

Vrentas is just what the doctor ordered

Story and photos by Maj. Richard C. Sater
Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan – The name tag reads Vrentas, lieutenant colonel, Army issue. The caduceus on his collar marks his branch, medical.

Badges on the uniform spell out some of his history: Special Forces tab, combat medic badge, master parachutist, air assault, 82nd Airborne combat patch.

His business card here is crammed full: Lt. Col. Gregory L. Vrentas, U.S. Army, chief of medical plans and operations for the Afghan National Army Plans and Design Team, under the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan.

Good doctoring is essential for the sustenance of any army. Vrentas envisions trained medics at the battalion level; clinics at the brigade or garrison level; Four or five fully-staffed provincial military hospitals situ-



Afghan National Army Pvt. Mirwais inserts a saline infusion IV during a training session at the Kabul military forces hospital. The "patient" is Pvt. Mirza Faiz.

ated around the country; and a 400-bed national military hospital. Big plans.

Though he would make a handsome cowboy, he's no maverick - the Plans and

Design Team consists of approximately 30 members, developing every facet of design-

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New generation faces new kind of war, Cheney says

Story by Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – A new generation of American service members has picked up the gauntlet thrown by terrorists and has accepted new responsibilities in the world, Vice President Dick Cheney said at Aviano Air Base, Italy, Jan. 26.

"Today's generation of our military has been called to fight in the first war of the 21st century – a war that began on September 11th, 2001, when enemies struck the United States and murdered thousands of our fellow citizens," Cheney said to assembled airmen, their families and their Italian allies.

Cheney said that Sept. 11 changed everything, and in that day of violence and grief, America got a glimpse of the even greater harm terrorists want to inflict on America. "The terrorists hate our country

and everything we stand for in the world," Cheney said. "They seek even deadlier weapons, and they would use them against us. In the face of this danger, we have only one option, and that's to take the fight to the enemy."

The coalition against terrorism is breaking up cells and disrupting plots. America and its allies are tracking al Qaeda operatives around the world, Cheney said. "Many skilled and determined military personnel are on a manhunt," he noted, "and one by one, we will bring the terrorists to justice."

And the United States is prepared to hold liable rogue regimes that support terrorists, provide them havens and provide them with weapons of mass destruction. "That's why we went into Afghanistan, and took down the regime, and shut down the al Qaeda camps," he said.

Afghanistan today is a land embarked on a democratic trail. The country has written a new constitution and the Loya Jirga has accepted

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



Former top U.S. weapons inspector David Kay testifies Wednesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Ex-Iraq inspector: Prewar intelligence failure 'disturbing'

WASHINGTON – The former top U.S. weapons inspector in Iraq on Wednesday blamed intelligence failures for the apparently incorrect conclusion that Saddam Hussein possessed large stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction before the U.S.-led invasion.

David Kay, who resigned last week as leader of the Iraq Survey Group searching for banned weapons, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he believed a “fundamental analysis of how we got here” is needed to ensure the best possible intelligence in the future.

Kay appeared before the Armed Services Committee after a closed-door session Wednesday morning with the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Kay told the senators that the intelligence he had seen before the war indicated Saddam had banned weapons and that France and Germany – countries that had opposed the war – had stated that the Iraqi dictator possessed such weapons.

“It turns out we were all wrong, and that is most disturbing,” Kay said.

U.S. military eyes spring offensive in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON – The U.S. military is planning a spring offensive against remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan, a senior Defense Department official said Wednesday.

Officials have ordered troops, supplies

and logistics into place to carry out the operation, the official said. The official did not say if the new offensive would require more troops.

The news comes amid increased violence in Afghanistan and on a day in which the U.S. military said it thinks it will find Osama bin Laden and fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar in eastern Afghanistan.

The manhunt for bin Laden is now in its third year but a military spokesman said confidence is high that he will be captured.



NASA's Jim Erickson points to the location of a heater on a model of the rover Opportunity during a press conference Tuesday.

Mars rover having problems

LOS ANGELES – As NASA scientists pored over striking new photos from Mars revealing finely layered formations of ancient bedrock, engineers labored on Tuesday to diagnose problems with two robotic rovers on opposite sides of the red planet.

Besides a serious malfunction that has idled the first rover, Spirit, since last Wednesday, mission controllers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said they are now contending with a power drain on Spirit's newly arrived twin, Opportunity.

Mission manager Jim Erickson told reporters said the power loss appeared to be from one of the craft's heating units that keeps turning itself on and running overnight without receiving commands from NASA to do so.

While engineers do not believe the faulty thermostat will overheat the vehicle, the long-term consequences of the glitch and whether it can be fixed are not yet known, Erickson said.

“I'd like to have a little more information on what we're seeing from the vehicle before we make any judgments there,” he said.



Firefighters try to put out a blaze at the scene of Wednesday's bombing outside a Baghdad hotel.

Car bomb detonates outside Baghdad hotel Wednesday

BAGHDAD, Iraq – A vehicle thought to be packed with explosives blew up Wednesday as it passed a Baghdad hotel, killing the driver and at least two bystanders, a U.S. military official said.

The explosion occurred at dawn near the Shaheen Hotel in the Karada neighborhood of central Baghdad. The bystanders were a South African contractor and an Iraqi civilian. At least four Iraqis were wounded, the U.S. official said.

Iraqi police said explosives may have been packed inside an ambulance or a vehicle made to look like an ambulance.

U.S. Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division have cordoned off the area and are investigating.

Dean shakes up campaign

(CNN) – After suffering losses in Iowa and New Hampshire, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean shook up his campaign Wednesday, replacing his campaign manager with a longtime aide to Al Gore.

Roy Neel, who was Gore's chief of staff when he was a senator and vice president, will be the new chief executive officer.

Neel's appointment prompted the departure of Joe Trippi, the campaign manager credited with bringing Dean from an asterisk in the polls to front-runner status.

The campaign, which has raised more money than any other Democratic effort and opted out of public financing, may also be having money problems. Sources told CNN that staffers have been warned that they could be facing pay cuts.



Photo by Senior Airmen Priscilla Robinson
 Vice President Dick Cheney, walks past the 31st Fighter Wing and Italian Honor Guards after arriving at Aviano Air Base, Italy, Jan. 27.

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it. Afghanistan has a long way to go – Taliban and al Qaeda remnants are still battling coalition service members – but it will never again house the terrorists, Cheney said.

“In Iraq, where a dictator cultivated ties to terror and sought to arm himself with deadly weapons, America led a mission to make the world safer, and liberate the Iraqi people,” the vice president said. “Saddam Hussein defied the demands of the civilized world and he has experienced the consequences.”

At the start of 2003, Saddam controlled the lives of 25 million people. “Now at the beginning of 2004, he’s in jail,” Cheney said. “He will never again brutalize his people, never again threaten the United States of America.”

The vice president said recent combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq showed the great power and precision of America’s modern military. U.S. military units were able to strike at military targets and spare civilian resources, he said.

“We will invest in these and other capabilities in the years ahead,” Cheney noted. “To carry out any mission that may come, you deserve the very best, in terms of weapons, equipment, and training and support. And you will have them.”

Cheney said operations continue in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. military personnel are working with coalition partners from around the world to “establish free and stable societies in a troubled region of the world.”

That effort still has enemies, he said, and those enemies have adopted terror tactics to confront the United States. “They hope to intimidate us, but they won’t succeed,” he said.

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

“Dragon”

0830Z at the MWR building:

A lionized account of the life of the martial arts superstar.

1530Z: Karaoke Night

Tomorrow’s movie:

“Young Guns.”



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Friday
Uzbekistan:	Cloudy/Snow H: 38F L: 29F	Cloudy/Snow H: 38F L: 20F
Bagram:	Cloudy/Snow H: 43F L: 30F	Cloudy/Fog H: 43F L: 25F
Kabul:	Cloudy/Snow H: 41F L: 28F	Cloudy/Fog H: 41F L: 27F
Kandahar:	Cloudy/Rain H: 57F L: 34F	Cloudy/Fog H: 61F L: 36F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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ing, training and equipping the Afghan National Army. Vrentas attacks his job with single-minded conviction that it has long-term consequence.

“A Soldier who knows he’s going to be cared for is willing to engage an enemy,” he says. Ideally, a wounded Soldier will be treated on the battlefield and then evacuated to a proper facility. “We fix him and return him to duty. If we can accomplish that,” he says, “we can sustain this army.”

The South stretches gently across his voice, pitched deep, volume set to “low.” He expresses himself sparsely, as if to match his economic build. No nonsense.

Military medical care is measured against five tiers, beginning with Level I, the field medic. Level II provides casualty stabilization, damage control and advanced trauma life-support. Level III includes resuscitative surgery for repair and intensive care unit capability; IV covers reconstructive surgery and extended care, while V is rehabilitation and long-term definitive care.

He rates the current level of the Afghan Army’s medical care at “a II-plus or a III-minus.” Strong Level III care isn’t currently available anywhere in the country, by his assessment. He faults three things – first, the medical staff’s current capability. “They have a strong skill set, but it’s antiquated. It’s never been honed and polished.”

Second is the “tremendous lack” of equipment and supplies, and third is the dis-

integrating infrastruc-
ture.

“We’re concentrating on building the medical architecture from Level I to Level IV,” he says. Level V might be out of reach now, but even if he won’t admit as much, he’s mulling it over like a dog worrying a soup-bone.

“We’re fortunate,” he says. “We have a good group of Afghan counterparts prepared to take the lead and produce their own medics. And they’re proud. Tremendously professional.”

Vrentas foresees a year, at least, to transform the deteriorating facility into that national military hospital he wants. He also estimates three to five years to accelerate the medical staff to proper speed, and that will require institutions to teach Army medics, doctors, dentists, nurses and specialists.

Recruits chosen as combat medics receive basic qualification at the ANA Central Corps Headquarters camp in nearby Pol-e-Charki. The first company of combat medics - U.S.-trained after the Army model - graduated last year. The second course is underway, taught this time primarily by Afghan military doctors, under the supervision of a U.S. military training team.

“We’ve already made a quantum leap in training at Level I and Level II,” he says. Approximately 160 medics have been trained thus far, toward his goal of 2,200-man ANA medical force.

The doctors themselves initially train for three years at the Kabul Medical Institute, subse-



Afghan National Army Dr. Amanullah Temori (at right) assists Cpl. Safar Mohammad during a training session for cardio-pulmonary resuscitation held at the ANA training camp at Pol-e-Charki.



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Greg Vrentas (at right) consults with Afghan National Army Surgeon General Maj. Gen. (Dr.) A.Z. Yafiali in the general’s office.

quently completing years four through six, internship and residency, at the military hospital. Such training academies “must remain solvent to maintain the medical capability of the ANA,” Vrentas insists.

Another of his initiatives has made a difference as well. Recruits must now pass a basic physical examination prior to acceptance into the ANA. Even that simple process has led to a healthier force.

The Army is intended to swell upwards of 70,000 Soldiers in the next several years. Lack of resources to build and sustain a force of that size will defeat it, and the opportunity – and responsibility – of U.S. and coalition forces to make a difference will be forfeited, Vrentas believes.

“Afghanistan’s window of opportunity will close with the global community’s ever-drifting attention span. And another generation, or a different coalition, will be left to sift out the mess.

“If we can grow an Afghan National Army,” he says, “we’ll have security in this country. If you’re not actively working to do that – or killing Taliban and al Qaida – then what are you doing here?”



Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from SI.com)



Todd Zeile is one of 82 players to play for both the Mets and Yankees.

Todd Zeile finalizes contract with Mets

NEW YORK – Todd Zeile had no interest in going back to the Bronx.

The infielder, who finalized his one-year, \$1 million contract with the New York Mets on Wednesday, wouldn't have spoken to the Yankees even if he had known an opening would develop at third base.

Following Aaron Boone's knee injury, the Yankees are thinking over their replacement options.

"I have no desire to play again for that organization," Zeile said during a telephone conference call.

After signing with the Yankees, his 11th major league team, Zeile hit .210 with six homers and 23 RBIs in 186 at-bats. New York released him on Aug. 17, and Zeile signed with Montreal three days later, going on to bat .257 with five homers and 19 RBIs in 113 at-bats.

"I think some of the things that happen over there are different than any other organization in baseball. I have a pretty good track record to judge that," Zeile said, citing his numerous stops across the majors.

"Every day is potentially the end all," he said. "It's whatever they need that day. It sometimes can be unsettling for people in role positions there. ... I don't really have a desire to get back into that mix."

Clarett declines to work with Buckeyes

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Suspended Ohio State tailback Maurice Clarett won't take part in offseason workouts even though he's been cleared by the school.

"I think he felt he didn't want to work out until he got reinstated by the NCAA," Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger said Wednesday.

Geiger learned about the player's decision from coach Jim Tressel.

Despite his suspension, the school permitted Clarett to participate in individual winter conditioning workouts that started last week.

"That's his choice," Geiger said. "If that's what he wants to do,

that's fine."

A message seeking comment on Clarett's decision was left Wednesday at the home of his mother, Michelle.

Tressel was recruiting and did not return a phone message seeking comment.

LeBron James to play rookie game

CLEVELAND – Being named an NBA All-Star is no slam dunk for LeBron James.

Cleveland's rookie said he will not compete in the Slam Dunk contest during the NBA's All-Star weekend next month in Los Angeles because of the ankle injury that sidelined him for three games.

"I thought about it, but with my ankle hurting, put me down (no) on that one," he said.

On Tuesday, James was selected to play in the Rookie Challenge next month, an event that the league has moved from Saturday to Friday night in prime time.

James and his good friend, Denver rookie Carmelo Anthony, will be teammates against a squad of the league's second-year players featuring Houston center Yao Ming and Cavs forward Carlos Boozer.

The All-Star starters will be named on Thursday and James is not expected to be one of them. He was fourth in fan voting for the team, trailing Allen Iverson, Tracy McGrady and Jason Kidd.



LeBron James will not risk aggravating his still-healing sprained right ankle.

Panthers, Patriots had big impact

HOUSTON – Five years ago, the owners of the New England Patriots and Carolina Panthers led the effort to bring the NFL back to Houston, and reward the city with a Super Bowl.

Now their teams are playing in the big game that was a crucial bargaining chip in establishing the expansion franchise.

"It's a phenomenal coincidence," Houston Texans owner Bob McNair said Tuesday.

When McNair was negotiating with the NFL, Patriots owner Robert Kraft was finance committee chairman and Panthers owner Jerry Richardson headed the expansion committee. The sticking point was how much McNair would pay.

He made what he called a "final offer" of \$650 million. The owners demanded \$700 million.

"I can't pay more than that unless you add more value," McNair recalled telling them. "They said, 'What about a Super Bowl. Would that help?'"

Afghanistan Hot Topics



(Compiled by CJTF-180 Public Affairs)

Taliban claim deadly Afghan bombings

By Amir Shah

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) – A pair of nearly simultaneous attacks, one suicide, on British and German bases near the Afghan capital Wednesday left one British Soldier dead and as many as nine other foreigners wounded, police and peacekeepers said.

A spokesman for the Taliban claimed it had carried out the bombings.

The attacks came during a memorial ceremony for a Canadian Soldier killed in a Taliban suicide attack in Kabul just the day before. An Afghan civilian was also killed in that attack.

The British Soldier was killed near their base in Kabul, said Canadian Maj. Gen. Andrew Leslie, deputy commander of the security force, speaking at the end of the memorial service at the Canadian base.

“Initial reports indicate that one of our British comrades lost his life and there have been several injuries,” he said, adding that another explosive device was detonated outside the main German base.

A spokesman for the NATO-led security force, Lt. Col. Joerg Langer, said one British Soldier died after a car bomb hit a British patrol at about 11 a.m. local time. In London, the British Ministry of Defense said another four were wounded.

There were no reports of civilian casualties.

Just east of Kabul near the German peacekeepers’ base, a suicide bomber in a taxi detonated an explosion that injured five foreigners, said Qasim Mangal, a local police chief.

International troops and Afghan authorities closed off the scene of the attack on the British patrol, on Jalalabad Road, about 1 1/4 miles from the Germans’ base. From nearby, two burned out jeeps could be seen – apparently Land Rovers that are used by British troops.

The blast blew out the windows of a bathhouse nearby, sending people scurrying from the showers, said Zulgai, 20, a worker there who like many Afghans uses only one name. He said he had seen three injured foreigners and two Afghans transported from the scene.

“It was a very strong sound,” Zulgai said.

Mullah Hakim Latifi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said it had carried out the attacks.

“We are compelled to attack the foreigners to defend our country, religion and honor,” he said in a satellite telephone call to *The Associated Press*.

His claim couldn’t be independently verified.

Latifi also claimed Taliban responsibility for Tuesday’s attack and alleged it would be the start of a campaign of suicide bombings across the country.

The attack on Tuesday also wounded three Canadian troops and eight civilians, including a Frenchman, when the bomber struck patrol.

The escalating violence comes the same week that President Hamid Karzai signed the country’s post-Taliban constitution into law, with hopes that it can help bring the fractured country together after more than two decades of war.

U.S. vows to capture Osama bin Laden

KABUL, Afghanistan (AFP) – The U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan is confident of capturing al Qaeda terror network chief Osama bin Laden by the end of the year, a U.S. military spokesman said.

Lt. Col. Bryan Hilferty said that the hunt for militant remnants of the ousted Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime, including its leader Mullah Omar, bin Laden and former Afghan premier and warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was continuing.

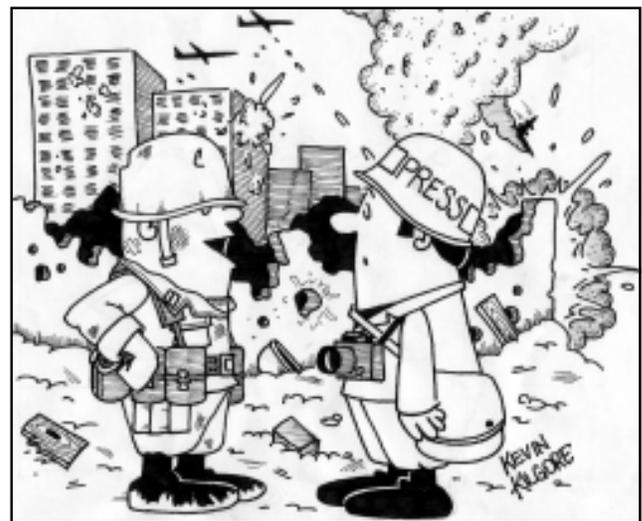
“Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar represent a threat to the world and they need to be destroyed. We believe we will catch them within this year,” Hilferty told reporters in Kabul.

Meanwhile, Hilferty said three U.S. Soldiers were injured by a home-made bomb planted by anti-coalition militants in northeastern Afghanistan. The three were wounded on Monday when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device planted on a road frequently used by the troops near Asadabad of Kunar province, he said without giving any further details on the attack. The incident occurred one day before an attack in which three more U.S. Soldiers were injured in direct gunfire with suspected militants in southeastern Paktika province, Hilferty said.

“Three Soldiers were wounded while pursuing anti-coalition militia east of Urgan,” the colonel said.

According to a Taliban spokesman, who spoke to *AFP* via satellite phone from the southeastern region, remnants of the regime claimed responsibility for Tuesday’s attack.

“Nothing exciting ever happens around here ...”



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support