

December 2010

Roaring Thunder

News for the Soldiers, Airmen, Civilians and Contractors of Task Force Thunder



Army Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams, battalion command sergeant major, 25th Signal Battalion, receives a token of appreciation, before leaving the unit for another position, from Army Sgt. 1st Class Maria Nevarez, detachment first sergeant, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 25th Signal Battalion; Army 1st Sgt. Don Riggins, company first sergeant, 580th Signal Company; and Army Master Sgt. Chrisanna Garcia, plans and operations noncommissioned officer in charge, 25th Signal Battalion.

Task Force Thunder **Command & Staff**

TF Commander

Army Col. Chris Kemp

Deputy TF Commander

Army Lt. Col. Teri Hassell

Command Sergeant Major

Army Command Sgt. Maj.

Thomas Wilkerson

Personnel Officer

Army Lt. Col. Orville Jennings

Security Officer

Army Maj. Benjamin Stevens

Plans & Operations Officer/ JNCC-A Director

Army Lt. Col. John H. Phillips

Supply & Logistics Officer

Army Lt. Col. George Brady

Brigade Judge Advocate

Army Lt. Col. Robert Drummer

Chaplain

Army Lt. Col. Gary Williams

Public Affairs Officer

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato

Task
Force
Thunder
Commander:

Col. Kemp

Servicemembers, contractors and civilians
of Task Force Thunder,

As the New Year begins, I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I know it was hard to be away from your family and friends during the holidays. Nothing I could have said would have made that any easier, but I do want you to know how much I appreciate each and every one of you.

The signal mission here in Afghanistan is critical, as you all know. And each one of you plays an important part. So whether you are a Soldier, an Airman, a contractor or a military civilian, you are part of Task Force Thunder. As leaders, we don't always make time to tell those who are doing all the heavy day-to-day work they are appreciated. But you should know that we could not do this mission without you. Every section and every member of the team provides a piece of the puzzle. Your contributions here are helping Coalition Forces make history. You are an integral part of the overall effort to create a more independent Afghanistan.

As you start the New Year, I ask you to think about what you have accomplished here. Consider both your professional and personal goals. Have you crossed off a lot of tasks on your to-do list? If so, congratulations, and keep up the good work! If there are some still on the list, well, that is normal. Mine seems to grow with each passing day.

While you go through your lists of tasks, goals, resolutions, I ask you include personal goals too. Of course, mission will come first, and there are critical responsibilities that must be done by each and every person in the task force. Prioritize those tasks and stay focused on them. But, make sure you make time for yourself as well. Keep yourself mentally, spiritually and physically fit. You will do your teammates and yourself no good if you cannot function at your full capacity.

If that means you take an hour to escape to nap, work out, read, or just listen to music, then do so, and come back refreshed and refocused. I would prefer that, than you sitting at your desk for hours accomplishing nothing. Leaders, this goes for you, as well as your personnel.

With the number of tasks ahead, I need every member of the team engaged and placing their piece of the puzzle in place.

Again, please know your efforts are appreciated not only by your leaders in Task Force Thunder, but by all of the warfighters we are providing services for out to the edge of the battlespace.

Privileged to serve each and every one of you,

COL Chris Kemp

Commander, Task Force Thunder

Task Force Thunder

Command
Sergeant Major:

Command
Sgt. Maj.
Wilkerson



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato

Dear Task Force Thunder,

Soldiers and Airmen, we have taken an enormous step towards fulfilling our mission each day we wake up without our families and with a constant reminder of threat looming thick in the air.

It is our duty, and undoubtedly our honor, to serve our countrymen and women. Duty means having a moral obligation or responsibility to serve a task to completion.

As servicemembers, it is important to remember that we are not only bound by our oath, but also by our morality.

It is our duty to ensure our families and friends are afforded luxuries that many countries or cultures can not emulate. We may have the toughest task to undertake, but the reward of those actions are shown in the eyes of all those we dutifully support and protect.

Thank you for your tireless efforts and attention to your various duties as a Soldier/Airman of the United States military.

Thomas D. Wilkerson
Command Sergeant Major
Task Force Thunder

Task Force Thunder Elements

Task Force Headquarters

HHC , 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade
Bagram, Afghanistan

Regional Command - East/Capital

25th Signal Battalion
HHD, 25th SB
C Company 63rd ESB
550th Signal Company
580th Signal Company
820th Tactical Installation Network
278th Signal Company

Regional Command - South/ Southwest

86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion
HHC, 86th ESB
A Company 86th ESB
B Company 51st ESB
B Company 307th ESB
C Company 86th ESB
550th Signal Company

Regional Command - North

307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion
HHC, 307th ESB
A Company 151st ESB
B Company 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion

25th Signal Battalion honors their CSM

Warm wishes for a great leader, friend & man: Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams

Right, Army Sgt. Stephanie Curtis, evaluations sergeant, 25th Signal Battalion, tells the audience about how Army Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams, 25th Signal Battalion command sergeant major, was such a good mentor and leader to her at a ceremony honoring Adams.



Photos by Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade



Left, Army Col. Chris Kemp, Task Force Thunder commander; and Soldiers from C Company, 63rd Signal Company: Spc. Joshua Jolley, wheeled mechanic; Spc. Bryan Davis, satellite communicator; Spc. Thomas Frydrych, satellite communicator, and Pfc. Beatrice Hernandez, supply clerk, serve the ceremony meal. Below, Army Pfc. Nicholas Saucedo, legal clerk, 25th Signal Battalion, and Army Pv2. Latcia Swartout, operations clerk, 580th Signal Company, play for the audience.

Right, 25th Signal Battalion's Army Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams thanks his commander and friend, Army Lt. Col. Ivan Montanez, as he prepares to leave the battalion.



Right, Army Capt. Jonathan McDougal, 17th Combat Service Support Battalion, plays *Amazing Grace* at the 25th Signal Battalion's CSM ceremony.



Above, 25th Signal Battalion's chaplain Army Capt. James Russell, "gifts" Army Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams some cookies of his own, so he won't have to liberate anyone else's. Left, Army 1st Sgt. Bennie Gause, 278th Signal Company's first sergeant give the battalion command sergeant major the company "Spartans" helmet as a farewell gift. Below, Army Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams, battalion command sergeant major, 25th Signal Battalion, exchanges thanks with his friend Army Sgt. Maj. John Schiffl, Task Force Thunder plans and operations sergeant major.

Right, Ms. Patricia "Mama Lewis," administrative assistant, 25th Signal Battalion Command Group, reads a poem honoring Command Sgt. Maj. Carl Adams.



25th Signal Battalion Feature:

Not all “Servicemembers” Wear a Uniform

By Army Capt. Michelle Lunato
359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

When people think of deployments, they generally think of servicemembers: Soldiers, Airmen, Marines and Sailors. However, these are not the only people who serve.

Throughout the years, there have been a number of civilians who play a huge part on the “battle fields” across the globe. These contributors don’t wear a uniform typically, but that does not mean their efforts are of any less value. Nor does it mean they spend less time away from their families and home.

As a Department of the Army civilian, Staten Island, N.Y. resident Mr. Daniel S. Cahill has spent over five years deployed in support of both Operation Iraqi Freedom, and now Operation Enduring Freedom.

For the past eight months Cahill, who is stationed at Bagram Airfield as the procurement analyst for the 25th Signal Battalion, has traveled around the country with signal leaders in their efforts to expand and develop the communications infrastructure for coalition forces. As military leaders, along with technology contractors, decide what they need to accomplish these tasks, Cahill analyzes their plans. “We provide guidance to the military and contractors so things can be performed in accordance to government regulations and laws,” said Cahill.

DA civilians, who are separate entities from servicemembers and commercial contractors, are like a form of protection, said Cahill. “We are like the shepherds and gate keepers.” To protect the Soldiers, “I help them package their requests so they can get what they need [within regulations].” To protect the government, and ultimately the contractors themselves, “DA civilians provide responsibility for contractors to do what they are supposed to do.”

In the ever-changing world of technology, keeping up with all of that can be a challenge, said Cahill, who was a communications specialist when he was in the Army years ago. “Functional-



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Daniel S. Cahill, contract specialist, 25th Signal Battalion.

ly there are still similarities, but the current technology has opened systems more.” With more ease and ability for the communication customers, comes more challenges for the signaleers, and the team figuring out what to buy for them. Advances in technology have “made it easier, but have also made more layers – which has made it more complex” for us in the field.

With all the different compartmentalization, you can’t avoid one problem, warned Cahill. “Technology allows you to do it, but the human element can make it difficult.” Whether that means innocent errors or malicious attacks on the network, there is always something for the signaleers to repair, maintain or replace.

Cahill said his contracting efforts here in

See CAHILL, page 16



Army Spc. Michael Cannon, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

A mountain view of Afghanistan shows the beauty of a country that has lived with war for so long.

Work on Resilience, Decide to Have a Great Day

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all my comrades in Task Force Thunder!

One of the important buzz words in the military as of late is the word RESILIENCY. To be resilient means making do and surviving despite the difficult conditions that surround and engulf you.

It means making a decision to stay positive and move forward even though your heart, gizzards, mind, and stomach would just a soon lay down and forgo all responsibilities given to you.

One of the things I have learned and won't forget from Col. Kemp's officer professional development, as well as what he mentioned to me once, was his early morning decision making process. When asking him how he was one day, he said he was 'Great!' which is what I hear every time I ask. I finally asked him what gives,

and he said that everyday he wakes up and makes the decision that it will be a GREAT day. This is a very powerful way to start your day. It's one of the hallmarks of being resilient! It's mind over matter sometimes, but it works.

This Christmas/Holiday season can be difficult for many servicemembers who are away from their families and friends. It really is a feeling of loss and loneliness. There may be some who don't experience any difficulty at all, but they would be foolish to think that many others don't feel some of that pain.

This is where this morning decision making process can really help those of us who may at times feel some of that pain. Sometimes it means taking control of what you can control and not letting the pain that stems from things that you cannot control

erode your job performance.

I encourage you to also make this part of your early morning decision making process: I will concentrate on what I can control - not on what I can't control. I can't control not being there when my daughter opens her Christmas gifts, but I can control what I do with my time over here.

Instead of sulking, I am going to write my daughter a note and carve a heart for her! I may choose to eat four big bowls of ice cream in recognition of her splendor! I may choose to read a book and then send it to her to read. We can make it, we can keep moving forward, we can complete the mission and take positive reign over all the responsibility given to us. Blessings on your resilient Christmas/Holiday season!

Chaplain Gary Williams

Looking for a job?

Check out these links/POCs
for tools, info & possibilities...

(1) Employers Partnership of
the Armed Forces ~
www.employerpartnership.org

E-mail: gethired@employerpartnership.org

(2) Personnel Force Innovation ~
<http://pfi.dod.mil/>

(3) Guard Knowledge Online
~ <https://gkoportal.ngb.army.mil/default.aspx>

(4) YOUR State website

(5) <http://www.jobcentral.org/vetcentral/army-reserve-employer-program/>

(6) <http://www.usar.army.mil/arweb/EPI/Pages/default.aspx>

(7) www.usajobs.gov

(8) <http://hireveterans.com>

(9) <http://www.dol.gov/vets>

(10) <http://federaljobs.net/veterans.htm>

(11) <http://www.militaryresume-writers.com>

(12) <http://jobs.com>

(13) <http://www.careerbuilder.com>

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Photo Courtesy

359th TTSB Soldier meets ISAF Commander, Awarded Joint Service Achievement Medal ~

Centerville, Va. resident Army Spc. Frank McDonough, Enterprise information management officer, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade, meets Army Gen. David Petraeus, commander, International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, in late October while on mission supporting the Civilian Military Rehearsal of Concept Drill.

During this event, McDonough served as a "key player" of an 11-member communications team that supported more than 250 participants from the Department of State, Department of Defense, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, North Atlantic Treaty Organization members and coalition partners.

For his "outstanding professional skill and ceaseless efforts that resulted in major contributions to the effectiveness and success of the United States Forces-Afghanistan's support for a four-star shura," McDonough was awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal.

The drill was essential in laying the groundwork for the next six months of military and civilian interactions between the United States, coalition, and Afghanistan leaders.

86TH ESB WARRIORS FLY IN STYLE

Gates Gives Soldiers a Holiday Lift Home

**Compiled from an article by
Lolita C. Baldor ~The Associated Press**

ABOARD A MILITARY AIRCRAFT — It's a long flight home from the battlefields of Afghanistan. But four Soldiers traveling to see family for the holidays got an upgrade, courtesy of Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Normally, their leave would have started with a wait at the airport for the next available seat on a military plane to Kuwait, followed by a grueling commercial flight back to the United States.

On Dec. 9, 2010, however, Army Sgts. 1st Class Kerry and Moses McMillan, a married couple in the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, and two other Soldiers got to skip the long lines and security pat-downs, and instead boarded Gates' expansive E-4B — a militarized version of the Boeing 747, known as the Doomsday Plane.

And their layover wasn't at an airport hotel — it was at the luxurious Emirates Palace that stretches for more than a kilometer along the Persian Gulf coast in Abu Dhabi, where Gates stopped to meet that night with the crown prince. The layover at the palace was a huge bonus on top of the already amazing ride home, said Sgt. 1st Class Kerry McMillan, battalion career counselor. "It was breath taking."

Traveling with Gates certainly made the process much more efficient for the Soldiers, which was the goal, according to the Pentagon staff. "This way they'll get a more comfortable, hopefully more enjoyable and certainly faster trip home," said Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell, as Gates' plane coasted over Eastern Europe. Our travel time was definitely a lot quicker, and the staff was so gracious, said Kerry McMillan. "They also offered us to spend the night in D.C., but we were just too anxious to get home to our children since it had been 10 months since my husband and I had seen them."

The rugged aircraft was designed to be an airborne operations center for the Pentagon chief



Photo Courtesy

Army Sgts. 1st Class Moses and Kerry McMillan, both of the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, receive a coin from International Security Assistance Forces Commander Army Gen. David Petraeus before riding home with Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense.

in the event of a national emergency. The plane was gigantic, said Kerry McMillan. "It was like a three-story building. I flew home behind a desk and a computer."

Morrell said Gates has long wanted to give some troops a ride home for leave or at the end of their tour. Before Gates left the U.S., staff told commanders in Afghanistan that there were a few empty seats on the plane and asked them to find some troops who were heading back to the U.S. within the secretary's schedule.

The McMillans, who were headed to Texas to spend the holidays with family members who are taking care of their three sons, (2-year-old Corey, 4-year-old Kai, and 5-year-old Marcus), have both deployed four times to war, once to Kosovo, twice to Iraq and now to Afghanistan.

Another Soldier has deployed twice to Afghanistan during his four years in the Army and was heading to Indiana. And the fourth has been in the Army for four years and is on his first deployment to Afghanistan.

For the 86th ESB Soldiers, the lift home was an unforgettable experience, said Kerry McMillan. "Opportunities like this don't happen to us. This was a once in a lifetime experience."

Back to the Basics

By Army Pfc. Chalon E. Hutson
301st Public Affairs Detachment

For almost a decade, America has been fighting throughout the Middle East. Deployment after deployment has given the fighting forces throughout the United States military experience that is impossible to be taught. However, an almost singular focus on preparation for these tours of duty has caused a lack of training on the Army "basics."

"We have become technically and tactically proficient in... training units to deploy and redeploy," said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Schultz, Command Sergeant Major for the U.S. Army Reserve Command. He said that while preparing Soldiers for the field environment, Army Reserve leaders have neglected preparing Soldiers for the garrison environment, which includes counseling and accountability for the physical readiness of Soldiers.

"Getting back to the basics" was the main theme Schultz portrayed throughout the Fall 2010 Army Reserve Senior Leader Conference in Phoenix Oct. 12-18. This bi-annual conference gives leaders the opportunity to discuss and plan the Army Reserve's future.

"As a result of the multiple deployments for our Soldiers, we have the most seasoned combat veterans in our force - probably since World War 2 or even beyond - now that we've been at war for so long," Schultz said. "Still, we can really do better... providing true mentorship to our junior (non-commissioned officers) and Soldiers."

"For the NCO corps, it's taking care of Soldiers, mentoring them, providing that fundamental responsibility of us as NCOs to train them," he said. "We have not been doing a good job at that."

Schultz plans for this to change. According to a directive he gave command sergeants majors in attendance at the conference, leaders should refer to his acronym "HOA," whenever they make a decision, where H stands for hypocrisy, O stands for ownership, and A

Weapons Safety

- Safe muzzle orientation is critical.
- Soldiers will always keep their weapon pointed in a safe direction. *At no time should any part of the human body be in the likely path of a bullet.* This requires constant awareness of the muzzle orientation and frequent the weapon is considered loaded. It is critical that Soldiers learn muzzle orientation as a life skill that becomes second nature and a personal responsibility.
- Weapons will be kept on safe at all times when not engaging a target or when enemy contact is not imminent.
- Fingers will be kept off of the trigger until firing the weapon is intended. There have been numerous negligent discharges resulting from Soldiers being bumped while the weapon safety selector was placed on FIRE and the finger on the trigger.
- Leaders will remain involved to ensure ammunition has not inadvertently been left in the weapon or placed in the weapon in a manner that can result in a negligent discharge.
- When clearing weapons on ranges, the weapon will be oriented down-range during the clearing process.
- During the issue and turn-in of weapons, both the armorer and the Soldier will visually *verify that the weapon does not contain any ammunition.* This procedure will be conducted whether ammunition was issued or not.

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Courtesy Photo

Air Force Master Sgt. Robert Rondash, an Air National Guardsman from the 213th Engineering Installation Squadron out of Newburgh, N.Y., tests recently repaired fiber in Technical Control Facility at Forward Operation Base Wilson. Rondash is currently assigned to the Engineering and Installation Team, which is part of Task Force Thunder, and travels around Afghanistan repairing and installing communications infrastructure.

Are you a writer or photographer?

Send your submissions
into the Task Force Thunder
Public Affairs Officer,
Army Capt. Michelle Lunato
at
michell.lunato@afghan...

Looking for:
accomplishments
scenic scenes
features
volunteer work

Task Force Thunder Chaplains:

Bagram-359th TTSB
gary.c.williams@afghan...

Kandahar-86th ESB
roger.b.osborn@afghan...

Bagram-25th SB
james.b.russell@afghan...

Have Free Time?

Get involved with
Operation Care:

Donate your:
time
I.T. skills
surplus items

Location does
NOT matter!

Contact:
michelle.lunato@afghan...

Two different worlds~Signal and Social Media

Understanding the military's goals for use

**Compiled from Army Reserve Soldiers' Notes,
Dec. 14, 2010**

Many servicemembers, especially you signalers, wonder why social media sites are authorized. Well, here are some of the reasons, according to Army Reserve leadership.

MyArmyReserve Social Media sites are not only "Official," they're powerful, and the Army Reserve's Command team is taking full advantage.

Thanks to MyArmyReserve's Flickr and Twitter feed, a quarter of a million people were able to witness and share Army Lt. Gen. Stultz's remarks at the Army Worldwide Diversity & Leadership Training Symposium on Dec 15.

Army Command Sgt. Major Schultz will conduct a Town Hall with leaders and Soldiers on January 4. Yet, rather than communicating to just the few hundred in attendance, MyArmyReserve's Twitter feed will allow him to have a live two-way dialogue with any Soldier across the country as part of the DoD's first "Twitter Town Hall."

Social Media is not a site, a piece of technology, or some catch phrase.

It's become an official way of communicating and listening that fits directly into our organization's values and imperatives. Of course, with everything we do in the military, there are rules and regulations as to how units can use their command sponsored sites and how Soldiers access and interact with social media when on duty or when deployed. DTM 09-026 (<http://ow.ly/3lnaG>) clearly outlines these responsibilities, lays the foundation, and addresses the challenges of operating in social media.

Our goal is to create online communities that share information, news, and resources that enhance the lives of Soldiers and families while giving the communities we live in an unprecedented understanding of our organization.

Social media is not meant to replace leadership's role in disseminating policy and command information: it's a complimentary program that allows leaders to do so more effectively, reaching our intended audiences in the places they go to communicate. Price B. Floyd, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, who's led the Pentagon's Social Media efforts, has emphasized the importance of Social Media for some time now.

"We shouldn't be so dogmatic about this stuff," he said. "I would encourage people to open a Twitter account, create a Facebook page, and see what works for them and their audience."

Find MyArmyReserve (facebook.com/myarmyreserve, twitter.com/myarmyreserve

and our blog at myarmyreserve.com) in your social networking community, and let your voice be heard.

Your questions, your comments can directly influence policy and by sharing your experiences you can help other Soldiers and families. Social Media can be an amazingly powerful, productive and meaningful way of communicating with our community of Soldiers and families, and that's why the leadership team has embraced it.

Facebook.com/myarmyreserve, it's "your site" to use and share it with those who are important to you.

To find a list of official Army social media sites, go to the The U.S. Army Social Media Page at www.army.mil/Media/socialmedia/.

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stands for action.

"If I'm telling (Soldiers), 'this is what you need to do,' but I'm not doing it myself, then I'm not leading from the front," he said, giving an example of hypocrisy to the audience.

Similarly, he said, "Most Soldiers have joined the military because they want to be challenged... They knew when they joined this all-volunteer Army that the requirements would be doing PT, they would be put in stressful situations. That's what they want. They want to train. And so we have to provide them that training. We have to get creative on how we do it, but we can do it."

The second acronym Schultz refers to is TT or "tree time". He explains it as a time spent talking to and getting to know the Soldiers in the unit.

"As a squad leader, team leader, or platoon sergeant (leaders have the opportunity to) grab (their) section or squad and take them out under a tree, or somewhere in the Reserve center and have lunch together," he said. Mentoring Soldiers in such a way is the right thing to do as an NCO, he added, and it also provides an opportunity to get to know your Soldiers better than reviewing records or communicating through e-mail.

During the Senior Leader Conference, Schultz had the opportunity to honor a Soldier who exemplified "getting back to the basics." On Oct. 16 he presented the first and an honorary Army Reserve Sergeant Audie Murphy Club Award to Sgt. 1st Class Kimberly Mercado, on behalf of her husband the late Master Sgt. Pedro Mercado, who had his life taken away on June 17, 2010, at Fort Gillem, Ga. This award honors Soldiers who represent the epitome of the finest NCOs.

"He was a Soldier's Soldier," said Schultz about Master Sgt. Mercado. "He took care of everyone, not just the NCOs....he was always leading from the front and always looking out for their best interests....Even though I never met him, I wish I would have met him."

"That's really what it's about. We have to do our jobs to get back to the basics."



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade
Army Spc. Courtesia Wilson, supply clerk, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade, sorts baby clothes at Operation Care in preparation for donation.

Task Force Thunder Provides for Fellow Servicemembers, Afghan Citizens

Servicemembers and contractors with Task Force Thunder are volunteering with Operation Care on a regular basis now in efforts to help fellow servicemembers and Afghan people.

The operation, which is a non-profit group located at Bagram Airfield, provides comfort items to servicemembers stationed at remote bases and humanitarian aid to Afghan citizens.

Here are some ways your team can help (even if your not located in Bagram):

- send addresses of remote servicemembers
- redesign & maintain website
- update facebook site
- market for donations
- give out donations (create at your location?)
- write & mail thank you notes to donators
- pick up & sort donations (create locally?)
- update donor list & needs
- monitor e-mail

If interesting in volunteering, please contact Army Capt. Michelle Lunato at: michelle.lunato@afghan.swa.army.mil.

Signal Mission Highlight:

Sling Load Operations ~ A Tool for Success in Signal

By Army Staff Sgt. Jason McGarvey
HHC, 307th ESB

One way to transport large pieces of Army equipment is to attach them to a vehicle and drive down the road. Another way to transport said pieces is to place them in an aircraft and fly to the new location. What happens when no one is driving to this new location? What happens when there is no place to land the plane at this new location? What can be done? Don't fear: Task Force Dragon is here.

Task Force Dragon [307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion] faced such a situation. Signal equipment was needed to fulfill a mission at a remote locale lacking all the essentials: ice cream machines, cable television and beautiful beaches that stretch as far as the eye can see. They chose a viable alternative. They chose to sling load the equipment. Despite having never done so in combat, there was no lack of preparation. TF Dragon conducted sling load training at Wheeler Army Air Field prior to deployment.

For those of you out there not familiar with sling load operations, the basic concept is simple. Simply put, sling loading is attaching strong chains to large pieces of equipment too big for even the strongest of Soldiers (like your humble author) on one end and attaching said chains to a helicopter on the other end. The helicopter then lifts off and flies equipment like satellite transmission trailers and generators to their new home. Upon arrival at the destination, the helicopter swoops in, places the equipment ever so gingerly on the ground and flies off into the sunset.

One might say, "That's too easy. I could do that in my sleep." That person would be sorely underestimating the coordination, labor and danger involved in such a mission. To sling load equipment helicopters are needed. To use a helicopter, one needs pilots. Pilots have many missions. Oh my! Army Staff Sgt. Aracely O'Malley came to the rescue. As the TF Dragon movement noncommissioned officer, she worked overtime coordinating with a nearby aviation unit to ensure that sling loading our equipment became one of their top priorities.

All the coordination in the world is great, but who is going to do the work? Can anyone be used? Hardly! Part of a successful sling load operation is hooking up the equipment and ensuring the physical stresses and strains on the equipment meet Army standards. Who is capable of such a daunting task? The Army, in its



Above, a unit on Bagram Airfield performs sling load operations with some signal equipment.

The 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion performs many of their operations at night, which makes photographing the helicopters somewhat of a challenge and security concern.



Photo Courtesy

infinite wisdom, developed a tough course so Soldiers would be prepared for such an occasion.

“What kind of course would train Soldiers to conduct sling load,” one might ask. Well, I will tell you; it is Air Assault. Sling Load is an essential portion of the Air Assault course. Army Staff Sgt. Jason Yielding and Army Spc. Thomas Carr are two such qualified Soldiers. They rigged, inspected and ensured all safety measures were met with regards to vertically lifting the equipment. Further inspections were done. What, more inspections! Weren’t Yielding’s and Carr’s enough? Yes, they were super. The mission would not have been a success

without them. But even in combat (especially in combat), the Army must ensure top notch safety and quality assurance.

TF Dragon sent one of its own, Army Sgt. 1st Class Humberto Tamez, a bona fide Army Pathfinder, to do follow on inspections. When asked what a genuine, honest to God, Army Pathfinder was doing in a Signal organization (a rarity in the signal world), Tamez answered expertly, “We [Pathfinders] ensure all Sling Load missions are done safely, and we act as the liaison between the aviation unit and the

See SLING LOAD, page 21



Courtesy Photo

Department of the Army civilian Daniel Cahill works to secure a contract in Fallujah while supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006.

CAHILL, continued from page 6

Afghanistan are not as visible as they were during his nearly-five-year deployment for Operation Iraqi Freedom. “In Iraq it was tangible. There was a building, a road, a school.” Outside of a brand new base or building receiving phones, computers and cable, in the signal field, the contract results cannot always be seen, he explained.

Whether the signal effects are visible or not, the money spent to acquire them is more than real, said Cahill. “One detail can cost a million dollars here, and one thing can lead to another thing, and to another.”

And knowing which project, or part of the project, needs to be paid with which check book is where Cahill comes in as a contracting specialist. “In Iraq there were so many colors of money. Here, there are basically two.” For day to day requirements like computers and food, the government pays from the Operations and Maintenance Army, or OMA, fund. For anything that is a new capability, like installing a new cellular switch, there is the Other Procurement Army, or OPA, fund.

December 2010

The schedule in Afghanistan is visibly different as well, said Cahill. “In Iraq, I worked seven days a week.” In the 25th SB, Cahill has been allowed a day off. “It is nice to have a day off to re-charge.” Nevertheless, there are so many things that need to be that you never really power down completely, he said. “I have a hard time turning it off.” If I do, I feel like I lose time and get behind, said Cahill. And when you work all of the time, you have to make each day individual. Otherwise, “it’s like Ground Hog Day” over and over again while you’re deployed, he said.

The sporadic incoming rockets always add something different to the day, mentioned Cahill. But compared to his time in Fallujah, where explosions were much more frequent, Cahill said

he can’t worry about it. “It is all about timing. It can happen anywhere, and being from New York, it’s timing there too.”

Being deployed to these different countries and traveling throughout them has provided Cahill with access to more than rocket attacks and repetitive days. This sacrifice has broadened his view of the world, he said. “I’ve been around the block. People don’t have a clue about places outside their homes.” Regardless of which side of the Earth people are from, “we seem to have a movie mentality about foreigners’ lives,” explained Cahill. Many people in the Middle East think all Americans are rich, while many Americans think all Middle Eastern people live in First Century conditions, he said.

If we could all just understand each others’ lives more, it would be so helpful, Cahill said. On the other hand, “the more I know, the more I don’t know.”

The one certainty his years across the globe have taught him is that it doesn’t really matter where you are to appreciate things. “There are glorious moments here, and there are glorious moments at home.

The Roaring Thunder

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86th ESB Soldier Highlight:

I Joined the Army to See Where it Would Lead Me



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade
Army Pfc. Michael A. Mejia, earlier in the year, in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Army Pfc. Michael A. Mejia *air conditioner technician ~ A Company* *86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion*

The 19-year-old Soldier, who is stationed in Kandahar, Afghanistan, said his first deployment is “more relaxed” than he expected. As he stays busy with work, and getting close to his motor pool comrades, life is “almost normal.” “So far, the deployment has been everything I was told,” said Mejia.

Except for being away

from his family and brand new wife, the deployment actually has had a few benefits, said the San Antonio, Texas resident. “My communications are better with my family now that I am so far away.” And as the operational tempo at work, makes the days go by quickly, Mejia said he is even more appreciative of the time when

he can call. It is not the same as being at home, when I could “just go and see my family anytime,” he explained. “I don’t take that time for granted anymore.”

On deployment there is just work but, sometimes that is just the answer to feeling blue, said Mejia. “When I am working, I don’t think about being deployed.” The days go by quicker when there is so much to be done.

At the beginning of the deployment, Mejia admitted that he really didn’t understand the importance of how his job as a technician related to the signal battalion he was supporting. However, since his sergeant explained the connection, he uses his perfectionist attitude to triple check his efforts. “If I can’t fix it, they would be incapable of doing their jobs,” Mejia said. “It is like a chain reaction. The only way they can stay up and running is with us. Without our help, they could not do their mission.” And without good communications in the country, the warfighters could not do theirs, say the signal leaders. Everyone does their part here, he said.

“Even though my job is not in the news, I feel like what I do here does matter.”

Another benefit from the deployment has been the motor pool team, Mejia said. The team has pulled together to really help each other, he said. “We are like one big family.” Whether it is work related or personal, Mejia has found a role model in his motor sergeant. “During work, he helps, but he also helps me out with whatever I need.” This mentorship has really taught me a lot, said Mejia.

On the other hand, he says he has also learned valuable lessons from a few bad leaders. “When I become a sergeant, I know what to do because I know how it felt to be treated badly.” They helped me learn by showing me something I didn’t want to become, he explained.

That lesson alone is one of the things Mejia was looking for when he joined the Army in the first place. “I wanted to better myself and see where it would lead me. I was just a normal kid who joined the Army, and now, I am here in Afghanistan.”

25th Signal Battalion's Soldier Highlight:



“A good leader is someone who doesn’t get intimidated easily, stands their ground and is willing to give direction.”

nally in the 1610th Signal Company out of Fort Hood, Texas, says the deployment is not what he expected. “It’s normal life. It’s just the work environment is more tactical.”

As a new Soldier, Vines said he has learned a lot about leadership this past year. “A good leader is someone who doesn’t get intimidated easily, stands their ground and is willing to give direction.” But, with that said, he stated that a bad leader can teach valuable lessons too. “You can learn what not to do from a bad leader. For example, a bad leader doesn’t know how to talk when giving out orders.” One shining example for Vines though, has been his sergeant, Army Sgt. 1st Class Agne Curtis. He doesn’t take abuse or excuses, said Vines. “He is about business and gets the job done.”

As a communications Soldier, Vines realizes the impact of his mission, though it is not widely publicized. “It all starts with us,” he explained. “If we can’t do our jobs, they [warfighters] can’t do theirs.”

And at the end of the deployment, Vines said he has learned a lot, but has not changed from his laid back persona. “I am not different. I don’t take things for granted but, I do look at things differently.”

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade
Army Spc. Marcus Vines, earlier in the year, at Kandahar when he was still a private first class.

Army Spc. Marcus Vines
informatin technician specialist
550th Signal Company

Vines, a Laurel, Md. resident, is wrapping up his first deployment in Kandahar, Afghanistan now. At the beginning of his year in country, he was stationed at Forward Operation Base Sharana. “It feels like I’ve been on two deployments,” said Vines since the locations and duties were so different from each other.

Throughout the deployment, the 21-one-year old Soldier, who was origi-

307th Wins Soldier & Sergeant of Quarter

On Nov. 22, 2010, Soldiers from across Task Force Thunder traveled to Bagram Airfield to compete in the brigade-wide Soldier and Sergeant of the Quarter Competition.

The competitors appeared before a panel board of two sergeants major and two first sergeants, from the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade, and the 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion. They answered questions about a variety of topics ranging from military history to current events. They were also graded on a physical fitness test and a 50-question test.

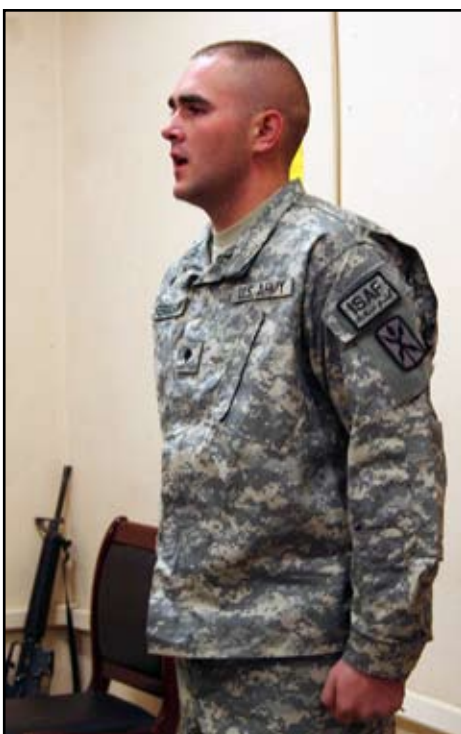
Two Soldiers from the 307th ESB ruled the competition and claimed both positions. Army Staff Sgt. Jason Yielding was selected as the Sergeant of the Quarter, while Army Spc. Kenneth Ferguson earned the title of Soldier of the Quarter.



Left, Army Staff Sgt. Jason Yielding, company motor sergeant, 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, earns the title of Task Force Thunder Sergeant of the Quarter at the board held at Bagram Airfield Nov. 22, 2010.

Photos by Army Spc. Jessica Jones, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Right, Army Spc. Kenneth Ferguson, senior mechanic, 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, replies to the Task Force Thunder board members, and wins the Soldier of the Quarter title.



Above, Army Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Wilkerson, Task Force Thunder command sergeant major, reviews a packet for one of the Soldiers who appeared before the board that was held at Bagram Airfield on Nov. 22, 2010.

Father Surprises Son on Christmas Eve in Bagram ~

Army Lt. Col. James R. Herd, deputy program director, Logistics Civil Augmentation Program in Kuwait, surprised his son Air Force Staff Sgt. Jonathan Herd, engineer apprentice assigned to the Task Force Thunder Engineering and Installation Team based out of Bagram, on Christmas Eve.

As part of the E&I Team, the younger Herd moves around Afghanistan a lot on missions. But, when the opportunity for James to fly to Afghanistan surfaced while his son Jonathan was actually on base, he said he had to grab that special gift. "This was a Christmas present for his mom since she has been worried about both of us."

Jonathan said he was definitely surprised to see his father. "I really just couldn't believe it. I had just got off the phone with him last night."

James explained the little necessary recon phone call to ensure Jonathan would be at Bagram, and everything else just kind of clicked. "It was just an opportunity that happened - one of those Christmas miracles."



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Below, Army 1st Lt. Theodore Forbes, Joint NetOps Control Center's Afghan Mission Network Operations Center liaison officer, Mr. Michael Freeman, General Dynamics information technology network engineer, and Army Sgt. 1st Class Mario Heath, Direct Service Support Team noncommissioned officer in charge, 25th Signal Battalion, take a moment to smile for the camera after receiving certificates of appreciation.



Army 2nd Lt. LeShawn Torrance, 25th Signal Battalion



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Above, Army Sgt. Natanisha Hershberger, supply sergeant, and Army Master Sgt. Carolyn Suazo, information assurance/computer assurance network defense noncommissioned officer in charge, both from Task Force Thunder's Joint NetOps Control-Afghanistan, welcome in the new Egyptian Hospital staff as representatives of Operation Care.

supporting unit. Our training and skill set gives the aviation unit further confidence because they know the training we have.” He went on to say his Pathfinder training enabled him to “intelligently explain our mission requirements to the air crews”.

What about the danger? And how is it that only experienced Soldiers get to do all the high speed stuff? Allow me to answer both questions. The inherent dangers in sling load operations were experienced, but not by those who have previously conducted sling load operations. Army Staff Sgt. Scott McLain, a novice to sling load operations, braced Army Sgt. Ashley McLeod, another neophyte, during the hook up to the helicopter.

As the helicopter hovered just overhead, the rotor wash was more than expected. Rotor wash is basically the wind artificially created by the rotation of the propellers. When McLain was asked about the dangers of the experience, he

said, “I’m glad I was there to brace the hook up person. The wheel of that helicopter got really close to my head, though.”

One last hook up was needed. Who answered the call? Army Sgt. 1st Class Noel Walton did. Despite having never cut his teeth in the sling load game in combat, Walton acted expertly. He drilled for several hours with hopes of attaining perfection when the time came for the real hook up of equipment. Walton did not disappoint. He hooked the equipment to the helicopter just perfectly and punctuated the hook-up by looking up at the crew chief and yelling, “Air Assault!” (Helicopters are really LOUD and Walton needed to confirm his success with the crew chief.) That is a lot of action!

What did the boss have to say? Army Lt. Col. Jacqueline Brown, Task Force Dragon commander, was asked her opinion on her unit’s accomplishment, a first for the Dragons while down-range. She said with eloquence and brevity, “They exceeded my expectations...as always.”

Task Force Thunder Soldier Coined by Petraeus



Army Maj. Jane Tamboli, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade liaison officer to the Combined Joint signal officer, International Security Assistance Force Headquarters, receives a coin Dec. 22 from Army Gen. David Petraeus, commander, ISAF and U.S. Forces - Afghanistan, for her accomplishments.

Courtesy Photo

President Obama Visits Bagram

By **LAURA MECKLER**
The Wall Street Journal

President Barack Obama made a brief, unannounced visit to troops at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, telling them “you will succeed,” a year after his decision to widen the war and days before a White House war-strategy review.

A scheduled trip to Kabul to meet with President Hamid Karzai was scratched due to weather, adding another chapter to tense relations with the Afghan leader. Tensions were aggravated this week by leaked cables that show U.S. diplomats painting Afghanistan and its top officials as rife with corruption.

Mr. Obama told the troops at Bagram that the war effort was making progress. “We said we were going to break the Taliban’s momentum, and that’s what you’re doing. You’re going on the offense, tired of playing defense,” he told about 3,850 members of the armed services at Bagram. “Today we can be proud that there are fewer areas under Taliban control and more Afghans have the chance to build a more hopeful future.”

He thanked the troops and their families for their sacrifices, particularly during the holiday season. He noted that his decision this week to freeze federal workers’ pay exempted uniformed personnel.

Mr. Obama also visited soldiers at the base hospital and awarded five Purple Hearts for wounds sustained in combat.

Senior officials have said the December review is meant to evaluate progress and not consider large strategic shifts.

“We have a strategy in place,” Ben Rhodes, deputy national-security adviser for strategic communications, told reporters on Air Force One en route to Bagram. “This is a process that will assess that strategy and review the need for any adjustments.”

The review will be an important oppor-



Army Sgt. David House, 17th Public Affairs Detachment

President Barack Obama addresses troops at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan Dec. 3.

tunity for coalition commander Gen. David Petraeus and other military leaders to make the argument that their strategy is making progress.

Success in Afghanistan is critical for Mr. Obama, who took a political risk in escalating U.S. involvement and is under pressure from liberal Democrats to end the war.

Military officials have pointed to parts of Helmand province where their strategy has reduced violence. In other parts of Helmand, security remains a problem and the U.S. hasn’t been able to help build government services.

The president’s relationship with Mr. Karzai, has been tense, with Mr. Karzai complaining about U.S. military tactics and the U.S. government pressing him on graft and corruption. Reuters President Obama arrived Fri-



President Obama made a surprise visit to Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan where he thanked all of the service members for their hard-work and dedication. The trip was part of an overall trip to meet with Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai.

Army Sgt. David House, 17th Public Affairs Detachment

day for visit to U.S. troops at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan. ‘You will succeed in your mission,’ he told them.

After Friday’s meeting was scrubbed, a backup plan to talk via secure videoconference was also canceled. They talked by phone for 15 minutes instead.

U.S. officials said that neither corruption nor the issue of the leaked cables came up in the president’s conversations with Mr. Karzai or in his meetings on the ground with U.S. officials. The president’s visit to Afghanistan lasted about three hours, half the time originally planned.

Mr. Karzai’s spokesman, Waheed Omar, said the Afghan leader didn’t travel to meet Mr. Obama in Bagram because “there was no plan as such.” Bagram is about an hour’s drive from Kabul, through the safest part of the country.

The war, launched in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, has raged for longer than any U.S. conflict except the Vietnam War. After an intense review last year, Mr. Obama amped up U.S. troops in the face of Taliban gains. This year has been the deadliest to date

for U.S. forces, with more than 450 killed.

The U.S. has said it will begin drawing down troops in July and formally end combat operations by the end of 2014. The military and White House appear to have different views about how quickly the drawdown should proceed once it begins. Some military leaders want to remove troops slowly, keeping large numbers of troops in the south and the east.

For security reasons, news of Friday’s trip was kept under close wraps until the president was on the ground.

Landing in darkness just before 9 p.m. local time and wearing a brown bomber jacket, the president was greeted by Gen. Petraeus. U.S. Ambassador to Kabul Karl Eikenberry was also on hand.

Gen. Petraeus introduced Mr. Obama to the troops, and joked about a basketball injury last weekend when the president was elbowed by an opposing player in a friendly game. He presented the president with a T-shirt from the 101st Airborne Division and said, to cheers, “No one will mess with you if you wear this, Mr. President.”

Army Safe for the New Year

The start of a new year is always exciting. The months ahead are a blank slate for new beginnings and resolutions to do better in the things most important to daily life. But before we go “out with the old,” it’s important to reflect on where we’ve been — and for our Army, 2010 was a year to remember. The closure of combat operations in Iraq was a remarkable milestone for our force and a highly visible indication of the abiding hard work and dedication of our Soldiers, families and civilians. So too was the near-record safety performance we sustained throughout the fiscal year, culminating in an historic five-year reduction in on-duty fatalities.

The lead article in this month’s Knowledge focuses exclusively on the specifics of our fiscal 2010 safety performance, but the big picture looks like this: Overall, fatalities were up slightly from fiscal 2009; however, our fatality rate per thousand Soldiers remained on par with the historic low achieved during the previous year. This accomplishment was due in large part to a 65 percent reduction in Army motor vehicle fatalities and a drop in deaths attributed to sedans and other privately owned vehicles, including SUVs and trucks. Sharp rises in off-duty motorcycle and pedestrian deaths, however, in addition to a spike in Army combat vehicle and aviation fatalities, resulted in seven additional Soldiers lost during 2010 than in 2009.

Our challenge for 2011 is applying the same principles that have worked both on and off duty, such as an emphasis on restraint system and seat belt use in AMVs and POVs, to our existing problem areas. Pre-combat checks and inspections are a great way for leaders to engage with their Soldiers on the importance of restraint systems, safe driving habits and proper training both inside and outside the wire. Off duty, leader, Soldier and family engagement is crucial to countering the recurring problem of indiscipline, especially with regard to sedan, motorcycle and pedestrian fatalities. Active participation by all three groups is required for maximum effect, and that means leaders must take the initiative by involving all their Soldiers and family members in the unit’s safety programs.

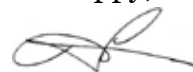
While Leader engagement has become a hot topic in Soldier safety during the past couple of years, we can’t forget about the foundation of every successful safety program: composite risk management. A vital part of engagement is ensuring all Soldiers, regardless of rank or position, are equipped with the tools and knowledge to keep them safe. The best start any Leader can give their Soldiers is an in-depth education in CRM because, once learned, it’s much more than a process — rather, it’s a mindset and lifestyle that becomes second nature in all activities. As we embark on the new year, take a hard look at your unit to see if your Soldiers really understand the CRM process and conduct refresher training when necessary. The time and effort spent will reap exponential rewards for Soldier well-being and mission readiness.

Although 2011 has officially just begun, we got a great start to the new fiscal year with below-average fatalities throughout much of the first quarter. Ultimately, however, we must remember that every number in our fatality count represents another Soldier tragically lost to his or her unit, family and our Army. By working together, I am confident we can maintain the positive momentum of the past few years and achieve another record year for Soldier safety. Our Band of brothers and sisters have demonstrated time and again their courage and sacrifice, and they deserve no less than our full focus, attention and concern, both on and off duty.

The USACR/Safety Center stands ready to help as you renew your commitment to safety during the new year. We have several initiatives planned for 2011, and you can find all our products and tools online at <https://safety.army.mil>. Please let us know what you think and how we can better meet your needs in the months ahead.

Thank you for what you do every day for our Soldiers, families and civilians. Make safety a priority on your resolutions list, and always remember the precious lives of those counting on you. On behalf of the USACR/Safety Center team, I wish each of you and your families a happy, healthy and safe 2011!

Army Safe is Army Strong!



William T. Wolf
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding