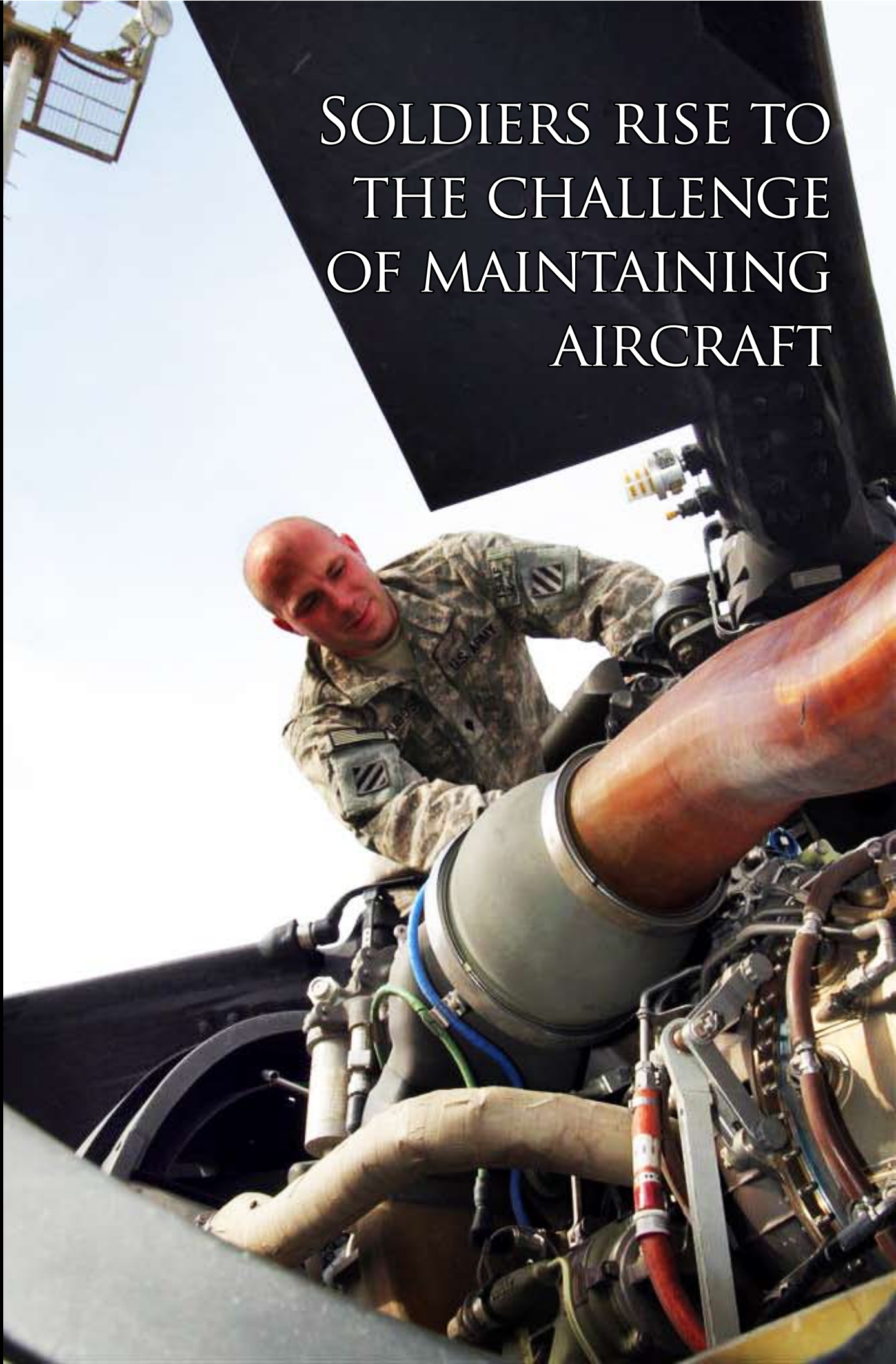




FALCON FLYER

March 2010

SOLDIERS RISE TO
THE CHALLENGE
OF MAINTAINING
AIRCRAFT



FLIGHT SCHEDULE - MARCH 2010



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Afghan National Army Air Corps crew chiefs graduate from the Afghan National Security Forces Crew Chief Academy, March 4, at Bagram Airfield.



Capt. Garrett Gandia

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Soldiers from TF Falcon participate in base-wide MASCAL exercise, Feb. 26, at Bagram Airfield.



Spec. Jose Villa

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Soldiers from TF Falcon participate in the Marine Corps Corporal Course, Feb. 26, on Bagram Airfield.

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FALCON FLYER

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COVER PHOTO

Spc. Robert Dubose of D Co., Task Force Knighthawk, inspects the hydraulic deck of a Black Hawk for corrosion during a corrosion control inspection, Feb. 20 at Bagram Airfield.

Photo by Warrant Officer Robert Renny
Full story on page 13



Pfc. Nichole Hill, medic with HSC, TF Workhorse, checks the vitals of an Afghan baby, Feb. 9 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The baby was a victim of an avalanche that occurred the previous evening north of Bagram Airfield.

FALCON 6 SENDS...

Col. Don Galli

CAB Commander

When we arrived in Afghanistan five months ago, I reminded our Soldiers that the history of the battles to come over our next year in combat will not be written about the number of missions flown or munitions expended. Our story is going to be written about how we left Afghanistan better than we found it. And how, along with the Afghan National Army, we defeated the insurgents and empowered the Afghan people.

During the past month, the Marne Air Brigade was an integral part of two extremely important events in which we took a meaningful step in helping and empowering the Afghan people.

First, our Soldiers performed brilliantly by aiding avalanche victims in northern Afghanistan in early February. This three-day mission was a true team effort by a number of units and sections. It was a true team effort by a number of units and sections from Task Force Falcon. Our tactical operations center provided command and control, while at the same time our Apaches provided overhead security, located landing zones for aircraft and searched for people that the ground forces could not locate. Our Chinooks and Black Hawks provided material assistance to stranded motorists and constantly resupplied the Afghan Police, Afghan Army and U.S. Forces with essential rescue equipment throughout the operation. Our medics and their aircraft were first on the scene, organizing medical treatment and making sure that patients with serious injuries were taken to the Craig Joint Theater Hospital for treatment. Our Brigade Surgeon, Lt. Col. Katrina Hall said it best: "Being able to provide assistance to these people today was

an honor, not just because it will hopefully plant a seed that will change hearts and minds, but because providing care to those in need is what we do."

We also kicked off a crew chief academy this month in partnership with the Afghan National Army Air Corps. The Crew Chief Academy came to fruition through the combined efforts of the Air Force, the Afghan Army and, of course, the Soldiers in the Marne Air Brigade. This is a no-fail mission because our goal is to eventually hand over responsibility for all aviation operations to the ANAAC.

The crew chief academy is an incredible opportunity for our Soldiers to train our Afghan counterparts; and, perhaps more importantly, to learn from them. It is just the start of a continuing relationship with the ANA that will pay great dividends in the future. During the month of March, we will kick off the Air Assault Academy, where ANAAC pilots and crew chiefs and Afghan Commandos will learn the skills necessary to conduct combined-action missions with crews from the Marne Air Brigade throughout our area of operation.

Our Soldiers' performance during the avalanche and the work we are doing with the ANAAC are examples of what we've accomplished during the past month. I wish I had the space to write about all that we are doing and about each and every Soldier who has inspired me during our first 5 months in theater. Suffice it to say, the Soldiers of the Marne Air Brigade are performing exceptionally well under difficult conditions. I have no doubt that they will continue to do so and that we will leave Afghanistan better than we found it.

Marne Air!
Rock of the Marne!
Falcon 6



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Spc. Monica K. Smith

(Above left) Task Force Falcon Commander, Col. Don Galli (left) stops for a photo with Afghan National Army Air Corps Wing Commander, Brig. Gen. Mohammed Barat, March 4 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (Above right) Task Force Falcon Commander, Col. Don Galli (left) and TF Falcon Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley (right) take a photo with Lt. Gen. Michael Oates, director of the Joint IED Defeat Organization, Feb. 20 at Bagram Airfield.

FALCON 7 SENDS...

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley
CAB Command Sergeant Major

Another month has come and gone here in Afghanistan and spring is in the air. The brigade commander and I have traveled to each forward operating base this month visiting Task Force Viper, Task Force Lighthorse and Task Force Brawler. All our units continue to accomplish amazing feats in the battle space and our Soldiers are doing great.

Our home detachment pushed another 54 individual replacement Soldiers to us this month. They are all a welcome addition to the task force and I would like to thank Lt. Col. Gallagher, 1st Sgt. Depenhart and the entire home detachment team for a job well done.

We have completed our first Afghan National Army Air

Corps (ANAAC) Crew Chief Training Course and it was a huge success. The Afghan soldiers were very professional and willing to learn. We have started our first ANAAC Air Assault Course combining Afghan Aviation assets and Afghan Army Commandos. This has become a very important part of our mission here in Afghanistan as we serve brother to brother – shoulder to shoulder.

I understand how busy every member of Task Force Falcon is on a daily basis. Regardless of your duty position or pay grade, please know you are all an important part of this team and we will not be successful without your continued hard work and determination. Thanks for what you do!

Don't ever forget those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of our great Nation. God bless America.

Marne Air!
Rock of the Marne!
Falcon 7



Spc. Monica K. Smith

(From left) Deputy to the commanding general of U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, Ronnie Chronister, TF Falcon Commander, Col. Don Galli, AMCOM Commanding General, Maj. Gen. James R. Myles, TF Falcon Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley, and AMCOM Command Sgt. Maj. Ricky P. Yates gather for a photo March 4 at Bagram Airfield.

SIGHT & PICTURE



Spc. Monica K. Smith



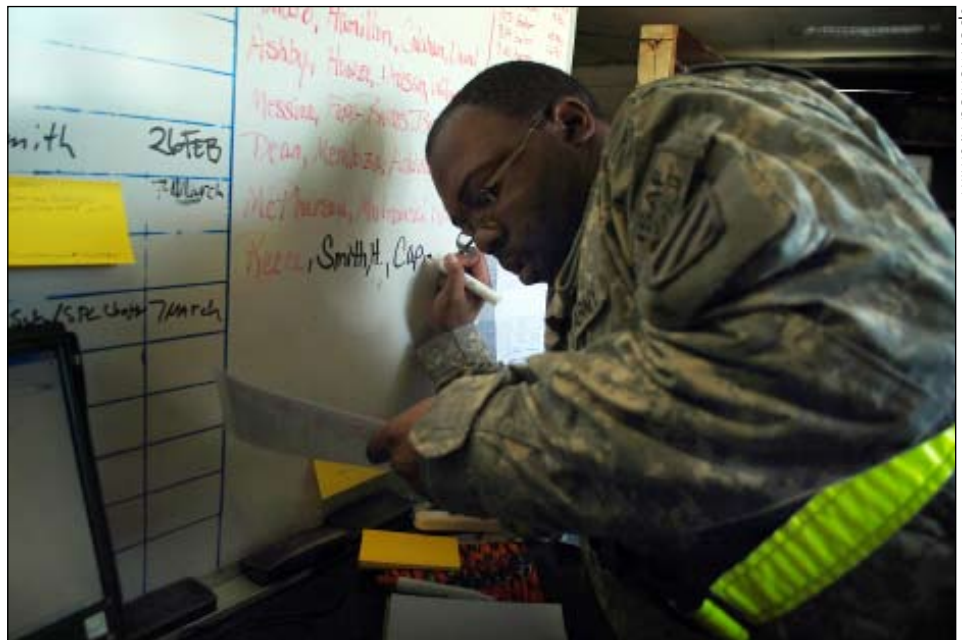
Spc. Monica K. Smith



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Warrant Officer Robert Renny



Spc. Monica K. Smith

(Clockwise from top left) 1. An Afghan boy waves after he and other Afghans walk out of a Chinook with B Co., TF Knighthawk, Feb. 9 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The boy and other Afghans were victims of an avalanche that occurred the evening before, north of Bagram. 2. Soldiers from A Co., TF Knighthawk preflight a Black Hawk, March 1 at Bagram Airfield. 3. Sgt. Robert Driessen, HSC, TF Workhorse, updates a board letting Soldiers know they have mail, March 9 at Bagram Airfield. 4. Spc. Algernard Sharp, HSC, TF Workhorse, refills the transmission of a gator, March 9 at Bagram Airfield. 5. Staff Sgt. David Manseh, E Co., TF Knighthawk, works on a truck, March 9 at Bagram Airfield.

TF Falcon trains ANA medical staff

Photos by Spc. Monica K. Smith



Ghلام Sakhi, an Afghan National Army flight medic, talks with an Afghan patient as Capt. Erika Noyes and Staff Sgt. David Marshall, both members of C Co., MEDEVAC, TF Knighthawk, observe, Feb. 3 at Bagram Airfield.



Staff Sgt. David Marshall (center), C Co., MEDEVAC, TF Knighthawk, and Ghلام Sakhi, an Afghan National Army flight medic, secure a patient to an Mi-17 aircraft, Feb. 3 at Bagram Airfield, during the ANA's first medevac mission.



An Afghan physician acts as a patient as Sgt. Chris Rigby, flight medic with C Co., MEDEVAC, TF Knighthawk, explains how to carry a litter off of the medevac Black Hawk, to Afghan physicians, Jan. 6 at Bagram Airfield.



Staff Sgt. David Marshall (left) and Sgt. Chris Rigby, both flight medics with C Co., MEDEVAC, TF Knighthawk, explain the equipment on the medevac Black Hawk to Afghan physicians, Jan. 6 at Bagram Airfield.

TIMELINE



Feb. 13 - Brig. Gen. Mohammed Barat (left), the wing commander of the Afghan National Army Air Corps, and TF Falcon Commander, Col. Don Galli, review a brief on the Afghan National Security Forces Crew Chief Academy.



Feb. 16 - Staff Sgt. James Parker, HHC, TF Brawler, and academy instructor, observes members of the ANSF Crew Chief Academy practice giving calls as they simulate landing an aircraft.



Feb. 18 - Staff Sgt. James Parker, HHC, TF Brawler, and academy instructor explains how to conduct a preflight check to members of the ANSF Crew Chief Academy.

Afghan crew chiefs learn to fly

Story and photos by Spc. Monica K. Smith

After more than a month in planning, leaders from the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force Falcon, and Afghan National Army Air Corps, gathered to celebrate the opening of the Afghan National Security Forces Crew Chief Academy, Feb. 13 at the Marne Cafe on Bagram Airfield.

"The goal is for us to transition the security of their country to them," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Chris Hinkle, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, TF Falcon, training leader for the Marne Combined Action Program. "We're increasing their tactical proficiency and enabling future partnerships between the Afghans and the U.S."

The opening ceremony included speeches from the 3rd CAB, TF Falcon Commander, Col. Don Galli, and Brig. Gen. Mohammed Barat, the wing commander of the ANAAC. Following the ceremony both the ANAAC and the U.S. Soldiers shared an Afghan-American lunch before the crew chiefs departed to begin their classes.

The inaugural class of five ANAAC crew chiefs progressed through the two-week academy which included both classroom instruction and flying.

The ANAAC crew chief's first flight day came a week after the opening of the academy and five days after classroom academics. Early in the morning, Feb. 20, the ANAAC crew chiefs made their way to the flight line on Bagram Airfield to observe Black Hawk crew chiefs from Company A, TF Knighthawk, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon. As the rotor blades began to turn, the ANAAC crew chiefs studied every movement of their American counterparts.

"We wanted to show them how crew coordination works," said Staff Sgt. James Parker, HHC, TF Brawler, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, and academy instructor. "You have a limited ability to teach in the classroom, even with our simulator. Here they actually see what we do and I think a lightbulb clicked on."

During the three-Blackhawk flight, two TF Falcon crew chiefs sat in their normal positions, manning the door gun while making and responding to calls. An interpreter sat in the middle of the first row of seats next to the TF



Staff Sgt. James Parker, HHC, TF Brawler, and academy instructor, points out what to look for in the tail when conducting a preflight check to members of the ANSF Crew Chief Academy, Feb. 18.

Falcon crew chiefs with an ANAAC crew chief sitting on either side. All wore headsets, and as the TF Falcon crew chiefs communicated with their pilots and each other the interpreter then explained to ANAAC crew chiefs what was being said.

"With the initial flight we wanted them to listen to how we make calls and how we respond to calls during flight," said Sgt. Matthew West, A Co., TF Knighthawk, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon. "We want them to understand the importance of communicating with the pilots."

During the week prior to the flight the ANAAC crew chiefs were instructed on lessons such as how to prepare an aircraft for flight, how to wear a flight vest and attach it to the aircraft, in addition to how to communicate with one another during flight.

"They're picking it up very fast, every day they learn something new," said West. "We ask them basic questions at the end of the day and they answer them all so we know they're learning the material and understanding it. Their enthusiasm is high and they pay attention in class."

For Abdul Wali, an ANAAC crew chief, he says his enthusiasm and willingness to pay attention in class is based on 27 years of wanting to be a crew chief.

"I wanted to be a crew chief because I want to help my country and I like this job – and flying," said Wali. "Today we saw what we are supposed to be doing, and that's the important part. We learned what we need to do and what (the 3rd CAB flight crews do) so, in the future, we can fly missions together."

After three weeks of training, the five Afghan aircraft maintainers each had smiles on their faces as they sat, waiting to shake their general's hand during the Afghan National Security Forces Crew Chief Academy graduation ceremony, March 4 at the Marne Cafe dining facility.

One by one their names were called and after shaking the hands of multiple military leaders, both Afghan and American, they sounded off: "I will serve Afghanistan." They then took their seats, no longer amateur soldiers but trained crew chiefs.

With their graduation these five crew chiefs made history as the first graduating class of the ANSF Crew Chief Academy.

"Three weeks ago, we gathered to launch the first-ever Afghan National Army Crew Chief Academy," said Galli, during the ceremony. "Today, we celebrate its success in bringing our nations and Soldiers together as a team. During this short period of time, we have forged the beginning of what I hope will be an enduring relationship with the Afghan National Army Air Corps."

For Mohammed Yousaf Wafa, an ANAAC crew chief, the graduation ceremony was the culmination of years of hard work and an accomplishment of great pride.

"I'm really excited and happy to complete and pass the three weeks of the crew chief academy," said Wafa. "It was a great opportunity because we are the first to go through the academy. There is a lot of responsibility for crew chiefs and we learned those responsibilities which will help us serve our country, Afghanistan."

The graduation ceremony also recognized West and fellow instructor Parker, for their work in the academy.

"(Parker and West) are two of our best crew chiefs," said Galli. "They conducted the day-to-day training and worked directly with the Afghan crew chiefs. They did so professionally and exceeded our expectations."

The academy is one of two academies within the TF Falcon Combined Action Program, the other being the ANSF Air Assault Academy. After graduating the crew chief academy, the ANAAC crew chiefs immediately began air assault training with the opening day on March 6 at Bagram Airfield. The air assault academy will not only include ANAAC soldiers but also ANA commandos.

"The big picture is that we are bringing together soldiers from two nations and giving our Soldiers and their Afghan counterparts the skills needed to conduct combined-action missions," said Galli. "Three weeks ago, when we launched the crew chief academy, I said that if we continue to work together, we will be a team that is ready to face any foe, defeat any enemy and accomplish any mission. After witnessing first-hand our Soldiers and our nations working together, I am confident that we will achieve that goal."



Feb. 20 - CW2 Jeffrey Stackhouse, A Co., TF Knighthawk, gives a flight brief to his crew and members of the ANSF Crew Chief Academy, prior to their first flight.



Feb. 20 - Crew chiefs participating in the ANSF Crew Chief Academy fasten themselves to the seats of a Black Hawk prior to their first flight.



March 4 - TF Falcon Commander Col. Don Galli, (left) presents a graduation plaque to Abdul Wali, ANAAC crew chief.



March 4 - Afghan National Army Air Corps Wing Commander, Brig. Gen. Mohammed Barat, gives a speech during the graduation ceremony.

TF Viper makes a difference in Afghanistan

Story by 1st Lt. Kaden Koba and Capt. Brandon Archuleta

Phone calls and radio chatter tear into the silent Task Force Viper tactical operations center. A combat outpost has taken indirect fire and there are casualties. The Viper battle captain, Capt. Nate Swann, calls the TF Viper Commander, Lt. Col. Mike Musiol, and the TF Viper plans officer, Maj. Steve Gilbertson, and requests their presence in the TOC to brief them on the situation. Musiol comes into the TOC and immediately requests a weather update: Weather and visibility are extremely poor. After Swann briefs the severity of the situation, Gilbertson begins examining courses of action to make a recommendation based on the security situation on the ground. Musiol quickly analyzes the information and makes his decision: Launch the medevac with an attack weapons team escort to provide reconnaissance and overhead security.

In less than an hour, the casualties received life-saving medical care thanks to the efforts of the leaders, aviators, and Soldiers of TF Viper. This was one of the 157 medevac missions that Company C, 1st Battalion of the 159th General Support Aviation "Cowboy Dustoff" of the Wyoming National Guard has executed, transporting some 240

casualties to medical treatment facilities.

These events describe just another day for TF Viper whose Soldiers are proudly serving at the tip of the spear of American foreign policy. Task Force Viper is located some eleven miles from the Pakistani border at Forward Operating Base Salerno. Task Force Viper's mission is to conduct full-spectrum aviation operations that secure the Afghan population, defeat anti-Afghan forces and enable freedom of movement for coalition forces in the provinces of Khowst, Paktika and Paktia - a region known as the P2K. Task Force Viper employs Apaches, Black Hawks, Kiowa Warriors, Chinooks and medevac aircraft to accomplish this mission, but behind the aircraft, it is ultimately the pilots, staff, fuelers, armorers, maintainers, radio telephone operators and other Soldiers who make mission success possible.

Specialist Sven Bowsher of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, a radio telephone operator, describes the best part of his job working in the center of operations, in the TOC.

"I am in the battle, every battle, that my aircraft are in," said Bowsher. "Every mis-

sion the MEDEVAC conducts, everything attack and scouts respond to, every Soldier moved to another location, every air assault too. I am a part of it."

The task force supports the troops on the ground with everything from reconnaissance and security to material assistance and leaflet drops. As brigade combat teams moved into and out of theater over the past few weeks, Company B, 1st Battalion 169th General Support Aviation and Company A, 4th Battalion 3rd Aviation Regiment, operating Chinooks and Blackhawks, respectively, found themselves transporting almost double the number of passengers in February than January.

Specialist Brandon Johns of B Co., 1-169th evinces his pride in the task force's performance.

"Our unit is handling this monumental task with a lot of hard work," said Johns. "Moving a brigade is not an easy task."

Providing food, water, ammunition and resourcing passenger moves, Viper has moved more than 11,000 passengers and more than 1,500 short tons of cargo since they began operations in November 2009.

The Chinooks and Black Hawks transport personnel and conduct combat resupply missions all over the battlefield. But beyond



Courtesy Photo



Spc. Janora Phillips

(Above left) Sgt. Michael Anderson, Company C, TF Viper, prepares a needle, Feb. 20 at Forward Operating Base Salerno. (Above right) Spc. Kenny Wright, medic with HHC, TF Viper, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon provides aid to a Soldier, Feb. 28 at the aid station on FOB Salerno.

logistical support, these aircraft and their pilots are an integral part of every deliberate and hasty air assault mission, infilling and ex-filling Soldiers on and off the objective. Since November 2009, B Co., 1-169 Avn. and A Co., 4-3 Avn., have supported 32 deliberately planned air assaults. In addition to the pre-planned missions, these companies have also conducted 39 hastily planned air assaults - inserting troops at a moment's notice based on time sensitive intelligence.

The Kiowas and Apaches provide recon-

"In six months we have gathered maintainers from five different units," said Armstrong. "In that short period of time we have gelled and become one."

"Viper maintenance is the heart of this great unit," said Armstrong. "In an aviation task force no mission can launch without fully mission capable aircraft. In order for an aircraft to be useable for a mission it must receive a clean bill of health from the maintainers. It must be prepared to handle the demands of rigorous flight and harsh

enemy, deliver Soldiers and supplies or conduct material assistance missions.

"Our success is evident in the over 7,000 combat flight hours the task force has flown in just over three months," said Armstrong. "We have performed 18 phases on four different types of aircraft. In addition, the maintainers have identified and repaired a countless number of unscheduled maintenance faults."

The teamwork that goes into maintenance is the same teamwork that is essential



Courtesy Photo

Soldiers with C Co., MEDEVAC TF Viper, prepare their medical equipment for a medevac Black Hawk, Feb. 20 at FOB Salerno.

naissance and security to air and ground forces in the region, both coalition and Afghan. Their reconnaissance provides improvised explosive device detection and interdiction. They provide security that protects against indirect fire attacks at vulnerable forward operating bases and combat outposts. But these aircraft will not fly without the dedicated maintainers who spend countless hours troubleshooting and repairing mechanical problems.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tracy Armstrong, the task force production control officer, describes the effort and esprit de corps that goes into maintaining a fleet of aircraft.

environmental factors. Aircraft constantly need to be repaired and serviced. This is accomplished through hard work and selfless service to any and all maintenance tasks our maintainers are presented with. The Viper maintenance program involves many different areas of expertise; these include crew chiefs, (technical) supply, armament, maintenance, and of course all the back shops (hydraulics, propeller and rotor, power train, sheet metal, and avionics)."

Every hour of work put into maintenance is directly reflected on the battlefield. The better the maintenance, the more aircraft are flying to conduct missions, pursue the

to all of TF Viper's missions, especially the most unpredictable, the medevac missions. Major Matthias Greene, commander of C Co., 5-159th Avn., describes what makes the medevac mission in Afghanistan unique.

"Only about forty percent of our patients are U.S. or coalition forces," said Greene. "Most of our patients are Afghan, including military and civilian. We treat them equal to any U.S. Soldier, and our mission is building trust and confidence with the local population."

Greene also shared his company's motivation.

"It is great to be part of the Viper family," said Greene. "We look forward to our mission, making a difference, saving lives every day."



(Top) Spc. Robert Dubose of D Co., TF Knighthawk, inspects the hydraulic deck of a Black Hawk for corrosion during a corrosion control inspection, Feb. 20 at Bagram Airfield. (Bottom Left) Sgt. John Baker and Spc. Matthew Lopez of D Co., TF Knighthawk, are reinstalling radios in the avionics closet of a Chinook during a 400-hour phase inspection, Feb. 20, at Bagram Airfield. (Bottom Right) Staff Sgt. Michael Ortiz (left), briefs Capt. Travis Betz, both D Co., TF Knighthawk, on the maintenance progress that has been made, Feb. 24 at Bagram Airfield.

FIX TO FIGHT

Soldiers rise to the challenge of maintaining aircraft

Story and photos by
Warrant Officer Robert Renny

"Fix to Fight," the motto of the Company D, Dragons, Task Force Knighthawk, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, has certainly been a saying that the Soldiers live by daily in the Afghanistan theatre. These Soldiers have been given the challenging task of maintaining an enormous fleet of aircraft and ensuring each aircraft is ready to fly a various assortment of missions and a large number of flight hours.

The Chinook maintainers, more commonly known as "uniforms," work around the clock to keep these medium-lift helicopters flying. Each Chinook on the flight line must go into phase maintenance every 200 and 400 hours. The uniforms have completed 10 phase maintenance operations on the Chinooks in the past two and a half months – last year only one 400-hour phase was conducted. The uniforms' ultimate goal, and the end state of any phase maintenance operation, is to push the aircraft back out onto the flight line to allow the maintenance test pilots to fly the aircraft and make sure that they are fully mission capable.

"Remove, clean, inspect and install, as long as you follow those guidelines you can't go wrong," said Staff Sgt. Michael Ortiz, Chinook floor supervisor in D Co., TF Knighthawk. "We take our time and conduct maintenance by the book. Everyone fully understands the need and importance of a fast turnaround, and to do this we ensure that the maintenance is completed correctly the first time."

The Chinook maintainers have averaged eight days for each 200-hour phase, exceeding the theatre standard of 14 days. For the 400-hour phase, which is inherently more in depth and time consuming, the uniforms have averaged 13 days, again exceeding the standard which is set at 21 days.

On the other end of the flight line, Black Hawk maintainers, known as "tangos," work to ensure that the fleet of Black Hawks are ready and capable to conduct missions which include resupply, VIP movement, and medical evacuation operations. Each Black Hawk must be thoroughly inspected every 120 hours. When not deployed maintenance Soldiers may perform a 120-hour inspection once a month, however in theater the tangos have

completed 19 120-hour inspections during the past two and a half months, averaging roughly 48 hours per inspection.

Although the phase maintenance operations on any helicopter are time consuming and labor intensive, the benefits to the ground force commander and improved ways in which maintenance is conducted far outweigh the long hours and hard work. As with any task, repetition allows the maintainers to increase productivity without jeopardizing quality of work. As efficiency has increased, the maintainers and leadership have worked together to create a work schedule that allows two simultaneous phase operations and enough maintainers available to conduct unscheduled maintenance.

"The work these Soldiers are accomplishing at this level is unprecedented," said Capt. Travis Betz, D Co., commander. "They take so much pride in the work they accomplish and are eager to show their increased capabilities in spite of the constraints placed upon them. I walk through the hangar at all hours day and night and am continuously impressed by the leaders' and Soldiers' enthusiasm to contribute to the fight. Leaders at all levels are dedicated to making the mission happen and have truly made the Dragons a combat multiplier."

With so many phases in such a relatively short amount of time, the younger enlisted leaders have been given multiple opportunities to run various shifts and areas of the phase operations. This allows each young noncommissioned officer, and several specialists, the chance to test his or her leadership skills and gain knowledge and experience on the aircraft at the same time. These opportunities prepare the young leaders for the increase in the operational tempo expected this spring and summer.

"There is no doubt that our junior leaders are prepared for the increased workload," said Betz. "In our first 90 days they have completed phase maintenance on 10 aircraft. This kind of experience would take a year or greater in garrison. Their experience and proficiency rivals any other maintenance entity in the theater. They are more than ready."



AROUND THE TASK FORCE



1st Lt. Shad Lancaster

1



Sgt. Scott Tant

2



Spc. Monica K. Smith

5



Sgt. Brandon Goggins

4



Sgt. Brandon Goggins

3

1. Soldiers from 3-320th Artillery, Battery A, fire a 105mm M119A2 Howitzer in support of TF Dark Knight elements, Feb. 13 at FOB Tillman near the Pakistani border. 2. Staff Sgt. Matthew Williams is reenlisted by CW2 Samuel Sheen, both with C Co., TF Brawler, while being suspended from a medevac Black Hawk, at FOB Shank. 3. Pfc. Gennitha Pounds, C Co., TF Workhorse, troubleshoots a command post node nonclassified Internet Protocol Router connection Jan. 13 at Contingency Operating Post Mazer-E Sharif. 4. Pfc. Brandon Yarosz, C Co., TF Workhorse, refuels a generator needed for the command post node Feb. 9 at COP Mazer-E Sharif. 5. Sgt. 1st Class Robert Boyce, dining facility manager of the Marne Cafe, HSC, TF Workhorse, answers questions during the dining facility council meeting, in the Marne Cafe Feb. 17, at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Spc. Nicholas Holley



Spc. Grant Marzoff

(Clockwise from top left) 1. Spc. Lloyd Sepulveda, cook in HSC, TF Workhorse, slices onions in preparation for lunch, Feb. 17 at the Marne Cafe on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. 2. Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Cardona, medic with HSC TF Workhorse, checks vitals of an Afghan man, Feb. 9 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The man was a victim of an avalanche that occurred the evening before, north of Bagram. 3. A Black Hawk from A Co., TF Knighthawk lands in the snow Feb. 1, outside Bagram Airfield. 4. Staff Sgt. Brian Waits (left) and Pfc. Jacquelyn Wallace, both members of HSC, TF Workhorse, use a plasma torch March 8 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

TASK FORCE LIGHTHORSE OPENS AN AID STATION



STORY BY CAPT. VALERIE KNIGHT
PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. JASON LASSITER



Soldiers from Task Force Lighthouse, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, gathered for the opening ceremony of the TF Lighthouse Aid Station, Feb. 14 at Forward Operating Base Jalalabad.

The aid station is staffed with five personnel: Capt. Aimee Jones, physician's assistant, along with Staff Sgt. Regina Lawerance, Sgt. Christopher Moore, Spc. Joseph Bailey, and Pfc. Ashely Sptizer, all medics and members of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, TF Lighthouse, in addition to Capt. Frederick Hauser, a flight surgeon who works primarily with the MEDEVAC unit providing care on missions. Together, the medical team worked to accumulate the medications needed and to find equipment to place in the aid station.

"I am very proud of all the work that the TF Lighthouse medics put into standing up our new aid station," said Houser. "I believe it will help Capt. Jones and myself deliver more complete and convenient health care to the task force."

The aid station is equipped with a pharmacy, screening room, treatment room and a small reception area. Prior to the

TF Lighthouse Aid Station, TF Lighthouse medics and Soldiers worked and were treated in a small 8-foot by 10-foot office in the TF Mountain Warrior Clinic.

"Task Force Lighthouse moved in order to be more conveniently located to the rest of the task force," said Lawerance.

With the opening of the aid station, TF Lighthouse aviation Soldiers and civilians are able to be treated at a location closer to their workplace.

"It is wonderful having something so close," said Sgt. Tamekah Thompson, HHT, TF Lighthouse. "I am able to be seen and back in the office in a timely manner."

The aid station began seeing customers the day of the opening and is estimated to serve more than 500 Soldiers stationed on FOB Jalalabad.

"The new location has afforded the medical staff an opportunity to be more efficient in performing routine care, flight physicals and providing medical advice to the task force," said Lawerance. "The additional space at the new location allows personnel on flight status the ability to receive flight physicals on a walk-in basis. The staff is very pleased with the new location and feels it is more convenient to provide medical care to the Soldiers."



(Top left) Task Force Lighthouse Commander, Lt. Col. Thomas von Eschenbach cuts the ribbon to the new TF Lighthouse aid station, Feb. 14 at Jalalabad, Afghanistan. (Bottom left) (From left) Capt. Aimee Jones, Sgt. Christopher Moore, Spc. Joseph Bailey, and Staff Sgt. Regina Lawerance, all members of HHT, TF Lighthouse, watch the ribbon cutting of the TF Lighthouse aid station, Feb. 14 at Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

The making of a Brawler leader



Story and photos by Sgt. Scott Tant

On an early February afternoon, 24 members of Task Force Brawler's leadership gathered at the steps leading up to the task force's tactical operations center. Wearing their body armor, Kevlar helmets and carrying their weapons, they stood in small groups, some talking amongst themselves, some quiet in thought. Moments later, Lt. Col. Robert Ault, TF Brawler commander, stepped out through the main door and addressed the group.

"Nobody leads here because it is owed to them," said Ault to a group of officers and senior enlisted. "The stakes are too high in this war. You can't afford to have leaders in command positions if they don't know what they're doing. Bottom line is that we are at war, and we need leadership that can effectively lead in unusual and challenging circumstances. Whether or not they are called on to do that is a different thing, but they need to be prepared to do that."

According to the field manual on Army leadership, an ideal Army leader "has strong intellect, physical presence, professional competence, high moral character, and serves as a role model."

On Forward Operating Base Shank, the leaders within TF Brawler participated in a rite of passage designed to forge those leadership traits. It was a test of one's physical and mental prowess, and the ability to make decisions under less-than-desirable conditions. It is a program known to the Brawlers as "Leadership Certification".

Being a member of TF Brawler, according to Ault, is based off a philosophy with three main pillars: Take care of the Soldier's family, achieve and maintain aviation excellence, and develop leaders

that are competent, capable and adaptive. Leadership Certification assesses the individual leader's abilities through combat-related physical training, stress/reflexive weapons engagements, and combat lifesaving drills. A high level of physical and mental stress is placed upon each leader during the certification trials to simulate the affects of actual combat.

"Our emphasis behind Leadership Certification is that the leaders understand the 'Big 3', which is combat-focused weapons, PT and medical, then the demonstration of these skills amongst the other leadership," said TF Brawler Command Sgt. Maj. Stuart O'Black. "Leaders must meet the standards and expectations of the command group. You, as a leader, have to be able to lead by example. As a leader you have to be able to do the same things as you expect your Soldiers to do. You can't just talk it, you have to walk the walk."

The Leadership Certification event consists of a small-arms range and CLS training lane, throughout which the participants are challenged physically and mentally. The event begins with a 1-mile road-march in full body armor, Kevlar helmet and weapons, to the small-arms range.

Once at the range, the group of leaders are partnered up and then placed into two groups. While the second group observes, the first group runs up a steep hill, back down the other side and then up to the firing lanes of the small-arms range. From there, one of the team members holds a hand-held punching bag while the other punches it for two minutes. After two minutes, the



(Above left) Demonstrating proper firer-coach stance prior to reflexive firing drills, Lt. Col. Robert Ault (right), commander of TF Brawler, explains his expectations as TF Brawler Command Sgt. Maj. Stuart O' Black looks on, during Leadership Certification Feb. 19 at Forward Operating Base Shank. (Above right) Leaders from TF Brawler, simulate combat stress prior to reflexive-fire drills Feb. 19 at FOB Shank during the Leadership Certification. (Opposite page) Maj. Mike Stull (left) draws back a punch as Sgt. James Lynch braces for impact Feb. 19 at FOB Shank during Leadership Certification.

puncher secures his/her weapon and fires control bursts of two rounds at the target, using a reflexive-firing technique. The teammate stands behind the firer acting as a range safety and coach.

Reflex firing has the firer standing with his/her body squared to the target and raising the rifle quickly and level, and firing controlled pair of shots at the target without actually focusing on the target as in a traditional range setting. The firer continues raising, firing, and lowering the weapon until they have expended all ammunition. The firer's coach stands directly behind the firer with hands in direct contact with his teammate. The coach acts as a safeguard ensuring muzzle discipline and awareness is exercised as fatigue sets in. The pair then alternate roles so each experiences the full spectrum of training.

"Soldiers should be in a stressed environment when performing weapons training," said 1st Sgt. Mark Carl, Company C, 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, TF Brawler. "That way the Soldiers are accustomed to working under pressure. You might be one hundred percent proficient on a task, but bring the heart rate up and add some stress, and the proficiency drops. This training helps build muscle memory on the task so that it becomes instinctual behavior."

On the CLS portion of the certification, the paired teams first did rigorous exercises, such as kettle bell drills, sledge hammer swings, or hillside sprinting. Then they each gave the other an IV and a nasopharyngeal airway application. The latter is a process of inserting a soft, plastic tube into either nostril to assist casualties if they are having breathing difficulties.

"Familiarity with these two particular tasks is critical in that it helps leaders remove the apprehension of being involved in medical procedures," said Capt. Caton Hill, flight surgeon for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, TF Brawler. "It is important for nonmedically skilled Soldiers to be hands on during medical

situations. The confidence gained through successfully giving someone else an IV under combat-simulated stress can possibly help save a life in a real-world situation."

According to some senior noncommissioned officers who also participated in the event, the pace and tempo of the training was an effective tool.

"After the range, the leaders should have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses," said O'Black. "They should have an understanding of the difference between how they trained, before becoming a Brawler, in relation to what is expected of them now."

Prior to the walk back to the Brawler area of operations, a brief review of the events by the task force commander helped reinforce the key points of the training.

"How do you know you're right?" asked Ault of the group of officers and enlisted surrounding him. "How do you know you're proceeding down the right road? I submit to you that you know this when you as leaders are making decisions down range that are right and good and timely. That when you look at your Soldiers, the training shows. That is when you know your training of your subordinates is headed in the right direction."

Later that day, after the return trek home, Ault explained the goal of Leadership Certification and what was the end state of his and other senior leader's efforts.

"Leadership Certification revolves around the third pillar of our (Brawler) philosophy, which really has become the main effort of the task force command group," said Ault. "That is developing competent, capable, adaptive, flexible leaders that are values based and can operate in conditions of great uncertainty. When we have those, then my job as the task force commander is not so much controlling the task force, my job is commanding it, because now the leaders are, in my eyes, empowered with the command philosophy."



MASCAL exercise tests medics' mettle

Story and Photos by Capt. Garrett Gandia

On a wet and windy February morning, hours before dawn, the Soldiers and civilians of Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan were stirred from their sleep. A loud voice from the airfield's public announcement system sounded: "CODE PURPLE. CODE PURPLE. ACTIVATE ALL CCPs. ACTIVATE ALL CCPs."

The medics on shift at the Task Force Falcon Aid Station spilled from the medical facility. Medical personnel across Camp Albert rushed from their plywood shacks, with aid bags and medical supplies in hand, to assess casualties. Bodies were strewn about with wounds exposed, the red liquid staining uniforms and the muddy ground alike. Commotion ensues as medics transported the wounded to the casualty collection points (CCPs), while trying to calm shock-ridden Soldiers in the general vicinity. At the CCP doctors, physician's assistants, medics and combat life savers worked diligently to stabilize casualties and prepare them for transportation to the next echelon of treatment. Screams and the sound of running field litter am-

balance engines pierced the once-serene morning air.

The scene is raucous, yet controlled. Too real to be a vivid dream, but disingenuous to be reality. The "wounds" are prosthetics, the "blood" is theatrical, and the casualties are Soldiers role playing different casualty situations during a mass casualty exercise, conducted simultaneously Feb. 26 across Bagram Airfield.

Weeks of planning have led up to this base-wide exercise to assess the confidence and competence of Bagram's medical personnel. Task Force Cyclone coordinated for the simultaneous MASCAL exercise to encompass the combined efforts of the TF Falcon Aid Station, the Navy operated Bagram Theater Internment Facility, the Air Force operated Craig Joint Theater Hospital, and the 82nd Special Troops Battalion along with additional support coming from various civilian agencies.

In the nine years Bagram Airfield has been controlled by the International Security Assistance Force only a hand full of simultaneous MASCAL exercises have

been conducted. This was the first base-wide MASCAL exercise TF Falcon has been involved in since arriving in theater in the fall of 2009. However, "medical readiness and appropriate reaction time during a MASCAL are perishable skills and it is imperative to continue to practice, in the event of a real MASCAL emergency" said Spc. Patrick Sullivan, a TF Workhorse, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon medic.

"Continued MASCAL evacuation drills are getting Soldiers used to MASCAL situations," said Sgt. 1st Class Denney Choate, TF Falcon medical operations noncommissioned officer, who helped plan the MASCAL exercise for TF Falcon Soldiers on Bagram Airfield. "[The importance of these drills are] getting Soldiers ready so they're not wondering what to do at the last minute."

"This exercise was designed to ensure all medical personnel are capable and comfortable in their medical skills and tasks," said Staff Sgt. Charmaine Howard, TF Workhorse assistant medical NCOIC, who participated in the MASCAL exercise.



From the TF Workhorse perspective the MASCAL exercise served as the validation of months, and perhaps years, of preparation by the TF Workhorse doctors, medics, and combat life savers. Training is at the heart of any military event, and preparations for the MASCAL exercise was no different.

Sergeant First Class Stephen Cardona, TF Workhorse medical platoon sergeant and senior medic in the battalion, applied outside-the-box thinking when developing the TF Workhorse combat life saver program on Bagram Airfield. One piece of equipment that was no stranger to the medics and combat life savers during the MASCAL exercise was the Warrior Aid and Litter Kit.

"Sergeant [Victor] Stepper and I added the WALK to the existing CLS to integrate additional medical technologies to the curriculum," said Cardona. "This exercise proved the mettle of the medics and has definitely raised the bar on how MASCAL exercises should be run."



(Opposite Page) 1. Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Cardona (left), HSC, TF Workhorse, and Spc. Jasvincent Lizama (right), B Co., TF Workhorse, attempt to subdue and escort a hysterical Soldier to the nearest casualty collection point during the MASCAL drill, Feb. 26 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. 2. Sgt. 1st Class Denney Choate, HHC, TF Falcon, puts the finishing touches on the moulage worn by Pfc. Whitney White, A Co., TF Workhorse at the casualty staging area prior to the Bagram Airfield MASCAL drill Feb. 26. (This page) 1. Capt. Kimberley Philips, HSC, TF Workhorse, assesses the responsiveness of a casualty suffering from head trauma during the Bagram Airfield MASCAL drill Feb. 26. 2. Spc. Ethan Lee, medic with HSC, TF Workhorse, applies a tourniquet to the amputated arm of Pfc. Whitney White, A Co., TF Workhorse, before attending to his skull fracture and protruding eye during the Bagram Airfield MASCAL drill Feb. 26.

Task Force Dark Knight Soldiers talk at the gate and share in the villages

Story by Cpl. Kara Subach
and Master Sgt. Mark Ligget

[Due to security, Soldiers' last names and rank are not used in the story]



Human Intelligence Collection Team member (left) talks with a local national during patrol, Feb. 14 in Kohe Safi District, Parwan Province, Afghanistan.

Driving to the gate, members of the human intelligence collection team glanced at eager Afghan nationals standing in line for employment with tin can lunch pails in their hands. They waited patiently in the cold and bundled up in warm clothing, in order to put food on the table for their families.

"The expression on their faces is unforgettable," said India, HCT member, Task Force Dark Knight. "It seems to show the true colors of working men".

The men with dirt on their clothes, wrinkles on their faces, and their beat up hands seemed to the team nothing more than sons, brothers, and fathers looking for hope and a better future. As the HCT approached the main entrance, some team members stopped and talked to some of the Afghan security guards. The guards hovered over a bonfire to keep warm, while each guard took turns chopping wood, in order to keep the fire alive. The HCT members chatted with the guards about recent events around Bagram Airfield, as part of their job to collect information while building trust with locals.

"It's very important for our team to go out and assess how locals are doing, and what problems they have," said Sam, team leader of the HCT, TF Dark Knight. "It creates trust, it's about building relationships and gathering information that can help us."

He referred to a paper by Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn, the Chief of Intelligence for the International Security Assistance Force that states:

"The United States has focused the overwhelming majority of collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, [but] ... is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate in and the people they are trying to protect and persuade."

In other words, the United States and coalition forces need to know as much or more about the people in Afghanistan, as the enemy.

The team is involved in the area that surrounds Bagram Airfield and all of Parwan Province. Bagram Airfield, as the largest employer in Parwan, is an economic magnet allowing the team to talk to Afghans as well as men who travel from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and as far away as Nepal. This constant flow of job seekers gives the HCT the opportunity to do their job – talk to people.



The talking pays off when a local national tells the team the location of anti-Afghan forces or hidden ordnance. By building relationships over time, the team also learns what is normal in the community so it can be alert for changes that may indicate danger.

Force protection is important, but for the team, the Army is there to protect and help the people of Afghanistan.

The team constantly helps the community by handing out supplies as a goodwill gesture. Often, the gifts are recreational equipment for the children, such as soccer balls, volleyballs, and kites. The team also assists local schools and children by providing paper, pens, and crayons. For team members, education is extremely important.

"The children enjoy receiving pens for school, and there is nothing more special than seeing their faces light up," said Carla, a team member.

In many of the schools, there is one textbook for every four students. Many children go to school without pens and paper, which hinders their learning experience. Members of the HCT have their friends and families send care packages with supplies and candy to give out to the children.

"Education is the only way to help rebuild this country," said Sam. "Giving children an education can help decrease Taliban influence and recruitment."

Many members of the HCT on Bagram Airfield say they are proud to protect the community and give Afghan nationals the tools to build a stronger society.

"To know that I'm making a difference, and that the Afghan nationals appreciate the little gestures, makes me feel like I make a positive influence on their lives," said India.



Courtesy Photo

(Above) Human Intelligence Collection Team members India (left) and Sam (center) pass out supplies, Feb. 13 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (Right) Human Intelligence Collection Team member India (left) passes out school supplies, Feb. 13 near Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (Background) After providing aid and listening to villagers; weapons like these get turned in, removing material, that can be used to make improvised explosive devices, from the battlefield.

Hard Corps:

Task Force Falcon Soldiers take on Marines in corporal's course

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Francisco Salas



This month, three Task Force Falcon Soldiers had a rare opportunity to participate in the Marine Corps Corporal's Course which ended in a graduation ceremony Feb. 24 on the flight line on Bagram Airfield. The Marines of the Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 1 and Soldiers of TF ODIN-A (Observe, Detect, Identify, Neutralize-Afghanistan) and TF Workhorse, both under TF Falcon, gathered to celebrate the culmination of all the events.

"They have a different mentality," said Spc. Robert Dean of Lexington, Ky., a wheeled mechanic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, TF Workhorse. "We seem to put our (military occupational specialties) first. The Marines train to be riflemen first."

Every Marine leader must start with the Marine Corps Corporal's Course. It is the preliminary introduction to what it takes to be a noncommissioned officer in the Marine Corps, much as the Warrior Leader's Course is for the Army.

"We are going to push them—hard," said Marine Sgt. Christopher Ostrander, at the beginning of the course. "We are going to push them so

that their [subordinates] never can. It's going to be tough, but we are not here to break anybody. We are here to make better leaders."

Ostrander, a seven-year veteran of the Corps, is the lead instructor for what was the second cycle for the course here on Bagram Airfield. He is said to be disciplined, fair, and have a passion for making Marines more effective. He has a candor that puts the Soldiers (unfortunately for them) on the same playing field as his own Marines.

"They will all be one team," said Ostrander. "If one of them fails, they all fail together."

Though Ostrander promised to push the participants hard, Dean said the Marine leader also cared for them.

"When most of us failed our first written test, I could see that it upset him; that he was disappointed," said Dean. "I could tell that he really, really cared that we failed. He wanted us to succeed."

The first day of classes also was the first snow of the year, Feb. 8. The grey skies, snow-covered earth and cold winds added to the chill of the unknown as the Soldiers traveled to Bagram's

Camp McCool for class sharing hopes with each other of winning the honor graduate award. Once there the students received their inbrief from the Marines' senior enlisted, Sgt. Maj. Bernard Coleman, as to what they could look forward to during the course and what they could achieve.

The second day of class introduced the students to the Marines drill and ceremony sword and the Marine physical fitness test. During the test's three-mile run, TF ODIN-A Soldiers, Spc. Ritchie Lopez and Pfc. Lawrence Johnson led the pack.

"We drove along [the group] as they ran, yelling out the window 'HOOAH! Rangers lead the way,'" said Ostrander in praise of Lopez, an aviation operations specialist from Fresno, Ca., and Johnson, an intelligence analyst from Atlanta, Ga.

"Hell on Earth" is the pet name for the combat conditioning portion of the course. The Soldiers ran through a gauntlet of mud, sweat, and big tires, as they suffered through circuit drills, Marine Corps style. A field was set up with multiple stations marked by orange cones, spread linear across approximately 100 meters, with exercises from tire flips, to "buddy lunges," to sand bag pressing, all networked together by shuttle sprints from one end to the other.

"The combat conditioning was by far the hardest part of the course," said Lopez. "It was 'boots and uts' (short for utilities, or Army Combat Uniforms) every other day. We'd run a mile out the field, (perform extensive physical exercises) for one and a half to two hours, and just when you thought we were done, we'd go again. Then have to run a mile back".

"Combat conditioning is meant to simulate battlefield situations," said Dean. "You don't have time to worry about (being hurt) or being tired. You have to be able to look out for your guys. It was tough, and I was mad, but you gotta push through it [because] when you let (the instructors) get in your head, they got you."

Marine Sgt. Bobby Malicoat, one of the instructors, ran the circuit side-by-side with his Marines and Soldiers.

"I was excited when I found out we had Soldiers coming through," said Mailcoat. "Even if they were 'volun-told' to be here, they still have to want to be here, because they didn't quit – and the Marines were trying harder because they didn't want to look bad."

But during, and amidst taunts of "you aint gonna get faster by runnin' slower" and "don't you break my sand bags!" the class of three Soldiers and 13 Marines literally carried each other through two hours of pain and exhaustion.

When the "Hell on Earth" subsided, the students showed their pride and motivation by rocking the north end of Bagram Airfield with their thundering cadence.

Having taken the Marine physical fitness test on Feb. 10 the class undertook the seemingly simple task that is an Army Physical Fitness Test. It was an opportunity to share the differences between the Marines' and Army fitness standards.

The Marines test consists of a pull-up event, abdominal crunches and a three mile run. The Army's test includes push-ups, [full] sit-ups and a two-mile run. The turnout was bigger than planned. A dozen Marines were on hand in support, Army evaluators were tasked to grade the event, including four staff sergeants and a sergeant, with three first sergeants overseeing, while the actual test was administered by the Marine cadre.

One of the Marine instructors and their sergeant major even

took the test alongside the students. While the performance expectations may not have been what were anticipated, there was more than enough competition and effort to make it worthwhile, and weeks later, the Marines' sergeant major said there is not a Marine in his formation that thinks the Army physical fitness test is easy – at least not anymore, that is.

The course also focused on ethics, leadership, communication, mentorship and counseling, comparing greatly to the Army's Warrior Leader Course.

"I don't want to say it's going to be a 'cake walk', but PT-wise WLC is going to be way easier," said Lopez. "This one [Marine Corporal Course] pushed you to the limits."

Both Lopez and Johnson agreed the most prominent lesson they took from the experience is to lead by example.

"I've gained a lot of tools" and "a new way of thinking," said Dean. "It made me realize it's time to step up [because] now I have a foundation to build my own leadership style."

Some of the areas Johnson said he intends to incorporate his new lesson into practice is in the "workspace and on the PT field."

"Sergeant Malicoat is the greatest NCO

I've ever met," said Johnson. "He was with us every step of the way, sometimes doing what we did, times four. I want to be seen as that type of leader."

The Soldiers and Marines of the course bonded in a way Lopez and Johnson said they could not do with their fellow TF ODIN-A Soldiers.

"You can see all the pictures and hear all the stories I have to tell, but until you go through all that we did with [those Marines], you'll never know what it feels like," said Lopez.

In the end the honor graduate award was presented to a Marine corporal named Sapp.

"Sapp deserved it," said Lopez. "He came such a long way."

"We were all proud of each other and all we accomplished together", said Johnson, having no remorse for not being named honor graduate. "It humbled me a little bit; [the course] opened my mind how (the Marines Corps) interact."



(Above) Pfc. Lawrence Johnson, D Co., TF ODIN-A (Observe, Detect, Identify, Neutralize - Afghanistan), conducts sword manual drills, Feb. 15 at camp McCool on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, during Marine Corps Corporals Course. (Opposite page clockwise from top left) 1. Pfc. Lawrence Johnson D Co., TF ODIN-A conducts a tactical halt during squad movements Feb. 17 on Bagram Airfield. 2. Spc. Ritchie Lopez of HSC, TF ODIN-A attempts an arm bar on instructor Marine Sgt. Bobby Malicoat, Feb. 21 on Bagram Airfield. 3. Spc. Robert Dean of HSC, TF Workhorse and Spc. Ritchie Lopez of HSC, TF ODIN-A, each uses a Marine to perform 'buddy squats,' Feb. 11 at Bagram Airfield. 4. Pfc. Lawrence Johnson, D Co., TF ODIN-A, conducts "tire flips" during the Marine Corps Corporal Course's "Hell on Earth" Feb. 11 at Bagram Airfield.

Task Force View



Sgt. 1st Class Kimberly A. Green

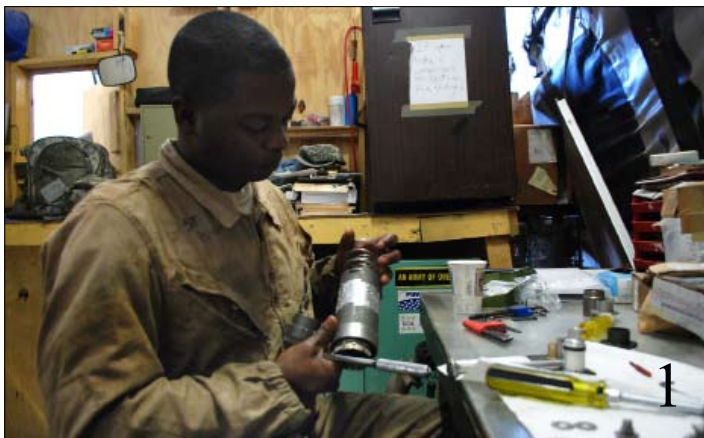


Spc. Monica K. Smith



Sgt. Scott Tant

(Above left) 1. Afghans, who were victims of a massive avalanche, patiently await medical attention Feb. 9 at Bagram Airfield, in front of a hand painted mural that depicts iconic symbols of U.S. freedom and liberty. The avalanche occurred the previous evening, north of Bagram. (Top right) 2. A Chinook with B Co., TF Knighthawk is unloaded March 14 from a C-17 at Bagram Airfield. (Bottom right) 3. Mohammad Hadil, center with green beret, platoon leader with the 4th Kandak, uses an interpreter to discuss the day's training with Capt. Andrew Alvord, E Co., TF Brawler, Feb. 27 at FOB Shank.



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Sgt. Scott Tant



Sgt. Scott Tant



Spc. Grant Marzolf

(Clockwise from top left) 1. Sgt. Kenneth Brown, HSC, TF Workhorse, works on a gravity nozzle, March 9 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. 2. Spc. Dartanyon (left) and Spc. Jarmal Davis, both members of HSC, TF Workhorse, work on a rear differential, March 9 at Bagram Airfield. 3. Cpl. Ian Jones, squad leader in E Co., TF Brawler, tests the range of the PSO-1 scope on a Dragunov sniper rifle, Feb. 27 at FOB Shank. 4. A Chinook with B Co., TF Knighthawk, flies over the Afghanistan mountains, Feb. 18. 5. Spc. Domenic Raushkolb, D Co., TF Brawler, applies sealing compound to the upper seal on the main rotor head of an Apache, March 7 at FOB Shank.

Parting Shot



CW2 Kyle Johnson

An Afghan mountain towers over a Chinook from B Co., TF Knighthawk, as it conducts a mission, Feb. 10.