

Freedom Watch



Defense Digest

News from the DoD

DOD

Military absentee voting 'primary' concern for FVAP

WASHINGTON – For the Federal Voting Assistance Program, getting deployed troops and their families engaged in the current election season is a primary goal.

Ahead of the November general election, FVAP, which fosters voting participation by uniformed and U.S. citizens abroad, is assisting eligible absentee voters who wish to cast ballots in their states' primary election.

"It's important that voters participate in the upcoming primary elections," said Polli Brunelli, the program's chief. "We have over 20 primaries occurring in February, so now is the time, if you've received your ballot, to vote and get it back by the state deadlines."

During an interview, Brunelli said registering to vote is a simple process. "Absentee voters fill out a federal postcard application form to request a ballot, send it into their local election official where the voter is legally authorized to vote," she said. The ballot will be sent to the voter, who votes on the ballot and sends it back to the local election office.

Paper copies of the application form are available at military installations, embassies and consulates and organizations of overseas citizens. Electronic forms are posted online at the FVAP Web site, www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefvab.html.

Citizens using this form should vote and submit it immediately using regular mail or, where allowed by state law, by fax or e-mail, to their local election officials. The FVAP's Integrated Voting Alternative Site at www.fvap.gov/ivas/fvap_state_menu.html shows citizens if fax or e-mail alternatives are permitted in their home state.

Voting-assistance officers are stationed at military installations abroad to help FVAP implement its program initiatives. Equipped with state-by-state voting assistance guides, the officers are available to assist servicemembers in navigating the registration process and election procedures and inform voters of relevant deadlines, Brunelli noted.

FVAP carries out the responsibilities of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, which protects the voting rights of active-duty military members, Merchant Marines, eligible family members and citizens residing outside the United States.

Members of the U.S. armed forces traditionally represent an active component of overall voting-age Americans. The total voting participation rate among servicemembers was 79 percent in 2004, compared to the 64 percent rate of the general public, according to FVAP figures.

In a memorandum to military secretaries and top commanders, Defense Secretary Robert Gates underscored the importance of extending voting rights to servicemembers at home and abroad.

"With the calendar of primary elections beginning early and stretching through September 2008," Gates said, "it is important that the department and the services be prepared to carry out the voting assistance mission to inform and educate U.S. citizens of the right to vote, foster voting participation and protect the integrity of the electoral process."

Air Force

Leaders announce policy changes for Airmen in AOR

WASHINGTON – Changes are on the horizon for Airmen serving in the Central Command area of responsibility. In an effort to standardize policies among those assigned and those deployed to the CENTCOM AOR, Air Force officials will implement several changes beginning as soon as February.

"There are several reasons for these changes," said Air Force Lt. Col. Scott Brady, chief of Air Force promotions and evaluations policy at the Pentagon. "We have Airmen on 365-day deployments and Airmen who are permanent party sitting side by side, for the same amount of time, but some policies affect them differently. So, in those policy areas where it made sense to make a change and where we could make a change, we did."

The first major change is that enlisted Airmen will no longer test for promotion in the AOR. Currently, permanent-party Airmen, those who are in permanent-change-of-station status, test for promotion while Airmen on 365-day deployments do not. Once implemented, the policy change will cease all Weighted Airman Promotion System testing in the AOR regardless of duty status.

"(Testing Airmen in the AOR) reduces mission focus and increases our footprint because it requires secure testing facilities, test proctors and test-control officers," Brady said. "We also had to consider that many Airmen have to travel to the test site, putting more Airmen on the road and in harm's way."

Instead, eligible Airmen will test before deploying if the testing cycle is ongoing, and, if they are deployed during the testing cycle, they will have 60 days to study upon their return to home station. If selected for promotion, they will receive back-pay and benefits based on their original date of rank, Brady said.

Skills Knowledge Test exemption policies will remain the same and will be considered on a case-by-case basis, he said.

Airmen on 365-day deployments in the AOR can also expect changes to physical-fitness testing policies. Fitness testing has been prohibited for these Airmen while those permanently assigned are required to test if it is "safe and reasonable" to do so, said Brady.

"We are going to remove that testing limitation for 365-day deployers and leave the decision to the commanders on the ground," said Brady. "If it is safe and reasonable (to test), the commander can direct the fitness test."

The final policy change includes not only Airmen on 365-day deployments but those who are extended to 300 or more days after they've deployed.

"Currently, Airmen who deploy on an approved 365-day indeterminate temporary-duty assignment can apply for advance-assignment consideration or a 24-month assignment deferment but Airmen who are extended to 365 days can not," Brady said. "To make this policy more equitable, we're applying those benefits to Airmen who are extended to 300 days or more."

Airmen who wish to apply for an advanced assignment or deferment will do so through their home-station unit commanders upon returning from deployment.

"The desires of the Airman will be heavily considered, but they must apply; the program is not automatic. Also, unit manning and the needs of the Air Force will still be deciding factors," said Brady.

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COVER: Army Maj. Warren
Cusick, a certified registered
nurse anesthetist and the of-
ficer-in-charge of the 160th
Forward Surgical Team, takes
a moment to play with an in-
fant brought in for treatment
at the FOB Naray Aid Station
in northeastern Afghanistan.
*Photo: Spc. Gregory Argenti-
eri*

BACK COVER: An Afghan girl
takes a break from unloading
a truck full of school supplies
at her school near Forward
Operating Base Salerno. *Pho-
to: Senior Airman Christine
Collier*

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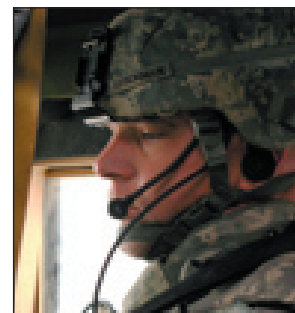
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Aid station makes a difference along border

Story and photo by

Spc. Gregory Argentieri

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team

Public Affairs

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan—Surrounded by snow-covered mountains, the medical personnel of Task Force Saber work side-by-side to provide a first-class, life-saving aid station on Forward Operating Base Naray, in northeastern Afghanistan along the Pakistani border.

The FOB Naray Aid Station team is comprised of medical personnel from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team and the 160th Forward Surgical Team. Their first responsibility is to U.S. Soldiers, whether providing routine shots, taking care of troops when they're sick, caring for them when they are injured or their top priority: treating Soldiers wounded in action.

"The Soldiers know we are here for them and that has given me a lot of good feelings about being out here. It's a huge privilege to be able to take care of U.S. Soldiers," said Army Maj. Warren Cusick, a certified registered nurse-anesthetist and the officer-in-charge of the 160th FST.

"The main thing is for troops to have confidence and know when they go fight they're going to be cared for if anything happens to them. I used to be enlisted and one thing that made me confident was knowing I would get medical care, and that is important," said Cusick.

Even though the aid station is only a few tents, the TF Saber medical team delivers care day and night as close to the fight as logistically possible.

"Our biggest challenge is ensuring the U.S. personnel are taken care of when they get wounded in battle and that is what we're always training for," said Army Capt. Scott Harrington, a family medicine doctor assigned to Charlie Company, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion.

"In a big battle, we could have 10 or 20 Soldiers come at one time; that's happened before. We handled it appropriately, got everybody out and saved their lives," he said.

"I am much more emotionally invested out here because I'm among friends. It's very scary when we know the guys are in harm's way," Harrington said. "Every time somebody goes out, one of our medics from the aid station goes with the line units. Whenever they go on convoys, one of our medics, whom I work with daily, goes out with them."



Army Sgt. Cody Vernon, 160th Forward Surgical Team, prepares an Afghan stone mason for medical evacuation from Forward Operating Base Naray Aid Station to the Craig Joint Theater Hospital on Bagram Airfield for surgery. The mason broke his back when the wall he was building fell on him.

The Naray Aid Station does more than provide medical care for American Soldiers. They also are providing life-changing and life-saving medical treatment to many Afghans, Afghan National Security Forces, and, when the need arises, the enemy.

"We have the best relationship with the aid station, they help us all the time," said Afghan National Army Capt. Amanullah, a general-internal doctor assigned to the 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps. "When our soldiers are sick, first we treat them. We try to cure them ourselves. If we are unable to cure them, we take them to the aid station, and the good doctors help us. We have a very good relationship."

"I was worried and nervous about being treated by U.S. doctors, not knowing what to expect, but after arriving at the aid station and seeing how nice and kind everyone was, I was okay," said Afghan Soldier Sherin Beg, a medic assigned to 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps. "Within an hour of arriving, I was asleep on the operating table having my appendix removed; the next thing, I was awake and it was all over."

The majority of people in need of medical care at the aid station have turned out to be Afghan. By word of mouth, the doctors and medics are gaining the trust of the locals and are building a solid reputation for their compassionate and respectful medical treatment.

"Since we've been deployed, from May 2007, the [aid station] has seen 5,400 local na-

tionals in our five clinics throughout the upper Kunar Province," said Harrington. "We see many children, adults and fewer women, but every day we're seeing more of the local nationals and more [females] because they're feeling more comfortable with us."

Ramdad, an Afghan from the nearby village of Juba, is one of the 5,400 people pleased with the services provided by the Soldiers at the Saber-run aid stations.

"The first time I came to see the Coalition forces hospital on FOB Naray was three months ago when I brought my daughter for treatment because she was burned. I was not sure the doctors were going to take her, but they treated my daughter and the doctors did a good job," said Ramdad. "I was very happy, and because of that, I brought my 3-year-old son, who is sick with pneumonia, in for help. We are happy with the American doctors taking care of our people because we are poor. We are not able to take our sick family members out of the country and it's helpful for us."

The doctors and medics working at the FOB Naray Aid Station are highly trained, dedicated professionals, working day in and day out, while remaining committed to providing excellent medical care.

"Being out here providing the care that I've been trained to do is why I joined the Army. I get to wake up every day and know that I am doing the right thing," Harrington said.



Army Staff Sgt. Dawayne Krepel (right), squad leader, and Spc. Trevor Petsch (left), Paratrooper, both from 2nd Platoon, Able Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), search a vehicle with the help of Afghan National Police on the Pech River Road in Kunar Province.

Able Company ‘snaps’ illegal activities

**Story and photos by
Army Sgt. Brandon Aird**

*173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs*

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Paratroopers in 2nd Platoon, Able Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), hold tactical checkpoints on a near-daily basis on the only road leading into the Korengal Valley.

The Pech River Road is one of two paved roads in all of Kunar Province. It allows for easy travel in an area dominated by the Hindu Kush Mountains.

Second Platoon works side-by-side with Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army to keep the road safe, stop the smuggling of illegal goods and prevent movement of Taliban extremists.

“We’re basically here to be a deterrent against those activities,” said Spc. Trevor Petsch, a Paratrooper.

Paratroopers from the platoon planned and held a two-hour “snap” TCP to look for weapons and ammunition that intelligence reports indicated would be com-

ing into the Korengal Valley on the Pech River Road.

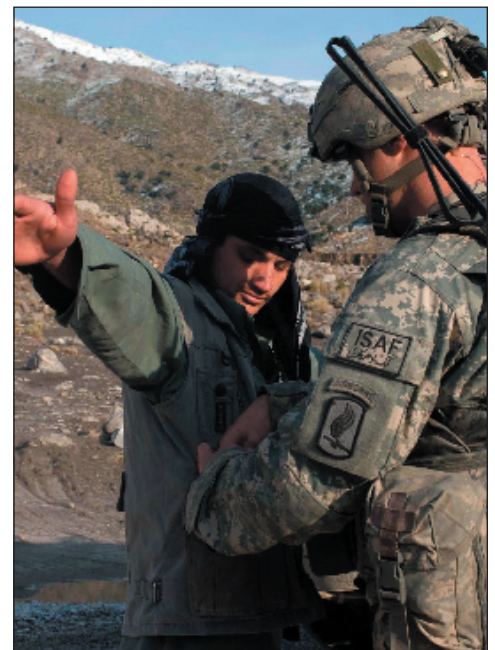
The TCP served two purposes: to intercept contraband and to make a statement.

“We set up the TCP in an ambush spot to show the Taliban we can’t be bullied,” said Army Staff. Sgt. Dawayne Krepel, a 2nd Platoon squad leader.

The TCPs involve searching trucks, cars and motorcycles for ammunition, weapons and materials that can be used to make weapons. The results of the tactical checkpoints vary from day-to-day.

“Sometimes we find stuff and sometimes we don’t,” Petsch explained. “One time we got a call about some guys about to place an [improvised explosive device] on the road. So we set up a TCP and pulled over a car with four guys in it – all four were from different areas. They had a video camera and \$80,000 cash on them.”

While this particular snap TCP didn’t find any weapons or ammunition, the Soldiers did gather valuable intelligence they will be able to use in future missions.



Army Staff Sgt. Dawayne Krepel, a squad leader in 2nd Platoon, Able Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), searches an Afghan during a ‘snap’ tactical checkpoint on the Pech River Road in Kunar Province. The purpose of the checkpoint is to stop the movement of ammunition and weapons into the Korengal Valley.

Strong foundations:

Workshop trains Afghans on construction skills

By Army Capt. Ashley Dellavalle
Task Force Rugged Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FENTY, Afghanistan – U.S. Army engineers of Task Force Rugged concluded the first of three winter skill labor workshops to train local Afghans on construction skills.

Soldiers with the 76th Engineer Company, Task Force Pacemaker, instructed 50 Afghans on masonry and carpentry skills here.

“We wanted to provide the training during a time of traditionally low economic activity,” said Army 1st Lt. Alberto Locsin, TF Pacemaker civil military operations officer.

In a close partnership between the engineers and local governments, the provincial labor directors nominated unemployed citizens to attend the course. Other students were nominated by Afghan contractors to improve the skill level and capability of their employees.

Saidghafoor Shah, from Dari Noor, Jalalabad, participated in the workshop. As a carpenter of 10 years, Shah not only wanted to learn additional carpentry and masonry skills but said, “I want to ... share ideas.

“I have learned a lot of things I can use on the outside; it will help me get a job,” Shah added. “The techniques I’ve learned will make me more efficient. I have learned great methods on construction.”

All students in the course receive free room, board, transportation to and from the worksite and the tools necessary to complete the course requirements. At the successful completion of the course, graduates receive a tool kit as a means to continue their endeavors in the construction industry and possibly start their own construction business. U.S. Army noncommissioned officers are instructing students with the help of interpreters.

The program, which involves hands-on training, is seven days of instruction and construction, including safety training,



At a skill-labor workshop in Jalalabad, Afghan students cut lumber for a tool shed. The tool shed is one of two hands-on projects at the workshop, taught by Task Force Rugged Soldiers. The skill-labor workshop is funded by the Commander’s Emergency Response Program to develop construction skills among Afghans. Photos: Army 1st Lt. Kenya Saenz

basic carpentry and masonry skills training, and the construction of two instructional projects: a wooden garden tool shed and a brick and block wall.

“The workshop is designed to increase the capabilities and skills of Afghans in order to improve wage-earning abilities and competition among contractors,” Locsin said. “Ultimately, the workshop will improve infrastructure and the economy in Afghanistan. The workshop is also increasing the capacity of Afghan contractors, increasing the skilled labor pool in the area.”

Shah, as many of the participants conveyed, plans to put these skills to use.

“I want to be able to serve my country, my people, and support my family,” Shah said.

The next two scheduled workshops are at Forward Operating Base Sharana and Forward Operating Base Orgun-E.



Army Staff Sgt. Windle Morgan, Task Force Pacemaker, instructs Afghan students attending a skill-labor workshop in Jalalabad.



Above: A Paratrooper from 2nd Platoon, Able Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), walks next to a creek during a patrol to Omar in Kunar Province. The snow and bitter cold are part of daily life for the battalion during the winter months. *Photo: Army Sgt. Brandon Aird*

Left: Army Sgt. Carlos Bell, Bravo Company, 864th Engineer Battalion, nails the wall for a bunker at an outpost in the Afghan mountains. *Photo: Army Capt. Nicholas Melin*



Two Afghan workers paint the outside of the Sharana Center for Educational Excellence. The \$1.1 million compound consists of a library, dorms, schoolroom, mosque, dining facility, guard room, technology room and generator room. Eventually, the compound will run on wind power, making it a more efficient and 'greener' project. The center is the first of its kind in Paktika Province. *Photo: Air Force Staff Sgt. Sarah Gregory*

Simply the best:

ANA 203rd Corps holds top Commando



Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force - 82 Public Affairs

KHOWST PROVINCE, Afghanistan— More than 190 Afghan National Army Commandos from the 203rd Corps vied for the right to be crowned the ‘Best of the Best’ during a competition at a combined military outpost here.

The Best Commando Competition featured several events designed to test the Commandos’ mental and physical abilities, determination and endurance.

Racing against the clock, participants navigated stations, testing their knowledge and preparedness in first-aid, communications, weapons and fitness over a mile-long course, while wearing their full uniform and 40 pounds of body armor.

“This friendly competition helps build morale and develop skills and unit cohesion,” said Army Maj. Chris Belcher, Combined Joint Task Force-82 spokesman.

At the first-aid station, the Commandos were required to properly affix a tourniquet to their own leg as quickly as possible using two cravats and an empty 30-round M4 magazine.

Next, to test their knowledge of communi-

cations equip- and program a few words o

Upon arriv Commandos bine rifle. Pa weapon and o the firing ran

Nearing th had to muste accomplish the pound pickup ing to the pu pull-ups as p

The Comm their total ti successful compl performers re T-shirts and achievement.

“This com and the body sergeant who “Everyone tr

“During r stronger now tition,” said “They’re bec more proficie



Top: Afghan National Army Commandos apply makeshift tourniquets using cravats and an M4 magazine, testing their ability to perform medical self-aid as part of a Commando competition. The friendly competition pitted more than 190 Commandos from the Afghan National Army’s 203rd Corps against each other, testing their physical and mental ability to complete basic soldiering skills as quickly as possible.

competition

ment, the Commandos assembled a field radio and exchanged over the air with a fellow Soldier. Moving at the third station, the found a field-stripped M4 carbine. Participants had to reassemble the effectively engage two targets on range, hitting each target twice. At the finish line, the Commandos used their remaining strength to accomplish the last two tasks; pushing a 4,500-pound truck about 50 feet before moving pull-up bars to perform as many pull-ups as possible.

Commandos were scored according to time to finish the course and successful completion of all five tasks. The top three received certificates, soccer balls, and running shoes to mark their

competition was good for the mind," said an ANA Commando who participated in the competition. "I tried to be the best of the best." "The missions our Soldiers will be that they've done the competition," a Commando platoon leader. "I'm becoming more professional and confident in key tasks."



Top: A Commando strains while doing pull-ups during the Best Commando Competition. *Courtesy photos*

Far left: Two Afghan National Army Commandos demonstrate their strength, endurance and determination during an event of the Best Commando Competition. About 190 Commandos from the ANA's 203rd Corps competed to test their physical and mental abilities.

Middle: An ANA Commando fires an M4 carbine rifle at designated targets during the Best Commando Competition.

'Be All You Can Be' meets 'Army Strong:' *Gulf War veteran volunteers for duty in Afghanistan*

Story and photo by
Army Pfc. Daniel M. Rangel
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team is now the responsibility of a new security force made up of Soldiers from the 838th Military Police Company, Ohio Army National Guard.

Among the new arrivals is Army Staff Sgt. John Brickman who works as a PRT security force squad leader for Parwan Province.

Brickman first enlisted for active duty in 1989 and deployed to Saudi Arabia in 1990 during the first Gulf War as part of the XVIII Airborne Corps. He returned to the region in 1991 on a second deployment.

After eight years of military service, Brickman moved into the civilian workforce. Then in 2004, three years after the Global War on Terror started, he joined the National Guard.

“After the attacks [on Sept. 11] I was upset, but I felt like I had already done my duty, so I didn’t bother to try and re-enlist,” Brickman said. “But as the war kept going on and I saw what was happening in Iraq, it upset me. And over time, that wore on me. That’s when I decided to re-enlist.”

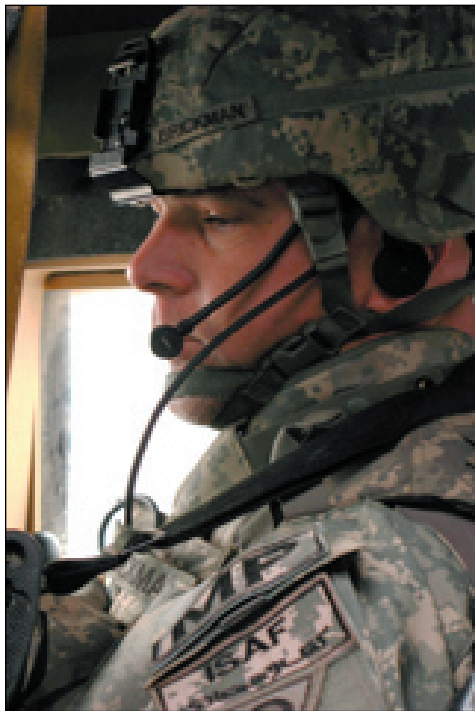
Soon after Brickman re-enlisted the nation was faced with another crisis – a crisis in which the National Guard played a vital role in helping fellow Americans survive.

“We deployed for [Hurricane] Katrina,” Brickman said. “It was my first deployment with a Guard unit. It was a lot different with the way things were run, but it was efficient and I was kind of surprised that we were able to go down there and help without the larger headquarters units being right on top of us and telling us what to do like I was used to on active duty.”

Brickman explained what it was like being deployed with the Sky Dragons during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

“I was working out of a tactical operations center for a patriot missile unit,” Brickman said. “I remember the first Scud alert we had. The people with the good radars would tell us when one was launched out of Iraq. We were in Saudi Arabia then, and we jumped around [trying to avoid the missiles].”

As a Soldier on the ground in both wars, Brickman noticed the recent emergence of



Army Staff Sgt. John Brickman, 838th Military Police Company, Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team security force squad leader, performs his duties as convoy commander inside his Humvee during a routine patrol just outside Bagram Airfield.

forward-operating bases and the amenities that come with them.

“As a patriot unit in Desert Storm, we were far behind the lines. We were quite isolated,” Brickman said. “There was no [FOB] around us. There was nothing. We were just sitting in the middle of the desert with some concertina wire we put up. We did a lot of moving around during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. There were no tents, no infrastructure. During the first war, the only time I saw the enemy, they surrendered.”

Brickman is impressed by the new gear, technology and improvements that are part of today’s Army.

“Blue Force Tracker is the greatest invention ever,” Brickman said about the onboard global positioning system. “It’s an invaluable asset and it will allow practically anybody to find where they are on a map and be able to orient themselves. In case a team leader should go down, the gunner or practically anybody can go on there and have a good idea of where they’re supposed to be. That’s training that I ensure the Soldiers in my truck get.”

Through intense training, Brickman

shares what he’s experienced and leads the Soldiers of today in the GWOT.

“Training is by far the most important thing,” Brickman said. “The training is what will keep you alive. Always rely on the training you’ve got. In my opinion, it’s important for the younger Soldiers to have training above what they’re supposed to have. I think good leaders do that for their Soldiers and groom them not just to take their own spot, but to survive on the battlefield.”

As a team leader, Brickman listed some of the duties he is charged to perform.

“I prepare the trucks that are going to be escorting [engineers and key leaders of the PRT],” Brickman said. “I get their intelligence and what they want to do and I plot out the maps; I get the trucks ready and put the individuals in the trucks.”

Brickman also summed up his fundamental leadership style.

“[Leadership is] taking care of the troops, doing pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections, ensuring everybody I have control over knows what to do in all the situations I can foresee.”

Brickman’s Soldiers trust him. He knows how to quickly build rapport and after only a few weeks has gained the loyalty of his driver.

“He’s awesome,” said Army Pfc. Erin Bell, an 838th MP Co. Soldier.

“I got switched over to him as soon as we got here and it was probably the best decision my platoon sergeant could make,” Bell said about being placed under Brickman’s responsibility. “If I need anything, I always go to him. I’m very comfortable going to him and talking to him about anything.”

Brickman is also able to build a rapport with Afghan children and encourages his Soldiers to do so as well.

“I love children. I have six of my own. I think kids are great and I don’t believe they are born with hatred,” he said. “When I see them I try to make them feel at ease. I don’t want them to be afraid of me.”

Brickman knows Afghanistan’s youth truly are its future. As for his own future, he intends to do much more for the Army.

“I intend to go back to active duty after this deployment,” Brickman said. “I feel that my leadership skills will benefit people.”

Brickman comes from an earlier era, a time when being a Soldier meant to “Be all you can be.”

ANSF, Coalition forces hold clinic for Farah villagers

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force - 82 Public Affairs

FARAH PROVINCE, Afghanistan – One of the more popular initiatives accomplished by Afghan National Security Forces, assisted by the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s ministry of public health, is temporary health clinics set up in remote areas of the country.

In the western province of Farah, ANSF, assisted by Coalition Soldiers and medics, provided health care to villagers who would not otherwise have easy access to medical services. The clinic was held near a combined military outpost in Farah District. More than 350 Afghans received treatment.

“The popularity of clinics continues to grow, with more and more villagers hearing about the free health services via radio messages or word of mouth,” said Army Maj. Chris Belcher, Combined Joint Task Force-82 spokesman. “Many people listen to messages on Radio Farah and then tell a friend or family member about the clinic.

“Generally everyone loves the clinic,” Belcher said. “Villagers say it is a good place to come for free health care.”

“We are happy with the government of Farah,” said an Afghan villager who came to the clinic for a check-up. “There are some who have travelled from very far away to come to Farah for the clinic.”

“If the treatment goes beyond what we can provide, we can refer the villagers to the Farah Hospital for further treatment,” said a Coalition medic.



Afghan National Security Forces, Afghan Ministry of Public Health and Coalition forces provided medical and humanitarian assistance to more than 350 Afghans in Farah Province. *Courtesy photo*

The clinic is staffed by doctors and medics from the Afghan National Army, ministry of public health officials and Coalition forces.

“The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Afghan National Security Forces are committed to serving the needs of the Afghan people,” Belcher said. “The Farah clinic is one way the Afghan government cares for its people.”

Rule-of-law: Justice reaches further into Afghanistan

By Army Pfc. Daniel M. Rangel
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

PANJSHIR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Coalition leaders took part in a justice conference designed to bring the Afghan criminal-justice system to the next level of development here.

Army Lt. Col. Michelle Atkins, Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team deputy commander, and contractors for the U.S. Department of State facilitated the conference.

Afghans in attendance included local prosecutors, justices, police chiefs and prison guards as well as team leaders from the Justice Sector Support Program and the Correction System Support Program in Kabul.

“The goal is to identify necessary resources and support that can be provided to the different sectors of the justice system in Panjshir in alignment with the overall national strategy for rule-of-law,” Atkins said. “The resource requirements here are numerous, from infrastructure to expanding knowledge of how the system works under constitutional law in Afghanistan.”

One of the key resources Afghan officials need is legal reference books, which were sent to provinces throughout Afghanistan. The reference books help practitioners make sound and consistent legal decisions, said Navy Capt. Stephen Sarnoski, staff judge advocate for Task Force Cincinnati.

“We delivered complete sets of law books – 17 volumes in all. They went to each provincial district center, the chief justice, the governor’s office and all the key ministerial departments here,” Atkins said.

Provinces across Afghanistan have been in need of a comprehensive source to use as a legal reference. Sarnoski described these references and why the laws were distributed in print.

“The legal books are just a compilation of all the Afghan statutes,” Sarnoski said. “One of the shortages in most places, and Panjshir is no different, is the availability of the various references in law. They don’t have the computers and automated sources we have, so we put together a complete set of Afghan laws and saw to it that every provincial and district court had at least one set.”

Sarnoski also explained how the books

are used as a legal tool and reference.

“When a judge has to make a decision, he has to be able to refer to the written law in order to determine the right answer,” Sarnoski said. “Of course in the past it has been difficult, because there are many people who are not literate and they don’t have access to the resources. But now that we have well-trained, educated judges, they need the resources to refer to, to guide them in their decision-making process and that’s what the written legal books we’ve provided will do for them.”

Coalition officials did not play a major role in the conference, but acted more as observers in an effort to allow the Afghan people to develop a legal system of their own. “We’re on the cusp of a change,” Sarnoski said. “The shura system, the tribal loyalties and the cultural loyalties have been around for centuries and those will remain and probably should remain. But what we’re going to do is find the right mix of the informal justice system with the courts and the formal system so we satisfy the needs of the people.”

To help meet the needs of all Afghans, more justice conferences are scheduled in other provinces throughout Afghanistan.

Task Force Pegasus, Destiny hold TOA ceremony

Story and photo by
Spc. George Welcome
101st Combat Aviation Brigade
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The 101st Combat Aviation Brigade officially began its latest “Rendezvous with Destiny” as it gained control of aviation operations from the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade in a transfer of authority ceremony held at the morale, welfare and recreation tent here.

The 101st CAB, based out of Fort Campbell, Ky., arrived in Afghanistan in December and, following the TOA, assumed responsibility for operations in the country to include providing convoy security, medical evacuations and utilization of air assets in support of ground forces in strengthening the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its security forces.

The 82nd CAB, based out of Fort Bragg, N.C., has been in Afghanistan since January 2007. The brigade is led by Army Col. Kelly Thomas and Command Sgt. Maj. David Brasfield. In his outgoing speech, Thomas acknowledged the hard work of the Task Force Pegasus Soldiers in supporting coalition forces over the past year.

“I could not be more proud of this task force and its performance in combat,”



Task Force Destiny leaders, Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Herndon (left) and Army Col. James Richardson (right) uncased the colors of the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade during a transfer of authority ceremony between the 82nd and 101st Combat Aviation Brigades.

Thomas said. “Looking back over the past year it occurred to me that our success was largely due to the hard work, commitment and high standards of our commanders, noncommissioned officers and Paratroopers of Task Force Pegasus.”

Army Col. James Richardson and Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Herndon, the 101st CAB brigade commander and command sergeant major, uncased the 101st CAB colors, symbolizing the unit’s assumption of responsibility for the area of operations.

In his remarks following the uncasing of the colors, Richardson thanked the staff of Combined Joint Task Force-82 and the Soldiers of TF Pegasus for their hard work.

“Your devotion to duty, unrelenting pursuit of excellence and exceptional performance are recognized throughout the Army,” Richardson said. “Your numbers in the categories for gallons of fuel pumped, hours flown and maintenance rates are truly impressive, but it is the intangible qualities like esprit de corps and unit sense of pride and individual discipline that set you apart.”

Richardson concluded his address by assuring his outgoing comrades and the leadership of the 82nd Airborne Division that Task Force Destiny will continue to uphold the standard set by TF Pegasus.

“The 101st Combat Aviation Brigade stands ready to support the infantrymen on the ground in combat and combat service-support assets,” Richardson said. “These Soldiers are mentally and physically tough, and are our country’s best and brightest.”

Congressional delegates visit Panjshir Province

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force - 82 Public Affairs

PANJSHIR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Six Congressional representatives from the House Armed Services Committee visited the Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team on a fact-finding tour and saw development projects, met with the governor and had lunch with servicemembers.

The representatives received a detailed brief on the history of the province and how PRT development projects are increasing the security, governance and development in Panjshir from PRT director, Ben Lowenthal of the U.S. State Department, and Air Force Lt. Col. Chris Luedtke, PRT commander.

“To see the success story here and the courage of the people is very inspiring,” said Susan Davis, D-Calif.

After learning about provincial development, the representatives got a first-hand look at infrastructure projects funded by the PRT, which have led to private investment.

A “windshield” tour of the province gave the representatives a chance to witness the value of a \$20 million-road funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The road has created opportunities for Panjshiris to commute to work in Kabul and enables rapid transportation of goods and services in and out of the province.

Before meeting with Provincial Gov. Bahlol, the representatives

stopped at a PRT-funded project, the Shast micro-hydro electric plant, which will provide electricity to more than 1,000 families. From the same location, Luedtke was able to point out the PRT-funded mountain-access road, which has led to further development and commercial investment.

“The PRT funded this road to the top of the mountain and USAID built a radio station up there,” Luedtke said. “But the best part is that commercial developers seized this opportunity to place cell phone towers on the mountain ridge as well. And the development keeps coming with the installation of TV towers, a wind-power project for government offices and even another road that was cut to the village on the other side of the mountain.”

The representatives returned to Forward Operating Base Lion for lunch with PRT members. Each representative took the opportunity to talk with the servicemembers about their deployment.

“It was great to have the representatives visit and see their interest in our mission,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Crystal Salas, an information manager.

After presenting the PRT members with a few gifts from their districts and taking several pictures, the representatives left the province with greater knowledge of the mission in Panjshir.

Visiting representatives were: Susan Davis, D-Calif.; David Loeb sack, D-Iowa; Peter Roskam, R-Ill.; Phil English, R-Pa.; Bill Sali, R-Idaho; and Mark Udall, D-Colo.

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Photos From the Field



Tech. Sgt. Buffie Verhagen takes a picture of Kohistan II district chief of police, Mouhammed Naieem's iris. The photo is cataloged in a database of biometric information used to identify Afghans the provincial reconstruction teams interact with. Verhagen has been deployed for 10 months and is currently assigned to the Bagram PRT.
Photo: Tech. Sgt. James Law



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

freedomwatch@swa.army.mil



Above: An Afghan construction worker paints a door on a new dormitory at the Sharana Center for Educational Excellence in Paktika Province. The center, built by 80 percent local labor, will allow students up to age 18 to live and study in the same place. Students will be taught religion, mathematics, chemistry, physics and history. *Photo: Air Force Staff Sgt. Sarah Gregory*



Left: Senior Airman Aaron Ferguson closes a valve after transferring fuel from a fuel bladder. Ferguson is a fuels specialist deployed to Bagram Airfield from the 97th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Altus Air Force Base, Okla. *Photo: Air Force Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester*

