

# Freedom

September 19, 2004

# Watch

**CMA team provides eyeglasses to Afghans**  
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***AMF division disarms, prepares for demobilization***  
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Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons

## A river runs through it

A Task Force Pirate crew chief monitors the ground for enemy activity, as he sits on the ramp of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, during a flight to Jildalek village in central Afghanistan. Members of the task force have made several trips into this area, often distributing school supplies and humanitarian aid to villagers.

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Cooperative Medical Assistance missions have found a new way to help the Afghan people. Here, Sgt. Caleb Wines, optical laboratory specialist, fits an Afghan man with prescription eyeglasses during a CMA mission, in the Panjshir Province. During the CMA mission the team provided more than 40 pairs of eyeglasses. This was the first time the team provided optical services, but it is something they plan to continue on other missions.

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Cover photo by Sgt. Frank Magni

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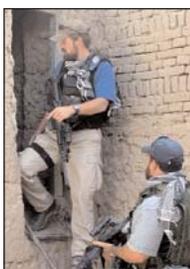
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# Freedom Watch

*Freedom Watch* falls under the supervision of the Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan, and is published weekly.

CFC-A Commander – Lt. Gen. David Barno  
Public Affairs Officer – Lt. Col. Pamela V. Keeton

*Freedom Watch*, an Army publication, is published each Sunday by the 17th Public Affairs Detachment at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Printed circulation is 6,000 copies per week.

In accordance with AR 360-1, this Army newspaper is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military overseas.

Contents of the *Freedom Watch* are not necessarily the official view of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Army.

Deadline for submissions is noon local/0730 Zulu each Friday. All submissions are subject to editing by the 17th Public Affairs Detachment, located in Bldg. 425, Room 107, Bagram Air Base. We can be reached at DSN 318-231-3338.

### Freedom Watch Staff

Commander – Maj. Steven J. Wollman

NCOIC – Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau

Editor – Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl

Journalists – Sgt. Frank Magni,

Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons, Spc. Dijon Rolle,

Spc. Cheryl Ransford, Spc. Chris Stump

Visit the CENTCOM Web site at [www.centcom.mil](http://www.centcom.mil) and click on the *Freedom Watch* or Forces in Afghanistan link at the bottom of the page to get to the *Freedom Watch*. To be added to the weekly distribution list, e-mail [carls@baf.afgn.army.mil](mailto:carls@baf.afgn.army.mil).

# AMF's 31st Division disarms in Kabul

Story and photos by  
Col. Randy Pullen

Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan Militia Force's 31st Division laid down its weapons in a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration event at the division's barracks in Mataw Qala Aug. 23.

Crew-served heavy weapons (mortars, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns and machine guns), individual weapons and ammunition were turned over to the Afghan New Beginnings Program's mobile disarmament unit. The 170 officers and soldiers of the 31st Division were then provided with temporary DDR identification cards and the paperwork needed to allow them to visit the ANBP region office to select their reintegration packages.

The commander of the soon-to-be demobilized division, AMF Brig. Gen. Alhaj Shah Mohammad Zakery, said that the division was obeying the decree of President Hamid Karzai and the command of the Ministry of Defense to undertake the DDR process.

He also said that the Coalition and the U.N. were working for the peace and security of Afghanistan and that he agreed with their aims.

"We are eager to help them," said Zakery. "DDR is good for Afghanistan."

More than 600 of Zakery's best soldiers



**Heavy weapons of the AMF's 31st Division are loaded on a U.N. truck during the Aug. 23 disarmament of the division in West Kabul.**

have already left the division to join the Afghan National Army, and he too is waiting to see if his nomination for a command in the ANA is approved.

Former and present soldiers of the 31st Division agreed with the division commander as to the necessity to disarm.

"We must turn in our weapons to the government," said former commander Abdul Rahman. "It is the time for peace."

"I want our country to be a safe place," said AMF Capt. Abdul Magid as he turned in his AK-47 and received his ANBP paperwork. "I am happy to do this."

The soldiers of the 31st Division were praised by several officials at the ceremony, both for their heroism on the battlefield against the enemies of the Afghan people and for their being "heroes of peace" and choosing to take part in the DDR process.

"You officers and soldiers here fought the Russians and al-Qaida and defeated them with your bravery," said Maj. Gen. Orya Khail, from the Central Zone disarmament program. "Now you take another step in bringing peace and security by submitting your weapons and participating in the reconstruction of the country as heroes."

The 31st Division's Political and Theological Director, Gen. Sayed Azghar Aalammi, also noted the division's fine record against the Soviets, the Taliban and al-Qaida, and said that turning in weapons and starting the DDR process was one more fine achievement for the division. He also requested that the demobilizing officers and men of the division be given jobs and careers according to their talents and qualifications.

In response, Ahmad Jan Nawzadi of the Afghan New Beginnings Program explained to the disarming soldiers that those who have little education or are illiterate will receive professional education. Those who have adequate literacy will have the opportunity to take short courses in teaching, communication, agriculture and small business.

He also added that the purpose of DDR was not to disarm Afghans, but to collect weapons and place them under the control of the government. By that control, the weapons still belong to the peo-



**Col. Bert Key, director of security sector reform, Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, examines some of the weapons being turned in by the AMF's 31st Division during the division's disarmament in West Kabul.**

# Engineers begin reconstruction at Kandahar

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Frank Magni  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Kandahar Airfield is currently undergoing improvements to rotary wing aircraft parking and taxi areas — a move that will consolidate and improve the posture of all aircraft on the airfield.

A horizontal construction platoon from Company B, 204th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Heavy), New York Army National Guard has joined forces with contracted elements from Kellogg, Brown and Root to upgrade rotary wing parking spots and taxiways.

The team will be pouring approximately 74,000 cubic yards of concrete to replace temporary asphalt and metal surfaces

The concrete will provide Kandahar's rotary wing parking areas and taxiways longevity over asphalt or metal, said 1st Lt. Joe Fassacesia, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., executive officer.

"Concrete is one of the most durable

surfaces for this project," said Fassacesia. "A surface like this can last at least 50 years.

"But pouring concrete can be more challenging than other surfaces," he said.

The challenges for the 204th start with the Afghan environment.

"This is definitely not like pouring concrete in the States," said Staff Sgt. Robert Ayers, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., squad leader.

With temperatures typically reaching more than 120 degrees, dust storms and the language challenges that accompany working with local nationals, the engineers have had to adapt to operating in Afghanistan.

To avoid the heat, the unit doesn't work a typical duty day. Beginning work at midnight, the Soldiers avoid the highest temperatures of the day by ending around lunch time.

"Working during the cooler hours has really increased our productivity," said Ayers.

The lack of rain in the area is also one constant that keeps productivity high for the team. But during the summertime, afternoon thunderstorms that are typical in New York state have been replaced by dust storms.

"It is kind of crazy, actually," said Ayers. "One minute you will be able to see the other end of the airfield, and the next minute you can't see five feet in front of you."

The engineers have also overcome the language barrier they once had with the local nationals who deliver the concrete. With no interpreters on the job site, the two crews have developed their own communication system.

"It is mostly hand and arm signals, but just as effective as working with somebody (who) speaks the same language," said Ayers.

Scheduled to be complete by December, the upgrades are highly anticipated by many units at Kandahar.

Maj. Greg Baker, Task Force



**Spc. Allen Vonrapacki, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., puts the finishing touches on the edge of a taxiway at Kandahar Airfield.**



**Sgt. Scott Szabo, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., excavates an area for upgrades at Kandahar Airfield. The upgrades will create more room for aircraft parking.**

Diamondhead executive officer, said the parking spots and taxiways are the first step in upgrades for rotary wing elements.

"These are vast improvements for our operations," said Baker. "The new parking area is centralizing all of our assets into one place."

In addition to outdoor areas, the unit is also upgrading their hangars and maintenance facilities.

"Once everything is complete, our overall maintenance posture will improve dramatically," he said.

Consolidation of the Army aviation elements will also improve aircraft capacity for Air Force elements on Kandahar, said Baker.

"Once we move, the Air Force will be able to bring in more aircraft with the new space available."

With so many units eagerly awaiting the project's completion, the pressure is on for the 204th to complete the rotary wing area by December.

"It is a very challenging project but we will make our deadline," said Fassacesia. "We will do whatever it takes to make it happen."

# Deadline approaching for absentee ballots

Story by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — As the Coalition helps Afghanistan prepare for its presidential election, it's important that U.S. service members don't lose sight of their own right to vote.

General elections will take place in the United States Nov. 2, but the deadline is fast approaching for citizens serving overseas to mail absentee ballots.

All registered voters should receive their absentee ballots for the general elections by the first week of October. Anyone who doesn't receive a ballot by that time should see their voting assistance officer for a federal write-in ballot.

"Our deadline to mail ballots back to the (United States) for the election is Oct. 11," said Maj. Bryan Carter, Combined Joint Task Force-76 senior voting assistance officer. This leaves approximately a

20-day window for the ballots to make it to the United States in time for the election.

However, those who want their vote counted shouldn't wait until the last minute to mail in their ballots. The longer you wait to mail your ballot, the greater the risk that it won't get there on time, said Carter.

"The important thing is that people ensure they are mailing the ballots in time to meet the deadline for voting," he said.

This election year a lot of attention is focused on absentee voters getting their paperwork in on time and participating in the elections.

"A big concern right now is that there are so many service members (and civilians) deployed right now. That's why there's so much of an emphasis on voting," he said.

"We want to make sure everyone knows that individuals do count. And their votes

will be counted for their future. Our elections aren't just about people. They're about taxes, bonds, referendums, schools, cities and counties. We're allowing the people we elect to work and perform different functions, and by voting, we get to approve or disapprove many of these functions."

The process of voting allows service members and civilians serving in Afghanistan to exercise their involvement in the government.

"Voting is just one of the rights we're here for," said Carter. "Voting is how our democracy works. Really, it's how we speak to our government."

To make the democracy work, however, personnel serving here need to ensure they take the time to vote.

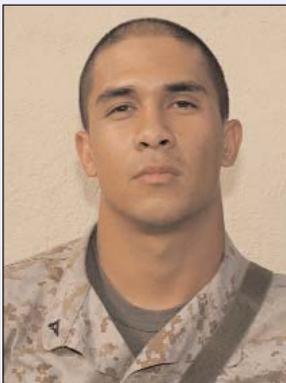
"This is the last big piece of the voting process," said Carter. "This is a culminating event. You're putting pen to paper and exercising your right to vote."

It's your future...  
**Vote** for it!



## Enduring Voices

*Why do you think voting is important?*



**Marine Lance Cpl.  
Christopher Vance**

HMH 769

*"It's my opinion, and my chance to have some say in what happens."*



**Spc. Jacob Jenson**

TF Victory

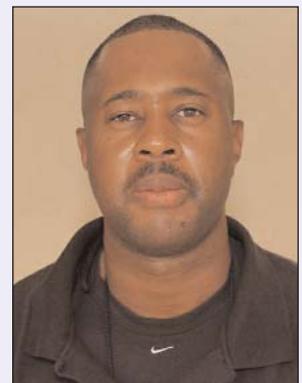
*"So you have a say. If you don't vote, you aren't exercising your right."*



**Air Force Staff Sgt.  
Andrea Norton**

CFC-A

*"Because people died for us to have that right."*



**Stanley Booker**

KBR, DS-ORG

*"I think by having the right to vote it gives us all a choice to put into office who we want."*

# Eyeglass clinic helps Afghans see more clearly

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Frank Magni  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

PANJSHIR PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Many Afghans can see reconstruction taking place in their country when Coalition reconstruction teams come into their area. Now, with a newly acquired capability, some Cooperative Medical Assistance missions will make it possible for even more Afghans to clearly see and appreciate Coalition reconstruction efforts.

Along with medical and veterinary care, some CMA teams can now provide eyeglasses during visits to remote villages.

The new capability was tested on a recent CMA mission in Panjshir Province's Shatol village, located in central Afghanistan.

After four and a half hours of work, one optical laboratory specialist was able to provide more than 40 pairs of eyeglasses — a success after months of preparation for members of Task Force Victory Surgeon Cell.

"This is a great success for the CMA project," said Lt. Col. David Ferris, Task Force Victory Surgeon Cell operations officer. "We have been preparing to do this for five months."

Waiting on the equipment and personnel, Ferris said the CMA team pursued the capability to create glasses because of the overwhelming amount of requests from local

leaders.

"There is a definite need for eyeglasses throughout the Afghan community," said Ferris.

To accommodate this need, the CMA provides every service necessary for providing glasses in a field environment.

From determining a patient's prescription to creating the glasses, the CMA can provide these services in a short amount of time.

Beginning with the eye exam and ending with the patient getting the glasses, the process takes no more than 10 minutes, said Sgt. Caleb Wines, 312th Medical Logistics Detachment optical laboratory specialist.

Since the idea of the eyeglass program was first developed, the team has had a goal of providing quick turnaround.

"Every step of the process was designed for efficiency," said Wines.

Using a piece of equipment called an auto refractor, prescriptions can be determined in 30 seconds to a minute. Wines also brought stock lenses so they don't need to be created in the field. By using the stock lenses, the only process that remains is to cut the lenses to fit the frames.



**Sgt. Caleb Wines, optical laboratory specialist, tests an Afghan man's vision during a CMA mission in Panjshir Province.**

Wines said there are still some procedures to work out, but over the course of the next few CMA missions he estimates they will be able to create 70-100 pairs of glasses a day.

Ferris said the impact of providing the glasses is obvious.

"Who doesn't want to see?" asked Ferris. "Providing these glasses has many positive effects for not only the people, but the Coalition."

After the CMA team provides the glasses, Ferris said there is a visual impact for the service.

"You can see our efforts right on the face of the people we help," said Ferris. "This is also a powerful multiplier for the people within the village."

Ferris said the glasses can dramatically improve the vision of some. This will have a positive effect because these members of the community will be better able to participate in business and community activities.

In the future, the CMA is trying to diversify their capabilities by getting an additional optical laboratory specialist to increase output. They are also working on getting smaller frames for the children so their glasses will fit better.

Wines said he is very grateful for his opportunity to help the Afghans.

"They really appreciate the glasses," he said. "The expression on their face when they first put them on really shows how much they appreciate them."

As the CMA teams work out better methods to deliver the glasses in greater numbers, the act of providing them is what is seen as truly important.

"We are just trying to come out here and improve the lives of these people," said Ferris. "Providing glasses is just one of the ways we are doing it."



**Sgt. 1st Class Marvin Docken, a member of the TF Victory surgeon cell, fits an Afghan boy for eyeglass frames during a CMA in Panjshir Province. This was the first time the CMA team was able to provide eyeglasses to patients.**

# Parwan PRT enters historic Panjshir Valley

Story and photo by  
Sgt. Frank Magni  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

PANJSHIR PROVINCE, Afghanistan — As Coalition forces reach out to more locations in Afghanistan helping with reconstruction and stability, the process of entering new areas poses new challenges. With each new location having unique cultural concerns and reconstruction needs, the experience is always different.

Members of the Parwan Provincial Reconstruction team visited the newly formed Panjshir Province — an area of central Afghanistan rich in history and pride — several times in August and September. It is also an area rarely visited by Coalition forces.

Located within the province, Panjshir Valley is the home of Ahmad Shah Massoud, a champion of Afghan freedom, who fought against Soviet and Taliban forces. Massoud was assassinated by the Taliban just days before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, and still remains a hero to many Afghans.

Master Sgt. Jeffrey White, Parwan PRT, was one of the first civil affairs members to enter the valley after receiving an invitation

from the provincial governor.

The area was never overlooked by the Coalition, but was being respected because of its symbolic importance to the country, said White.

“This place is very beautiful. When you come here you realize why they (Panjshir Valley residents) would be so protective of the area,” said White. “They are very proud of their home.”

After initial visits into the valley, the team saw that they could help the residents with the type of aid that has been provided in other provinces. They also encountered a very receptive population.

“When we initially arrived, the people were very glad to see we were here,” said Maj. Charles Westover, Parwan PRT commander. “Everyone in the valley is very hospitable.”

During the visits, the Parwan team gave out school and tool kits. Within each of the school kits are enough school supplies for 70 students. The tool kits contain an assortment of tools and materials, like hand tools and nails.

As the kits were distributed throughout the province, Coalition forces also began communicating with local leaders. During the first few meetings, the residents expressed the need for medical and veterinary treatment in the villages.

As a result of this need, the PRT enlisted the aid of the Cooperative Medical Assistance team.

Comprised of a group of doctors and veterinarians from throughout the Coalition, the CMA is a team that specializes in providing medical and veterinary aid to remote villages.

During the PRT’s third visit into the valley, the CMA team entered Shatol Village to provide aid.

Setting up in the local school, central to the village’s population, the CMA team opened a field expedient men’s and women’s clinic. They used their vehicles to create a corral for treating the animals, and another team created a separate area to make prescription eye glasses.

The CMA provided medical aid to hundreds of Panjshir residents. They also made more than 40 pairs of eyeglasses and treated more than 100 animals.

No stranger to being one of the first Coalition groups in the area, Col. Steve Jones, CMA team member and Task Force Victory chief surgeon, said the impact of the CMA mission is designed for exactly what the Parwan PRT was trying to do in Panjshir.

“Our aim is to begin direct personal interaction between the Coalition and local Afghans,” said Jones. “We have found that providing medical care increases the trust Afghans have with us.”

This was not the first time a CMA was used by the Parwan PRT to help increase communications. The CMA team also visited Sarobi and Nangalam Districts.

“There are many positive effects we see after a CMA (project) moves through a village,” said White.

He said the local leaders gain an understanding of what kind of assistance the Coalition can provide and how they can improve their own services in the area.

In Panjshir, the CMA project identified optimal times to help with the valley’s animals.

During the CMA, it was discovered that local herdsmen move their animals into the mountains during the summer months, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the Afghans to access veterinary care. With knowledge of the livestock’s grazing patterns, the team now knows to only provide veterinary services during the winter.

Gulabsha, a district chief within Panjshir Province, said livestock is very important to the people within the valley.

“Our village relies heavily on animals,” said Gulabsha. “We really appreciate it when the Coalition comes here and vaccinates our animals and treats our people. When the Coalition comes here, the people are happy. It has been very positive.”

Although the CMA will help greatly, it is just one of the many steps the Coalition will take in Panjshir.

“Now that we have a good line of communications open, we will identify what other projects and services we can provide,” said White.

Using the first meeting as a guide, both the Parwan PRT and Panjshir local leaders have learned much about each other. Using this newfound knowledge, the parties are forging partnerships that will make the aid provided by the Coalition more meaningful for the residents of Panjshir Province.



Col. Steve Jones, TF Victory chief surgeon, gives vitamins to an Afghan girl during a CMA mission to Panjshir Province.

# ***OEF Soldiers celebrate Labor Day in Bagram***

In celebration of Labor Day and Women's Equality Day, service members and civilians at Bagram Air Base participated in several events Sept. 5 that were designed to bring the Coalition together and demonstrate equality.

The events available to the service members and civilians included a 10 kilometer run, basketball and volleyball tournaments and a Tough Guy/Gal competition.

Through events such as these, Coalition members are able to come together for a bit of rest and relaxation, while inspiring friendly competition.

Photos by Spc. Cheryl Ransford



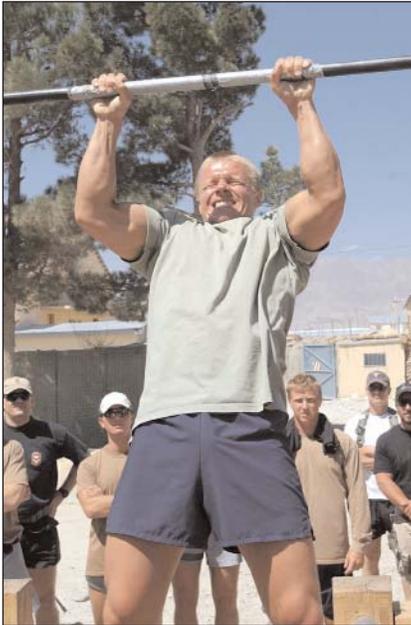
Clockwise from top: Lt. Col. Jenny Caruso, CJTF-76 Equal Opportunity program manager, receives motivation from Staff Sgt. Brian Mincey, CJTF-76, while pulling a "gator" during the Tough Gal competition.

Spc. Rob Coallier, CJTF-76, pulls a HMMWV 25 meters during the Tough Guy competition.

Members of the 3rd Bn., 6th Marines, and Air Force 455th EOG compete in the volleyball tournament.

Master Sgt. Evalani Faniel, CJTF-76 Joint Logistics Command, goes up for a jump shot during the women's basketball tournament.





Clockwise from top left: Czech Republic Warrant Officer Standa Haver strains to complete one more pull-up during the Tough Guy competition.

Service members and civilians begin a 10-kilometer run as the sun comes up in Bagram, in celebration of Labor Day and Women's Equality Day.

Spc. Martha Dawson, HHC, CJTF-76, attempts a shot during the women's basketball tournament.

1st Sgt. Charles Sasser, HHC, CJTF-76, bench presses his body weight during the Tough Guy competition.

Chief Warrant Officer Kat O'Konski, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., performs repetitions of the military press, lifting one-quarter of her body weight, during the Tough Gal competition.



# TOC coordinates aviation assets, missions

Story by  
Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — As aircraft fly overhead completing vital missions throughout Afghanistan, the Soldiers and Airmen in the Tactical

Operations Center of Task Force Pirate are hard at work behind the scenes, ensuring the aviation mission of Operation Enduring Freedom is running smoothly and safely.

Aviation is crucial to Operation Enduring Freedom, said Master Sgt.

Michael Cady, Operations and Tactical Operations Center noncommissioned officer in charge.

The command regularly uses aviation assets for resupplies, troop movements and support of troops in contact with the enemy, said Cady.

Coordinating these assets is the job of Task Force Pirate personnel who work in the Tactical Operations Center.

The TOC is important because it's where all flights are tracked, said Capt. Matthew T. Badell, TOC battle captain.

"We have a tap on all the crews, all the missions we are doing and all the missions we are going to be doing," he said.

Pilots don't just go out to the flightline and fly aircraft, said Badell. They must have all the proper information and clearance to fly a mission.

In order for pilots to launch a mission, they must have a weather and intelligence brief and ensure their paperwork, such as manifests, is in order, said Badell.

"It gives the pilots one-stop shopping," said Cady. "They can come in here and plan their flights. Flight operations can help them file for their flight. At the same time, they can get their intelligence update so they know what's going on with the enemy on the battlefield. Weather is critical for their ability to fly. The pilot can get a weather update right here in the TOC. It's important that they can come to the same place to do all that."

"This is where they can get their mission and go," said Badell.

"Helicopters don't fly without

*See TOC, Page 15*



Video Still by Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons

**Capt. Matthew T. Badell (right), TOC battle captain, helps a Task Force Pirate pilot plan a mission.**

# Security forces maintain vigilance through focus

Story by  
Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates  
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Two narrow wire fences are all that appear to stand between Coalition forces and potential enemies.

But appearances can be deceiving, as there are integrated layers of defense that provide protection for forces at Bagram Air Base. Air Force security forces are critical to that defense.

"Our main priority is to make sure no one harms our aircraft or people," said Air Force Staff Sgt. David Hess, 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, on a recent early morning patrol along the outer perimeter of Bagram Air Base. "We make sure everyone stays safe to do their mission without being interrupted by attacks — people can't recover aircraft if they are constantly being rocketed or attacked."

Security force teams can be compared to T-cells in the human body, said Air Force Staff Sgt. John Holland, also with 455th ESFS.

"If you think of the mission as a body, we go take care of problems when they rise up. Our sole purpose in the mission is to address and answer the question 'what if?'"

One of the biggest threats security forces face is complacency. To combat that, the Airmen here have a single-minded focus on the mission, said Hess.

"I focus on the mission — when I have a patrol, I change the routine to make it more interesting," he said. "I may stop along the route and scan the surrounding area for a while, or I think about where possible attacks might come from and how to combat those attacks."

Finally, he remembers the security lessons learned in the nearly three years of operations here.

"I look at what happened to Airmen in the past and don't copy their errors. I want to go home (unharmd)," he said.

Mixing up duties and partners also helps combat complacency, said Air Force Airman 1st Class Ryan Flory, occasionally Hess' partner on patrol.

"We look out for each other," he said. "If we see someone getting complacent, we talk to them and get them refocused."

Training helps keep the job fresh and interesting, as well as provides the opportunities for veteran-deployed Airmen to share knowledge of tactics and techniques with younger Airmen, said Hess.

"We share a lot of information about previous deployments in training scenarios

— what we've seen and how we responded," he said.

This is outstanding for young troops, said Flory, who is currently on his first deployment after seven months in the career field.

"I'm learning a lot here I can use at home — then, the next time I am on deployment, I can share what I've learned with other security force Airmen."

Focusing on the importance of the mission and what security forces do is extremely important in combating complacency, said Holland.

"This is a combat zone," he said. Unfortunately, that brings an added risk.

Being a part of history, and keeping people safe in these times, are important to the security forces Airmen.

"I wish I could do more," said Flory. "It's a great opportunity to be here and be able to say in the future that I was a part of this."

"Anything you do in the military automatically makes you a part of history," said Holland. "The military is a true melting pot of America. My service here helps me connect with my heritage — my father and uncles were in uniform. I'm serving here with a great deal of honor, and a great deal of humility. I feel great about being here."

# Postal operations keep OEF members in touch

Story and photos by  
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew A. Fearing  
105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — The 841st Adjutant General Postal Company received more than 37,000 pounds of mail in one day at Kandahar Airfield in late May.

For the 841st, it was the largest amount of mail ever to be received in a 24-hour period at the Kandahar Airfield postal facilities.

Delivered on nine pallets to the Postal Operations Center in Kandahar, it took the 20 members of the 841st, two Marines, and six additional Soldiers most of the duty day to sort through and distribute the majority of the mail.

It was the “busiest day we’ve ever had, probably the busiest this post office has had,” said Staff Sgt. Van Jordan, Kandahar postal operations noncommissioned officer in charge.

Even the 841st’s commander, Capt. Jay Edwards, jumped in to sort mail.

“All the Soldiers are doing the same



**Sgt. Anthony Beal, 841st AG Postal Co., helps a customer at the Kandahar Postal Operations Center.**

thing,” said Edwards. “If people don’t pitch in, we don’t get it done.”

The 841st is accustomed to large shipments. On their first day of work, they took in seven pallets, said Jordan. The unit they replaced, the 303rd Combat Postal Company, never received more than six pallets in a single day.

“We’ve had several days now with seven pallets coming in,” he said.

These pallets are sorted by the service members who work in postal operations. Normally, when the Kandahar Postal Operations Center receives mail, the 841st’s personnel can get the mail distributed for pick up within a few hours, said Jordan.

What they can’t control is how long it takes for mail to arrive.

He explained that the mail may be delayed at an airfield elsewhere, and the center may have a few days when they do not receive any mail.

“We don’t want (service members) to lose faith in getting their mail, but it sometimes takes three weeks for a parcel to arrive,” said Jordan.

Edwards concurred with Jordan’s assessment and added, “Letter mail takes longer to sort. Packages can

be carried (directly to the unit bins), but letters have to be pulled from the bags and handled one-by-one.”

While mail may not always arrive in country as quickly as service members may like, the Soldiers of the 841st are ensuring that once it gets here, it gets out as soon as possible.

This is a job that keeps them busy, and has Edwards saying with pride, “(My Soldiers) are doing a super job.”



**Spec. Cassie Gonzalez sorts packages as Spec. Bruce Downard returns from placing mail in one of the bins at the Kandahar Postal Operations Center.**



**Gonzalez passes packages to Marine Sgt. Carroll Mitchell, 22nd MEU, so they can be logged before they are forwarded to the units.**

# OSI uses proactive offense to secure Bagram Air Base

Story and photo by  
Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates  
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — When responding to attacks against Bagram Air Base, one team's philosophy is simple.

The best defense is a proactive offense. That offense is in support of the base operations defense plan, said Air Force Special Agent Jeff Rutherford, Air Force Office of Special Investigations detachment commander. The team includes Army military police, Air Force security forces, explosive ordnance disposal experts and many others dedicated to preventing attacks.

"This has been an outstanding opportunity for us to work together with the Army — who owns the base — and many other professionals, to bring safety and stability to the people who work on Bagram," said Rutherford.

Rutherford and a co-worker, Isaac Suydam, both hail from the AFOSI's Antiterrorism Special Team, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. They have received specialized training to operate effectively and safely in a high threat environment such as Afghanistan.

"Isaac and I are certified instructors, so we can give the people responding to attacks some specific training to help them safely accomplish the mission," said Rutherford.

The key to being proactive is trying to uncover the indications and warnings of an imminent attack, he said.

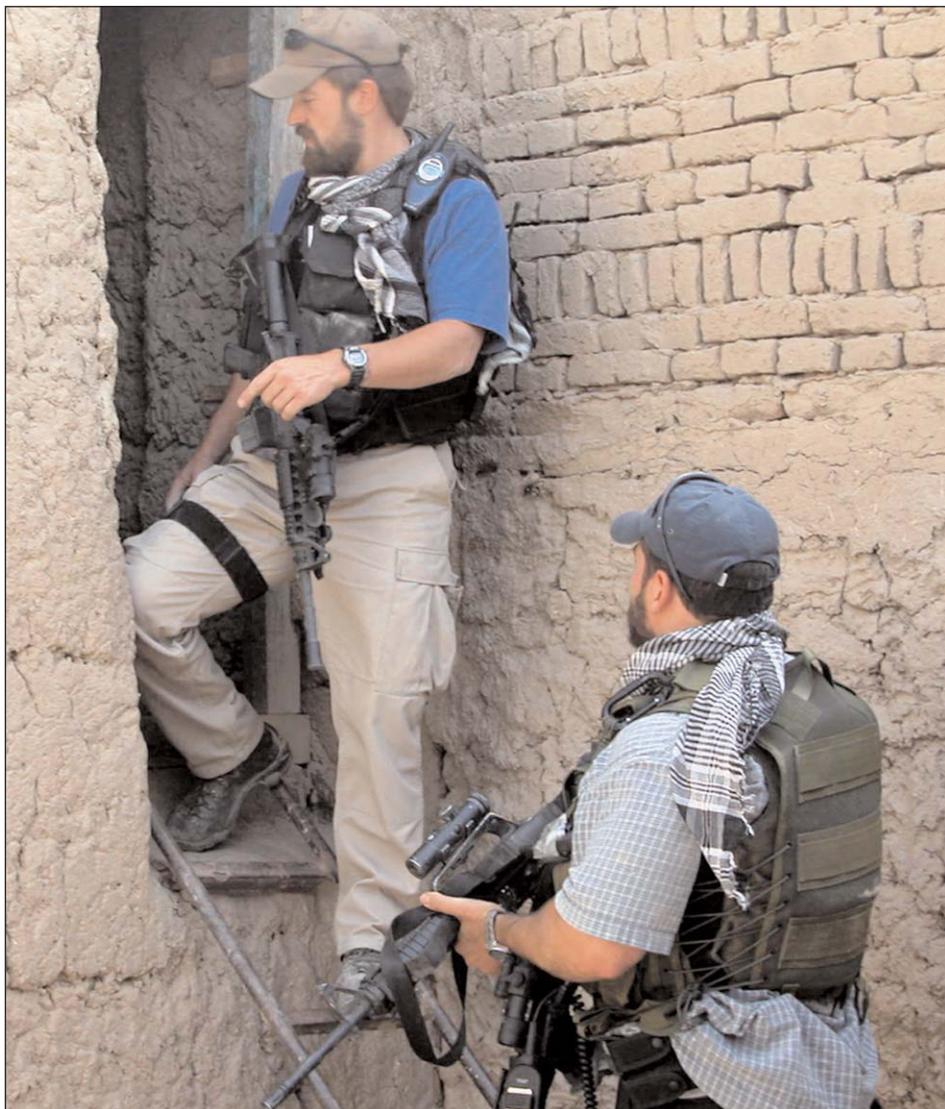
"We work with Army military police and agencies in a specified area around the base to develop leads to discover illegal weapons caches and possible attacks."

Their efforts have been effective, as they have discovered more than 13 illegal weapons caches in three months. In these illegal caches, the team has discovered more than 12,000 weapons, including heavy machine guns, antipersonnel mines and 107mm rockets.

"Stand-off weapons such as the 107mm rocket seem to be the weapon of choice for attacks here," said Rutherford.

Although their goal is to stop all attacks against the base, not all can be predicted. If an enemy attacks, a rapid response team gathers.

"We stand up operations immediately after an attack," said Rutherford. These operations involve security elements and



**Special Agents Jeff Rutherford (right) and Isaac Suydam, both members of Bagram Air Base's Air Force Office of Special Investigations, search for a weapons cache inside a false wall. The two have received specialized training in counterterrorism methods.**

EOD and medical teams. "We ... examine the intelligence available and go through a rapid mission planning process."

After coordinating with the Army, the team will go out and talk to local contacts to find out where the attack came from and what information they can find about the attackers, he said. It doesn't take long for the team to complete the planning meeting and roll out the gate — the process is quick, he said.

That speed is important for two reasons.

"First, this isn't the only response the base is going to have. We are not going to wait for an attack and sit back and allow you to shoot at us at will — we will

come out and find out who's responsible and apprehend them, if possible," said Rutherford. "They know we will be coming out there, so it narrows their targeting cycle — they are not going to be able to sit in one area all night long and just walk rockets onto the base."

The second reason for speed is to preserve evidence, he said.

"The longer you wait to respond, the farther the attackers will get away, and people will start to forget important information."

During past rocket attacks, the speedy response has allowed the team to identify the point of origin. Upon arrival, the

# Complacency affects mission success

## Safeguarding the Coalition

Story by Spc. Cheryl Ransford  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — Familiarity tends to give people a false sense of security, or a complacent attitude. In a combat zone like Afghanistan, there's no room for complacency. Vigilance is the key to survival.

When people become complacent, accidents happen, said Chief Warrant Officer Bill Sielaff, Bagram Air Base safety officer.

"Many times in Afghanistan, Soldiers find themselves in routines," he said. "When they do the same thing every time, they tend to forget things because they are rushing and don't (follow) proper procedures."

Just because the task has been completed several times, doesn't mean there is room for shortcuts, said Sgt. Maj. Samuel R. Jackson Jr., Bagram Air Base safety noncommissioned officer in charge.

"Every time you take a shortcut, you're going to pay for it in the end," he said. "One example is complacency around mines. We had some people who had been into the same area more than 20 times. The 21st time they went into the area, someone lost their leg. You can never be too safe."

One of the hardest tasks leaders face is keeping service members from getting into too much of a routine and losing focus.

"We are assigned missions such as six-month patrols," said 2nd Lt. Christopher Izquierdo, 551st Military Police Company platoon leader. "To keep the Soldiers from getting too used to the same route, we switch missions between platoons every couple weeks so the Soldiers aren't doing the same thing all the time."

Along with varying the mission, constant training on the importance of vigilance in a combat zone is something each unit should do.

"Part of ensuring the platoon is trained to standard is ensuring the Soldiers don't become complacent in their missions," said Izquierdo.

While vigilance is important to the mission at all times, the level of critical importance is increased in a combat zone, said Sielaff.

"In the States, if someone gets even

slightly injured, an exercise may not get completed," he said. "But in a combat zone, the whole mission could be put in jeopardy because one person was complacent and didn't take all the proper steps."

To ensure the Soldiers are doing the right thing, leaders need to get out and see what the Soldiers are doing and ensure all the proper procedures are being followed, said Sielaff.

"Safety and non-complacency start at the top of the chain of command," he said. "The commanders need to be stressing safety, while the senior noncommissioned officers enforce the policies with the Soldiers in the unit."

Another way to ensure the Soldiers are doing the right thing and not becoming complacent is to conduct spot checks on personnel and their equipment, said Izquierdo.

"To ensure my Soldiers are doing the right thing, I continuously conduct spot checks. I also go on missions with them," he said. "If something wasn't done right, I will be able to tell while we're conducting the mission."

Security is one area where service members become complacent, said Sgt. Josh Armstrong, 551st MP Co. squad leader.

"When Soldiers are inside the wire they tend to get a false sense of security and become lackadaisical and fail to pay attention to detail," he said. "Everyone should be reminded that this is for real. We can't go back and do it again."

For the units at the forward operating bases, closer to the fighting, complacency can mean even more danger for the Soldiers, said Jackson.

"The Soldiers at the forward operating bases have enough dangers to worry about. They don't need more dangers inside the wire. It becomes critical for the leaders to stress safety to the Soldiers," he said.

Regardless of location, all Soldiers should remain alert and ready for anything that may happen.

Vigilance could be what saves someone's life, said Sgt. Jonathon Yard, 551st MP Co. squad leader.

"When units are going on missions, they do checks to ensure they have everything needed," he said. "One piece of equip-



Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates  
**Air Force Airman 1st Class Ryan Flory, 455th ESFS, uses night vision goggles during an early morning patrol along the perimeter of Bagram Air Base.**

ment could be the difference between someone staying alive and getting killed."

Everyone is responsible for checking themselves and each other, said Armstrong.

"If everyone does their part to make sure everything is right, the likelihood of something going wrong is lessened," he said.

To ensure service members know what right is, training should be done on a regular basis, said Yard.

"To keep training interesting for the Soldiers you have to think outside the box," he said. "If the same training is done all the time, Soldiers get bored and can become complacent in the training, which makes the real thing even more dangerous."

Keeping Soldiers actively involved in training is one way to keep it interesting.

"One way to keep the Soldiers interested is to ask for suggestions for training – find out what the Soldiers want to train on," he said. "Also, have them conduct the training. If the subject of the training is what they are interested in, or something they feel they need more training on, they are less likely to become complacent in the training or a real mission having to do with the subject of the training."

While everyone is responsible for ensuring the safety of Soldiers, leaders have the ultimate responsibility for their troops.

"Part of my job is to ensure the Soldiers go home safe," said Izquierdo. "If I fail to maintain (vigilance) within myself, then I will fail my Soldiers."

As leaders, NCOs and commanders need to constantly stress safety, get out and observe their people, said Jackson.

"Safety first – mission always," he said. "With safety in mind, the mission will always get completed."

# Marine martial arts program enhances effectiveness

Story by Spc. Dijon Rolle  
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Marines in Afghanistan are learning some special combat skills to increase their effectiveness on the battlefield. The Marine Corps Martial Arts Training Program is a five-day comprehensive course designed to enhance combat skills first learned in boot camp.

Marines from the 773rd Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron at Bagram Air Base are the latest group to tackle the Marine Corps Martial Arts Training Program. The comprehensive program focuses on a combination of martial arts techniques, intricate unarmed and armed combat drills and movements, as well as reinforcing Marine Corps values.

“It’s very important for Marines on the battlefield to know how to defend themselves, whether they’re in a peacekeeping mission or a combative mission,” said Marine Chief Warrant Officer Casey Jones, HMLA 773 course instructor. Jones is certified through MCMAP to teach the course to students.

“We cover all those techniques, whether it’s lethal or non-lethal, depending on the situation that we’re presented with.”

Casey’s students are required to complete 25 hours of instruction, plus put in an additional seven hours of practice time to graduate. Despite the challenges of the course and battling Afghanistan’s heat and dust while training outdoors,

students feel the course is essential to being combat ready.

“It gives you an edge on your opponent. You’re a better fighter, you’re better in combat, and you’re a better Marine,” said Marine Lance Cpl. Kory Findley, HMLA 773. “It’s good training – (I) hope they keep it up in the Corps.”

The 773rd Marines have been teaching the course at Bagram since April, and it’s also being taught at forward operating bases Salerno and Orgun-E.

MCMAP students work toward a gray, green, brown or black belt after receiving their tan belt during boot camp. The colors signify the level of martial arts training they’ve completed.

Recently, the commandant of the Marine Corps ordered all Marines to obtain their gray belt by October.

“This is essential and it’s needed,” said Marine Cpl. Kyle Gisel, HMLA 773. “This is coming down from the Marine Corps commandant himself. He’s trying to do this to better the Marine Corps and make our fighting skills better overall.”

While the course is a requirement for all Marines, it’s also available to any



Video Still by Spc. Dijon Rolle

**Lance Cpl. Kory Findley practices a partner-assisted hand-to-hand combat drill during Marine martial arts training.**

Coalition members wanting to participate.

“We like to see everybody, the other services, other Coalition Forces, come out and join us, and non-military forces as well; it’s highly recommended,” said Jones. “We welcome everybody. I think it’s beneficial for all services.”

## OSI: Team help to prevent terrorist attacks at Bagram

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team found three more rockets and a possible improvised explosive device. EOD experts were able to defuse the weapons, said Rutherford.

Quick reaction also gives the team more information as to who might have conducted the attack, as the experts are able to identify motivations of the attackers and which groups the attacks might have come from.

Most of the people the team encounters are supportive of the base, he said.

“About 99.9 percent of the people we encounter are extremely supportive of our activities – kids give us thumbs up, people are friendly. This base is a center of gravity for national security and the locals recognize that. We have a better relationship with the locals than many

other bases – they know we work for the base and we’re trying to keep the area safe. There are lots of outside groups who are losing traction – they have lost their standing in the area,” said Rutherford.

The quick response and proactive searches for weapons caches has meant fewer attacks at Bagram.

“We’ve received information – for instance, that the base was to be attacked one night when illumination conditions were perfect for a rocket attack,” said Rutherford. “We went out, woke people up, responded to see if we could discover what was going on and possibly prevented an attack. Although there was no attack that evening, we got ahead of the curve.”

When they respond, the team goes out in full force – joint operations are com-

monplace, especially when rapidly responding to a threat.

“We respond with Army MPs – we bring in significant firepower and presence,” said Rutherford. “I don’t believe in parity – our teams go in with overwhelming force. I don’t want a fair fight if it comes down to that.”

The proactive offense, rapid response and overwhelming force are the hallmarks of an effective program, said Rutherford. The program, because of its success, has established a benchmark throughout the theater.

“I’d like to think being proactive, taking illegal weapons off the street and responding quickly has to have a negative impact on the bad guys’ operations,” he said. “They can’t hide weapons caches anymore, and can’t watch the base with impunity – we’ll find out.”

# Coalition troops build rapport in Paktika Province

Story and photo by  
Capt. Juanita Chang  
Combined Task Force Thunder

PAKTIKA PROVINCE, Afghanistan — The “Wolfhounds” of 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment have been conducting patrols in Paktika Province, eastern Afghanistan, since they arrived in here five months ago.

Due to its size, limited infrastructure and rough terrain, patrolling Paktika Province is a daunting task.

It’s a tough job, said Capt. John Sego, Company B, 2nd Bn., 27th Inf. Rgt. “I’ve been here five months and haven’t even seen a paved road yet.”

But the Wolfhounds have willingly embraced this mission.

To make their task a little less difficult, the Wolfhounds have developed strong relationships with their Afghan National Army counterparts and the provincial government — relationships that are promoting a secure and stable environment for the Oct. 9 presidential election and next spring’s parliamentary elections.

One of the ways the Soldiers have cultivated their relationship with the ANA is through joint patrols.

During one patrol, ANA soldiers from 2nd Company, 2nd Kandak (battalion), 3rd Brigade, enthusiastically prepared for and conducted patrols alongside the Americans. Together, Soldiers from both countries patrolled the roads and several villages in the province, stopping along the

way to talk with village elders, members of the Afghan National Police, and a district mayor.

Through this communication, the Soldiers establish a presence and gather information to take back to the provincial governor. This information often leads to improvements within the province. It also gives the Coalition the opportunity to support growth and reconstruction.

During a patrol through the village of Josufkhel, Coalition Soldiers met with Hajji Soorkai, village mayor, and Nazar Mohammad, local police chief, who addressed several concerns, including police vehicles and uniforms. Sego acknowledged their concerns, and then presented them with an Afghan flag and several windup radios.

After the patrol, the Soldiers joined Col. Gary H. Cheek, Combined Task Force Thunder commander, and Provincial Governor Mohammad Gullab Mangal, for dinner and a discussion about the day’s patrol. They also met with Afghan National Police Gen. Mohammad Rahime, provincial police chief; 2nd Kandak executive officer ANA Maj. Khan, who goes by only one name; and

members of the Ministry of Interior.

The lack of police uniforms was a concern expressed by Rahime during the dinner. Cheek addressed this concern, promising that the Coalition would do what it could to help.

The equipment and uniforms provided by the Coalition enhance the abilities of the ANP to assume a more active role within the community. Their role is necessary to promote a secure environment for the election.

“These elections are a blessing in more ways than one,” said Cheek. “First of all, the people of Afghanistan are able to participate in selecting their new leadership. But it also helps us focus on developing the police force.”



**Maj. Khan (left), ANA’s 2nd Kandak executive officer, Col. Gary H. Cheek (second from left), Combined Task Force Thunder commander, and Mayor Hajji Soorkai patrol the streets of Josufkhel with Soldiers from 2nd Bn., 27th Inf. Rgt.**

## TOC: Operations center controls aviation mission

*Continued from Page 10*

us,” said Sgt. Timothy Blatter, flight operations evening shift NCO.

Before any flight, the pilots complete a risk assessment matrix that helps them calculate the risk factors for that particular flight. Everything from the amount of rest the crew has had to the weather conditions is taken into consideration, said Blatter.

If the risk is calculated as low, the company commander can review and approve it. If it’s medium, the battalion commander must also approve it. The brigade commander makes the final

approval for missions that are determined to be high risk.

“They can’t fly until the risk matrix has been signed,” said Blatter. “We’ve had times when the pilots were all ready to leave and they had to wait to launch because the paperwork hadn’t been signed yet.”

Leaders are accountable for safety, he said. When there’s a mission with a higher risk, more of the chain of command is involved to approve the mission.

One of most important things about the TOC’s mission is safety, said Blatter. By having accountability of the aircraft and their crews, the command is able to make

proper decisions to keep its Soldiers safe.

Not only do the TOC personnel prepare the pilots for their mission, they continue to track them throughout the mission.

“One of the most important things we do mission-wise is track them,” said Blatter.

The pilots come in and find out the tail number of the aircraft they are going to fly and receive the call sign for the mission, said Blatter. After the paperwork is complete, the information is put on the board and is tracked as the mission is ongoing.

“If the aircraft is 15 or 20

minutes late, we can call them on the radio and find out what the delay is,” said Blatter. It helps with tracking and accountability.

“The TOC controls the aviation mission,” said Cady. “We are the aviation mission. Operations controls the mission, from its inception to its completion.”

From informing the pilots of weather and intelligence information, to ensuring all the proper procedures are completed is the job of the TOC, said Badell. “The TOC is the nerve center of operations. It’s where we keep situational awareness in (the aviation) realm of operations.”

# Warrior Ethos

**I will always place the mission first.**

**I will never accept defeat.**

**I will never quit.**

**I will never leave a fallen comrade.**

