Helmand Helicopters



Captain Lani Pineda, an enroute critical care nurse from the 30th Medical Command, Task Force MED-A and attached to Foxtrot “Jigsaw” Company, 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, New York National Guard, Task Force Falcon, prepares the inside of a UH-60 “Black Hawk” helicopter for a medical evacuation mission April 25 at Combat Outpost Shukvani, Afghanistan.

I’m gung-ho and I can go to those places, but for a moment...”

Once they were airborne in the helicopter, however, her training took over. She and the flight medic from “Jigsaw” Dust-off out of Combat Outpost Shukvani worked together, combining her familiarity with hospital methods and machinery with the medic’s emergency trauma care to stabilize the patient. All in a third of the time it might have taken either one of them alone.

Captain Lani Pineda, an enroute critical care nurse from the 30th Medical Command, Task Force MED-A and attached to Foxtrot “Jigsaw” Company, 1st Battalion, 169th Aviation Regiment, New York National Guard, Task Force Falcon, is one of eight nurses in Afghanistan bringing clinical experience to medical evacuation units on the front lines.

It is Pineda’s first Afghanistan deployment and her first time working with a medical evacuation unit. The mentorship she has received from Jigsaw has been invaluable, she said.

Sergeant Christopher Wareing, a New Hampshire National Guard flight medic and flight instructor with Jigsaw, said working with Pineda was easy because of her enthusiasm to learn.

“She came in with an open

mind and a high level of respect for what we do,” said Wareing. “She wanted to know how she could squeeze her emergency room, critical care and [intensive care unit] knowledge into the back of a helicopter.”

Although she came to supplement the Jigsaw crew through education and in doing so expand their scope of practice, Pineda said she feels she’s the one who’s doing the learning.

“It’s such a humbling experience,” she said. “I think they teach me more than I teach them.”

“Watching them save lives and knowing that I’m a part of it is amazing. They’ve really been like a family to me in the short time that I’ve been here.”

For his part, Wareing said her presence has led to an upswing in the unit’s morale. In the evenings the flight crews

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often come together for a few rounds of the game “Catch Phrase,” and the laughter inevitably follows.

She’s just got the knack for it, said Wareing.

“She’s excited to [bring people together], because she just wants everyone to have a good time,” he said.

Pineda said it’s just her nature.

“I love to talk to people, I love to help them out—it gives me a high,” she said.

It’s what lead her to become a nurse in the first place.

“The more I looked at the medical field, I saw how nurses played a role in patient care,” Pineda said. “To know that is your job as a nurse, to care for people physically, emotionally, spiritually—it’s one of those few jobs where you can honestly say you changed somebody’s life.

Practicing in Afghanistan has thrown her motivation into relief. She said the bare bones immediacy of medical evacuation and the exhilaration of saving lives reminds her every day of this motivation. A nurse and a Soldier, Capt. Lani Pineda said she is

proud of her contribution to the International Security Assistance Force’s mission in Afghanistan.

“I wanted to say I put my combat boots to work,” said Pineda. “How many nurses can say they flew in a helicopter in Afghanistan, and landed in a poppy field? To have these memories and know what I did—I’m fortunate to have had the opportunity to be here.”•

Major Jason Raub, the executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, Task Force Knighthawk, low crawls beneath barbed wire during the “Mustang Mudder” obstacle course May 5 at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. The “Mustang Mudder” competition was a test of Knighthawk Soldiers’ toughness, strength, stamina, camaraderie, and mental agility. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Luke Rollins)



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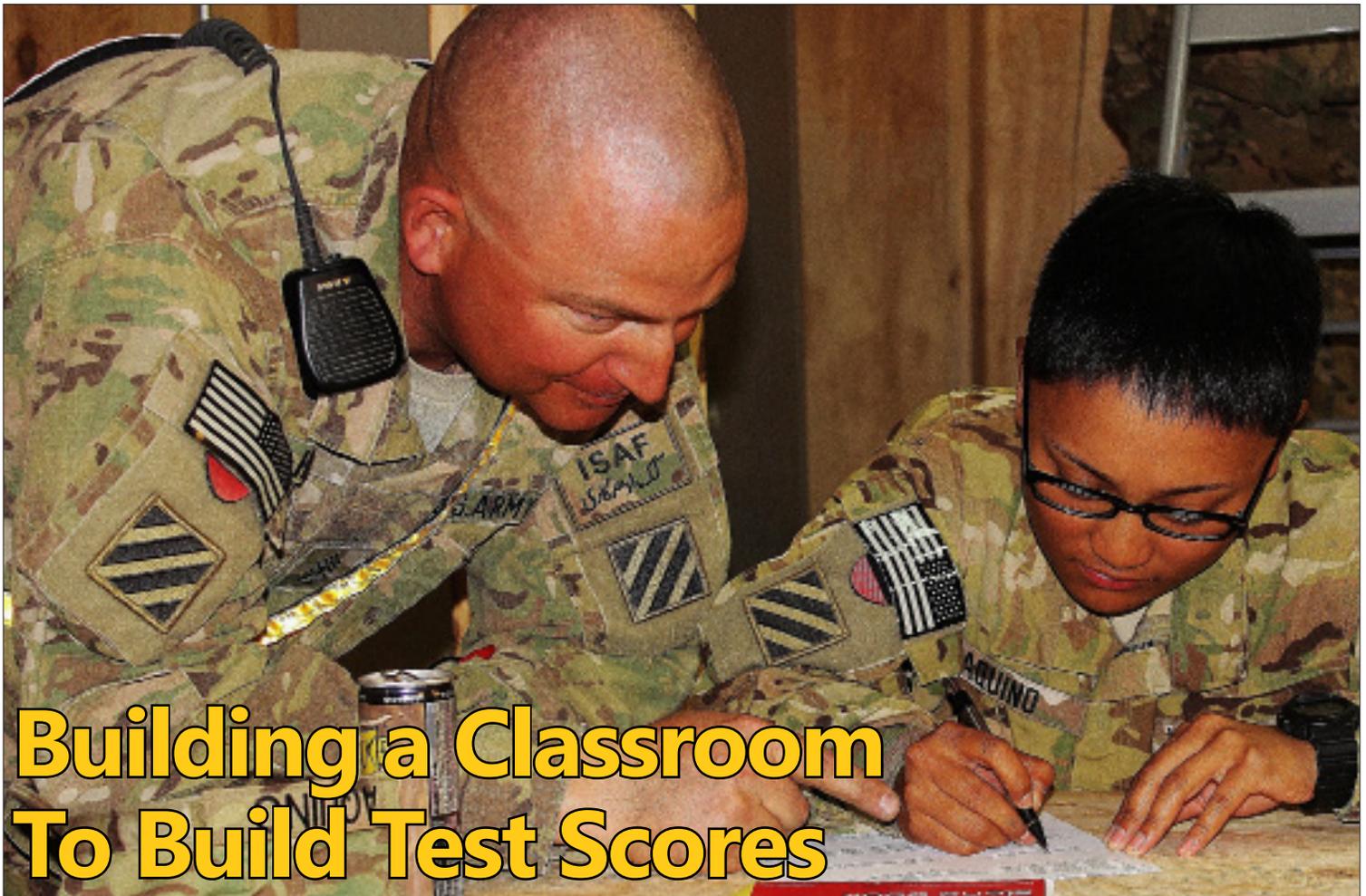
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Building a Classroom To Build Test Scores

First Sergeant Robert A. Herfel of Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, Task Force Viper, helps Specialist Nathalie Aquino, a petroleum supply specialist with E Co., 1-3 AVN, and a student in the Fundamental Academic Skills Training Class with a math problem March 10 at Forward Operating Base Wolverine, Afghanistan. Herfel, the class instructor, built the classroom in order to give his Soldiers the space to pursue their education and career goals. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Robert Carlile)

Story by 1st Lt. Rachael Berkoff, Task Force Viper Unit Public Affairs Representative

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WOLVERINE, Afghanistan – When 1st Sgt. Robert A. Herfel set out to establish a Fundamental Academic Skills Training class at Forward Operating Base Wolverine, Afghanistan, it wasn't just a matter of gathering books and students. The small outpost in the Zabul province didn't even have an education center. So Herfel began building desks out of extra wood he found around the FOB.

"I spent a day building desks so we'd have a suitable classroom for students to learn comfortably," said Herfel, the first sergeant of Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, Task Force Viper.

Herfel, a Soldiers Grove, Wis., native, transformed a space in his own office, the FOB Wolverine Motor Pool, into the classroom where he helps Soldiers increase their General Technical scores on the Armed

Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.

The class reinforces basic reading and mathematics skills, said Herfel, targeting the three components of the general technical score: word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, and arithmetic reasoning. An improved score allows Soldiers to have broader choices in their military occupation specialty, or MOS.

Twenty students enrolled in the first six-week iteration, which meets four times a week for two and a half hours a night.

Specialist Nathalie Aquino, one of Herfel's students and a petroleum supply specialist with E Co., 1-3 AVN, said she takes the class in order to explore the opportunities within her career field.

"The FAST class is very helpful for me," said Spc. Aquino, a Livermore, Calif., native. "First Sergeant Herfel makes sure we understand the basics, and if we don't, he

will find a way to easily explain the problem until we do."

Command Sergeant Major George M. Dove, the Task Force Viper command sergeant major, said Herfel's motivation to educate his Soldiers was extraordinary.

"It is awesome to have noncommissioned officers who are willing to teach and train Soldiers in areas outside their MOS," said Command Sgt. Maj. Dove. "This is a great opportunity for our Soldiers."

It's all part of being a noncommissioned officer, said Herfel.

"As an NCO, I feel it is my job to teach, coach, and mentor Soldiers to not only be trained and good at their job, but to expand their opportunity to be successful at life, even after the military," said 1st Sgt. Herfel. "Education is the best way I can help my Soldiers grow." •



Specialist Jasmyn Ramis of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, Task Force Brawler, performs the duties of an AH-64D Longbow Armament Technician with absolute proficiency. Specialist Ramis is an integral factor in the successful operations of the Forward Arming and Refuel Point (FARP) in sustainment of 14 Apache Longbow supporting Task Force Brawler’s mission. Specialist Ramis is responsible for the accident-free operations in the loading and management of over 8,000 rounds of munitions. She supervises three Soldiers in the rearming of Hellfire Missiles, 2.75 inch Rockets, and 30mm rounds for the diverse weapon systems of the AH-64D. Specialist Ramis emphasizes safe practices and controls the risk factors to ensure efficiency and reduce the probability of incident in the high tempo maintenance actions which quickly redeploy Marne Air’s greatest attack asset. She continually conducts herself as a leader and as a professional maintaining a mission focused attitude. Her diligence provides sound technical expertise for her peers and junior Soldiers. Her exemplary performance is one to be emulated by her peers and is the pride of Task Force Falcon. •



Maj. Gen. Kevin W. Mangum, center, commanding general of the U.S. Army Aviation Center for Excellence, and Maj. Gen. Lynn Collyar, right, commanding general of the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Life Cycle Management Command, walk with Col. Allan Pepin, left, commander, Task Force Falcon, during a visit May 7.



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