

Troops provide needed aid to village



Sgt. Crystal Whittaker, 455th Expeditionary Operations Group security specialist, takes a moment to spend with an Afghan child while providing security during the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group "Adopt a Village" delivery of humanitarian supplies New Year's Eve day

Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Brian Davidson
455th Expeditionary Operations Group Public Affairs

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – An adolescent Afghan girl watched protectively over a group of small children as they looked for winter clothing amidst a pile of boxes containing humanitarian relief supplies. As crowds of people from neighboring villages pressed their way forward, the girl stood her ground and pushed people back from the children.

The supplies were delivered to Jangadam Village on New Year's Eve by members of the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group as part of the "Adopt a Village" program sponsored by Bagram airmen.

A village elder showed Lt. Col. John Bernier, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing flight safety officer, and Chief Master Sgt. Timothy Sydnor, 455th AEW command chief, the village water supply, a small, stagnant pond of brackish water that sits in the center of town. Surrounding the pond are crumbling, mud brick buildings that serve as a reminder of the strife and poverty that can be found throughout Afghanistan.

On one edge of the village, Staff Sgt. Crystal Whittaker, 455th EOG security forces specialist, took up a security over watch position to protect airmen who were delivering the supplies.

In contrast, just a few feet from Whittaker, village women, covered head to toe in their blue burkas, covered behind the wreckage of an old, burned-out

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PSYOPS provide school supplies to local children

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Beebe
CJSOTF-A PAO NCO

TANGIKALAY, Afghanistan—Members of the CJSOTF-A Psychological Operations team visited Tangi Kalay, the most eastern village in the Kabul Province, to distribute school supplies Dec. 17.

Capt. David Halen, officer in charge of the team, had been in contact with Barabarak Khan, the district chief of the area and had made arrangements for the delivery. Barabarak's American-

born wife Debra is the International Aid Liaison for Kabul province and the main contact for the PSYOPS team here. She has been very active in furthering the growth and education of the province.

Halen's predecessor had introduced him to Babarak and Debra Khan back in July when they had made an initial visit.

The supplies came from several places in the states. Halen had sent his wife an e-mail asking for her to get him a bunch of golf pencils. She wrote back and asked for a more formal letter outlining some of the needs he was trying to fill.

His brother also asked for a letter of explana-

tion and that got published in several newspapers. The Kiwanis Club in Atlanta, Ga., then provided some supplies and the other shipments came from the efforts that Halen's wife, brother and parents had done.

The newspaper in Halen's hometown, had earlier run a story on him as a local deploying soldier. The chamber of commerce there decided to take up the mission to gather school supplies. The fire department set up collection points to gather the supplies before delivering them to Halen's parent's garage for storage before taking

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



An audiotape purportedly from Osama bin Laden aired on the Arabic network Al-Jazeera on Sunday.

Purported bin Laden tape aired

(CNN) – The Arabic-language TV network Al-Jazeera aired an audiotape Sunday in which a man purporting to be al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden referred to recent events, including the Dec. 13 capture of Saddam Hussein.

CNN could not confirm that the speaker was bin Laden.

U.S. officials are analyzing the recording. A CIA spokesman said “it usually takes a couple of days” to determine “who we think it is” and when it was made.

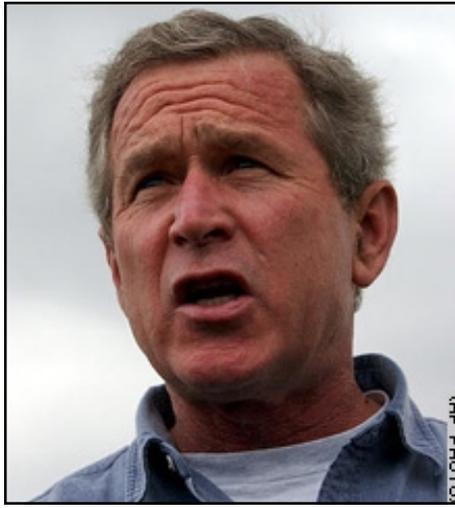
The speaker on the tape called on Muslims to overthrow regimes in the Middle East that are working with the United States or participating in peace efforts with Israel.

In an apparent reference to Iraq, the voice said Persian Gulf leaders know “their turn is coming” now that they have seen “the capture of their former comrade in betrayal and treason and puppetry to America.”

The speaker referred to other recent events such as the Dec. 1 launching of an unofficial peace plan by Israelis and Palestinians in Geneva and the November 8 suicide bombing of a residential compound in Riyadh, Saudi.

The bombing, for which al Qaeda later claimed responsibility, killed 17 people, most of them Arabs.

The last tape U.S. officials said likely did contain bin Laden’s voice aired Oct. 18. The officials said references on the tape indicated it had been recorded at some point during the past three months.



Bush says his initiative insists on high standards for all children, regardless of background.

Bush deflects criticism on ‘No Child Left Behind’ program

CRAWFORD, Texas – Gearing up for a possible election year fight on his education initiative, President Bush defended his “No Child Left Behind” law against critics who say it has been shortchanged and assumes all students learn at the same rates.

“The time for excuses has passed,” Bush said Saturday in his weekly radio address.

Bush plans to mark the second anniversary of the initiative, the cornerstone of his domestic agenda, during speeches at an elementary school in St. Louis on Monday and one in Knoxville, Tenn., on Thursday.

Bush and other Republicans say the law, which the president signed on Jan. 8, 2002, expands testing and toughens standards for teachers, schools and students.

The initiative, however, has lost support of some Democrats who say too little money has been spent on the mandated actions. Critics have argued that the funding increases that Bush touts are not nearly enough to cover the costs of the new requirements, including the expense of creating tests and processing their results.

Congressional Democrats have tried without success to provide billions of dollars of additional funding.

In the weekly Democratic radio address, Rep. Tim Bishop, said this year’s congressional agenda needs to include more money for “No Child Left Behind.”



Britney Spears, 22, walked down the aisle in blue jeans and a baseball cap, according to People.com.

Britney Spears weds, will annul

LAS VEGAS – Pop star Britney Spears married a childhood friend from Louisiana in an early morning ceremony, but quickly arranged to have it annulled, a source close to the singer told *The Associated Press* on Sunday.

George Maloof Jr., owner and operator of the Palms Casino Hotel, confirmed that the 22-year-old Spears married Jason Allen Alexander of Kentwood, La., about 5:30 a.m. Saturday at a Las Vegas wedding chapel.

“Nobody knew it was coming,” said Maloof, Spears’ good friend. The two arranged an annulment Saturday afternoon in the presence of several people, including a Las Vegas lawyer, said a source close to Spears who spoke on condition of anonymity. The signed annulment will be filed when the courts open Monday morning, the source said.

Calls to Spears’ representatives were not immediately returned.

Spears and Alexander journeyed by limousine to the Little White Wedding Chapel on the Strip after a stop at the Ghostbar, a club in the Palms Casino Hotel. The chapel staff told the couple they couldn’t get married without a license, so they were taken to get a license and driven back to the chapel, where they were married.

The bride wore a baseball cap and torn jeans down the aisle and was escorted by a Palms limousine driver, the source told the AP.

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Soviet military truck, trying to hide from the view of men.

Sheep, cows and chickens ran free around the village. Men serving as self-appointed village security stood nearby with their AK-47s, doing little more than talking and smoking as the crowd of villagers grew.

The mood was tense among the airmen unloading supplies as people begin to tear at the boxes. Security forces members kept the situation from getting out of hand to ensure the supplies went to the intended recipients.

“It was a bittersweet experience to say the least,” Sydnor said. “On the one hand we are proud as Americans to provide assistance to the less fortunate, because that’s part of our nature. But it also saddens us because of the poverty and conditions these fellow human beings live under. To see people so desperate for things that we take for granted is very humbling.”

The airmen of the 455th EOG are deployed to Afghanistan on a mission to engage and capture terrorists, and to significantly reduce the chance for future attacks on America and the rest of the world. They’re also here to provide an environment of peace and stability and to help the Afghan people grow, prosper, and be free.

PSYOPS, from Page 1

them all to the post office for mailing to Afghanistan.

Halen’s brother had also been gathering supplies to send to Afghanistan. His daughter’s Brownie Troop was instrumental in collecting and boxing the bulk of supplies for the effort there.

The nieces and nephews of Halen’s wife had done great work in gathering and boxing all the school materials there to be ready for shipping. Together, his parents paid more than \$1,000 for the mailing of the first shipment out of their own pocket. The second shipment, the one that was distributed today, was paid for by donations from local corporations in his hometown. There was enough money in the donations to pay for the original shipping costs as well.

Initially, the school in Tangi Kalay gets the bulk of these supplies, but eventually Babarak Khan will continue to distribute the supplies to other schools and orphanages in his province.

“Thanks to the generosity of all the people back home in the states I have been able to deliver over 100 boxes of school supplies in two deliveries, with a third scheduled right after the first of the year,” said Halen.

The school, which presently has more than 500 students, is conducted in five tent structures that have been provided first by UNICEF and more recently, by the Italians through the International Security Assistance Force, (ISAF). Permanent structures are presently being built and

then it is planned that the school enrollment will jump to 800 students.

There was great excitement in the village as PSYOPS trucks rolled in. All the children were running around the soldiers and shouting greetings. They were using their whole English vocabularies in a couple sentences but were very sincere in their efforts to say, “Hi, how are you mister?”

The Soldiers pulled into the compound and off-loaded the trucks, but there were several boxes that were set aside for immediate opening. These special boxes contained items that were given out immediately. Pencils, erasers and notepads were the first to go. There were some fluorescent sticky notes that were a big hit with the youngsters because of all the colors that do not exist in nature.

Crayons, colored pencils and chalk were given to the younger children, with pens and watercolor paint kits being handed out to the older kids.

Babarak Khan made sure that all the goodies were handed out equitably. Included in the boxes were supplies for the teachers as well. These included staplers, staple removers, pencil sharpeners and lots of paper. Card stock, colored paper and bulk supplies of plain lined paper fill some of the boxes.

The initial excitement had died down; all the boxes packed away and group pictures had been taken. The Soldiers then loaded up and rolled out, again being cheered on by the grateful children in the village as they waved goodbye.

The Adopt a Village program is aimed at this second mission.

Bagram airmen collect clothing, school supplies, basic food and household items donated from families, churches and civic organizations back home, and then travel throughout the region to make their deliveries.

Providing this humanitarian aid is not without risk. Airmen must wear body armor and travel in convoys with armored vehicles and heavy guns, as they make their way along narrow roadways surrounded by minefields.

“Naturally, I was a little apprehensive about going outside the wire, but I was put more at ease when I saw the smiles and received the handshakes and well wishes from the villagers,” Sydnor said. “I only wish the media at home placed more emphasis on the great things American military members are doing over here. The people I encountered today were not terrorists, but human beings searching for happiness and peace in their lives. An experience I won’t ever forget.”

As Americans at home ring in the New Year with parties, family gatherings and champagne, American military members in Afghanistan and Iraq will show both strength and compassion as they hunt down the terrorists who threaten freedom, and offer aid and comfort to the innocent victims of oppression.

Italians look into Afghanistan PRTs

Story by Spc. Kelly Hunt
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Italian forces may be taking over a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan as part of the coalition effort to help rebuild the country and to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

The team visited the Ghazni PRT as part of their mission to determine which PRT to take over in the future to aid the coalition forces.

“The Italians first indicated an interest in Ghazni two weeks ago,” said Lt. Col. Mark Schnur, Ghazni PRT commander.

On Dec. 13, Italian representatives visited the remote PRT to discuss the operations and to have their questions about the area and the mission answered.

After a general briefing from Schnur, the visitors asked questions and had their concerns addressed.

“They got all their questions answered and seem impressed with the site,” said Schnur who was optimistic about the visit. “It was a successful visit.”

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Though Schnur is hopeful that the Italians will choose Ghazni to operate out of, he did admit that the team was looking into other prospects throughout the region.

“They’re also looking at Herat,” he said.

The one interesting note about the Italians is that they do not operate with a civil affairs team, which is one of the main ingredients in the recipe for a PRT.

“They don’t have that MOS (military occupation specialty) in their army,” said Schnur. But what they don’t have officially can be made up with experience.

“Civil affairs is really people who have civilian acquired skills as well as military skills,” he said. “They really do have the expertise, they just don’t call it civil affairs.”

The current Ghazni PRT offered the Italians the idea of leaving a civil affairs team behind as an overlap for a period of time so they could adjust and see how a civil affairs team operates.

“They said the decision would be made back in Rome at their Missionary of Foreign Affairs,” said Schnur. “We may have an announcement in early January.”

The interest in Afghanistan by the Italians is a deep-rooted one.

“They have some history, Italy and Afghanistan,” said Scnur. “The former Afghan king lived in Italy for 25 or 30 years while he was in exile from Afghanistan.”

The Italians are no stranger to the operations and hardships that come with stabilizing the territory either.

“They’re familiar with the southeastern part of the country, which is the least secure parts of the country,” said Schnur. “I’m impressed with the Italians for being willing to operate in these less secure parts of the country.”

The Italians are a big part of the coalition effort here in Afghanistan and they want to help, said Schnur.

When the Italians choose a location, it will not be the first time the United States has had a transfer of authority for a PRT.

“The U.S. has had experience in handling over PRTs now to both New Zealand in Bamian and we’re still in the process of handing over Konduz to the Germans,” said Schnur. “We expect there will be more coalition forces interested in taking over PRTs in the future.”

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

“Baseketball”

1530Z at the MWR building:

Two childhood friends are pro athletes of a national sport called BASEketball, a hybrid of baseball and basketball, and must deal with a greedy businessman scheming against their team.



Tomorrow’s movie: “Daybreak”

Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Tuesday
Uzbekistan:	Cloudy/Rain H: 47F L: 35F	Cloudy/Rain H: 48F L: 38F
Bagram:	Snow H: 41F L: 30F	Snow H: 41F L: 34F
Kabul:	Snow H: 39F L: 28F	Snow H: 39F L: 32F
Kandahar:	Rain H: 64F L: 41F	Rain H: N/A L: 36F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from SI.com)

Manning helps in 41-10 win over Denver

INDIANAPOLIS – Peyton Manning was finally playoff perfect.

The Denver Broncos were imperfect. And that's being kind.

The result was a 41-10 rout by Indianapolis over Denver on Sunday that put to rest any questions about Manning's ability to win a big game and sent the Colts (13-4) on to Kansas City for a second-round game with the Chiefs next Sunday.

The NFL's co-MVP threw for touchdowns on each of the Colts' first four possessions and finished 22-of-26 for 377 yards and five TDs, the third time in 17 games this season he had five or more TD tosses.

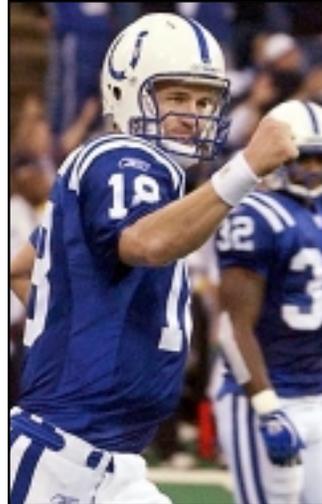
That made Manning the first ever to do that.

Perfection?

When he left game in the fourth quarter Manning had a perfect passer rating of 158.3 for the second time this season.

"It was one of those days that everything seemed to go right," said Manning, 1-3 in the postseason. "It's good to get the monkey off my back, but we've got more work to do now."

Added coach Tony Dungy: "It was really awesome to see from the sidelines."



Peyton Manning led the Colts to scores on their first seven possessions.

Stanford 11-0 after knocking off Wash.

STANFORD, Calif. – Mike Montgomery knows Stanford's days of easy victories are over. His team now realizes it, too.

Justin Davis had 17 points and 13 rebounds and led a second-half charge for the fifth-ranked Cardinal, who needed a strong finish to defeat Washington 85-72 on Sunday and remain undefeated.

"They gave us some anxious moments," Montgomery said. "They're certainly capable of scoring in bunches."

Chris Hernandez had 13 points and nine assists and Nick Robinson added 13 points, and Stanford shot 59.6 percent to beat the Huskies for the 12th time in the last 13 meetings.

Robinson was 6-of-7 from the field and had four assists.

"I see an open shot and I'm going to take it every time," he said. "I'm always looking to hit if there's an open look."



Justin Davis led Stanford with 17 points.

Packers stuns Seahawks 33-27 in OT

GREENBAY, Wis.—Al Harris never got a chance for a Lambeau Leap. By the time he thought about it, he was buried under an avalanche of teammates.

His long dreadlocks flapping outside his helmet in the frigid wind, Harris streamed down the sideline with a 52-yard interception return in overtime. That touchdown lifted the Green Bay Packers past the Seattle Seahawks 33-27 Sunday in a first-round NFC playoff game.

The cornerback picked off Matt Hasselbeck's throw and headed to the end zone—directly past former Packers coach Mike Holmgren. Only Hasselbeck had a chance to tackle Harris,

but he couldn't get there. Harris scored the first defensive touchdown to win an overtime playoff game in NFL history.

"I was just praying that he did throw the ball," Harris said, "because I was going to gamble on that play."

Once he got to the end zone, his teammates tackled him, setting off a wild celebration, including Harris slapping hands with fans in the stands on a 100-yard victory lap.

His heroics sent the Packers (11-6) to Philadelphia next Sunday, while the Seahawks (10-7) go home knowing they let a prime opportunity slip away.

"I'm dying inside," Holmgren said. "It hurts bad to lose this game."



Bubba Franks' second-quarter touchdown helped Brett Favre set a playoffs record.

Boucher blanks Hurricanes for win

RALEIGH, N.C. – Brian Boucher and the Phoenix Coyotes made it look easy against the low-scoring Carolina Hurricanes.

Boucher made 26 saves for his third straight shutout, leading the Coyotes to a 3-0 victory Sunday.

Boucher has stopped 82 shots in the past three games and is unbeaten in seven starts (4-0-3).

"Right now the puck looks like a beach ball to him," Phoenix coach Bob Francis said. "He's following it, squaring up, getting sound positionally and his concentration level is outstanding."

The Coyotes have won three in a row and earned at least a point in nine straight games.

"Things are just going well and hopefully we can ride it for as long as possible," Boucher said.

Afghanistan Hot Topics



(Compiled by CJTF-180 Public Affairs)

New Afghan army rejects professionals

By Dan Morrison

GARDEZ, Afghanistan (*The Washington Times*) – For almost 19 years, Syed Hakim lent his calloused hands and disciplined mind to the defense of Afghanistan, from military school in Kabul to the holy war against the Russians to the anti-Taliban militia currently guarding this dusty city 35 miles from the Pakistani border.

Last month, Hakim received a letter from the defense ministry saying Afghanistan no longer needed his services.

A new Western-trained army would take his place, it said, and Hakim should find a new life, as a farmer, maybe, or a shopkeeper.

“I’m a professional military man,” Hakim said, sitting in a United Nations office not far from the massive Bala Hisar fort, where he used to train soldiers in artillery. “There is no reason for a professional soldier to demobilize. If they are going to take away the professional soldiers, how are they going to rebuild the army?”

Though many Afghan fighters feel liberated after laying down their guns, Hakim is one of thousands of officers – graduates of military colleges and veterans of the decade-long fight against the Red Army – who will be forced from military life in the crucial effort to disarm Afghanistan’s estimated 100,000 gunmen.

There is fear, however, that as older, more experienced soldiers are phased out, the new Afghan army won’t be ready to fill the vacuum. “The combined experience of these officers is vast,” said defense ministry spokesman, Brig. Mar Jan. “What will replace them? Foreign-trained troops, God willing.”

The new Afghan National Army is having a troubled infancy. About half the 9,000 soldiers trained so far have deserted, and it’s unlikely the new force will reach its goal of 10,000 recruits in time for national elections next year.

According to one estimate, the new army won’t reach full strength, 70,000 soldiers, until 2010. In the meantime, most of Afghanistan’s soldiers remain members of private, ethnic-based militias.

The warlords who command them are of dubious loyalty to the government of President Hamid Karzai, and many have been implicated in human rights abuses and drug trafficking.

As the new army grows, however fitfully, Afghanistan’s private forces are expected to fade away as more of their fighters take part in a three-year, \$41 million program called Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration.

The program aims to turn Afghanistan’s guns-for-hire, most of them poorly paid and poorly treated by their commanders,

into wage-earning citizens. “With the extended family system, demobilized soldiers will be supporting 1 million people, if the program succeeds,” said U.N. spokesman Jim Occiti.

Soldiers who turn in their weapons are treated like retiring heroes. They receive a medal, a signed certificate from Mr. Karzai and the training to become merchants, farmers, laborers, mine-sweepers, police or soldiers in the new Afghan National Army. One thousand slots were made available for soldiers as part of a pilot program in Gardez, but only 447 chose to take part. Of those, most opted for farming or manual labor.

Thirty-one fighters chose to rejoin the new Afghan army or national police force, but there’s no place in the ranks for old soldiers like Hakim, who, at 35, is seven years over the age limit.

“The same thing you saw in Gardez is happening all over Afghanistan,” said Brig. Mar Jan, the defense ministry spokesman. “There are thousands of people like that. We’ve only got room for 20,000 officers and 50,000 foot soldiers. I feel bad about it, but these are the circumstances we’re in.”

Laugh Support