

FREEDOM

April 11, 2004

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'Storm' ahead

Task Force 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment Soldiers, based at Salerno Forward Operating Base, prepare to search a village as part of Operation Storm in southern Afghanistan. The current operation is designed to destroy terrorist organizations and their infrastructure while continuing to focus on national stability and support.

**Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Troth
Task Force 1-501st Public Affairs**



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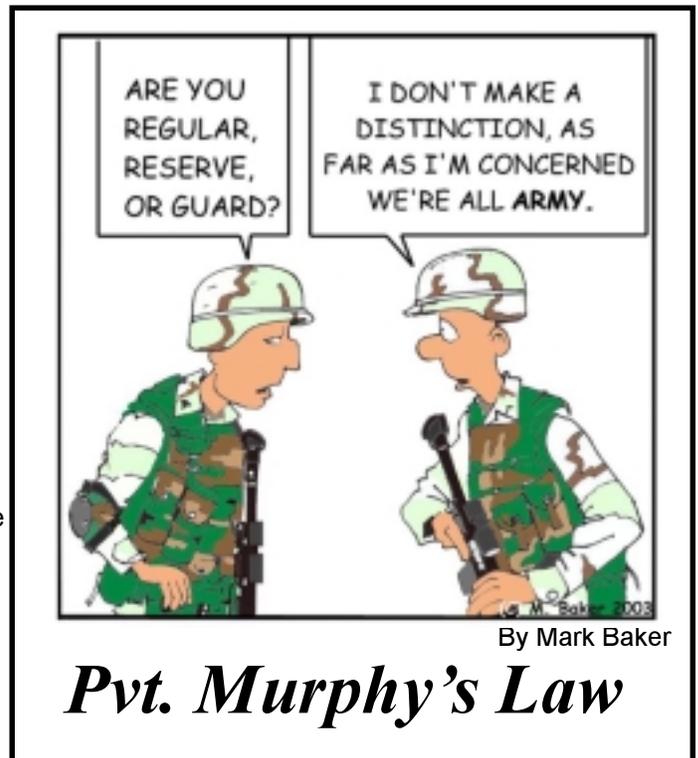
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Cover photo by Sgt. Greg Heath, 4th Public Affairs Detachment
Pfc. Jeremy Bartosic, Co. B, 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division is one of thousands of the divisions' soldiers who've been in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom for the past several months. They will shortly be replaced by the 25th Inf. Div. out of Hawaii.



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A-10 Warthog pilot takes aim on terrorism

Story and photo by
Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM, Afghanistan—Talk to most anyone in the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group, and one of the recurring themes is the desire to provide the best support possible for friendly forces on the ground.

The way to do that is by making sure the A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft here are always ready to fly and provide overwhelming air presence in the skies of Afghanistan. Ultimately, the fighter pilots of the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron make air dominance in Operation Enduring Freedom a daily reality.

In a recent battle, 1st Lt. Michael Stock, the 354th Bulldogs' newest, youngest pilot, who arrived here on Feb. 13, got his first taste of combat experience and helped to provide the kind of support that ground troops expect from Airmen. The success of his timely interdiction during a heated firefight once again demonstrated the lethal efficiency of the A-10 Warthog.

Stock was flying "convoy escort" support when an urgent call from a ground radio station came in: "Troops in contact." U.S. Soldiers and members of the Afghan National Army were taking intense small arms fire from enemy forces, who had holed-up in a compound. Two Soldiers had been killed in the fight, along with an ANA ally, and several others were wounded. Just weeks after being certified "Combat Mission Ready," the lieutenant was about to enter the fray of battle.

Flying in a two-ship formation, with his 354th EFS commander, Lt. Col. John Horner, in the lead, and Stock as the wingman, the aircraft swung into action. The youngest and oldest Bulldogs were en route to the scene of the action.

After getting precise guidance from an indispensable Joint Terminal Air Controller on the ground, Stock provided coverage as Horner dove in to deliver a Maverick air-to-ground missile that smashed into its target. Despite the direct hit, enemy resistance continued, repelling friendly force attempts to storm the compound.

Getting low on gas, Horner apprised Stock over radio of the situation at hand, then the two rolled back toward the target. First the lead ship, then his wingman, both unleashed deadly-accu-



1st Lt. Michael Stock, an A-10 fighter pilot with the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, sits in the cockpit of his A-10 Thunderbolt II prior to flying a mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

rate 30 mm cannon fire into the compound.

Having entered battle for the first time, Stock employed his weapons with the cool efficiency and professionalism of a seasoned veteran, said Horner.

"Given his inexperience, his performance was noteworthy," said the colonel. "The scenario we were in was extremely challenging due to the complexity, the dangerously close proximity of friendly forces to the target, coordination requirements with attack helicopters, terrain, communications limitations, and extremely low fuel state. He stayed in formation and put his shots abeam mine with pinpoint accuracy."

Stock said that the many months of fighter pilot training that he received from outstanding Air Force instructors made him ready for this moment.

"Everything is very methodical in training, and there's a lot of repetition, which is very helpful," he said. "This was just like training... but with real people and real targets."

He said that he didn't have time to feel a sense of anxiety or worry when the call for action came because there were too many other factors to attend to. Most important was to make absolutely sure that it was the bad guys he lined up in his gunsight. He wanted to be absolutely sure that no friendly forces were in the line of fire.

"I wasn't really nervous or excited—this is what we have to do," Stock said. "I was too concerned about focusing on my parameters and what I needed to do, so I had no time to be scared or excited."

He then explained some of those critical things that a fighter pilot has to consider before launching its weapons, including attacking at the right

angle, at the proper air speed, and with the correct distance from the target before pulling the trigger. He also explained that he had to position his aircraft to shoot from the appropriate direction so that none of the 30 mm rounds would hit "friendlies" battling on the ground.

"It's like splitting hairs," Stock said, explaining the precision of the targeting process. "Until this instance, I'd never taken such precise aim in my life."

He said that having the utmost confidence in his lead pilot during the engagement, along with a sense of not wanting to fail his 354th EFS teammates, provided extra impetus for a successful mission.

"I trusted my lead (Horner) 100 percent. He's very professional," said the lieutenant. "This entire squadron is very professional, and they don't accept weak links. I didn't want to be one."

In a familiar refrain, Stock said he was glad that he could support the troops on the ground. He also told of the respect that he has for them.

"We come back (to base) after a few hours," he said. "They're out there for weeks on end."

Once he returned to Bagram, Stock said that he remained concerned about the ground troops. He said there was no room for getting excited about his first combat experience until after he learned more about how his actions affected those engaged in the ground fight.

"Once you know that you did everything asked of you, then you feel good about the job you did," he said. "I feel great that we were able to do our part and take out some terrorists."

Computer automation: just what the ANA doctors ordered

Story by Maj. Richard Sater
Combined Forces Command Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan – With 30 new “desktops” and some how-to instruction, the Afghan National Army medical community has taken an enthusiastic step into the computer age.

It’s part of a long-range “get well” strategy for strengthening the ANA’s capability to provide complete health care for its soldiers. The Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan here donated the computer systems and also set up an ongoing training program.

OMC-A’s mission is to train and equip the ANA with essential skills, and as the Afghan Army develops into a capable, combat-ready fighting force, its Soldiers need to know more than the tactics, techniques, and procedures of battlefield engagement. A modern Army also needs computer expertise at the rear echelon to keep it running efficiently.

The skills training class, held at the ANA Surgeon General’s Headquarters, recently graduated 26 students, all of them medics,

who will be assigned to military hospitals and clinics to begin automating patient administrative records and inventory of supplies, medications, and equipment. Graduates are proficient in basic computer operation as well as word processing, spreadsheet use, and more.

“Automation is always a good thing,” according to U.S. Army Lt. Col. Greg Vrentas, assigned to OMC-A as the chief medical planner for the Afghan army. One

huge benefit is standardized practices across the ANA; for the medics, that means a computerized health services management system.

“You can do more with a com-

puter and one guy than you can do with 20 or 30 clerks trying to manage the same administrative and logistical documents,” Vrentas said. He was instrumental in facilitating the donation of the computer systems, including monitors, keyboards, and 15 printers, all Dari-based, the most common language in Afghanistan.

Drs. Zurmati Khalid Batoor Hassan and Niaz Mohammad Faizi, ANA Medical Corps officers, taught the class.

“Information technology is the basis of the medical field today,” Faizi said, speaking through a translator, “but we had no persons with computer knowledge for medical records.”

Additional classes have been planned for the doctors as well as for the medical technicians.

“It’s all part of the new Afghan National Army,” Hassan said.

Internet connection in Afghanistan is unreliable right now because of limitations of the local communication providers, but Hassan looks ahead to a time when the ANA medical providers can connect to a wide variety of health knowledge online – and connect with each other to establish a professional network. E-mail communication will also facilitate medical processes by permitting quick transfer of information.

“It was difficult at the beginning,” said course honor graduate Ahmad Shah, who had never operated a computer before attending the class. “But after awhile, it got easier.” He’s not sure where his duty station will be now that he’s graduated, but he looks forward to putting his new skills to good use, he said.

Computers have changed the world, and now that technology – and the ability to use it – will change the Afghan National Army too.

“Information technology is the basis of the medical field today,”

**Dr. Niaz Mohammad Faizi
ANA Medical Corps Officer**

Mountain Voices

What are some things from home that you wish you had here with you?



Spc. Joel Tilley
Co. B, 1st Bn. 501st Para. Inf. Regt.
“A ski resort, as long as there is snowboarding.”



Spc. Michael Edelstein
Btry. B, 377th PFAR
“My motorcycle and my fiancee.”



Spc. Robert Faulkner
Task Force 1-501st
“My family and my friends, but I have all that here. I guess take-out food.”



Capt. Aram Donigian
Task Force 1-501st
“My wife and my cat.”

Coalition engineers work to build up Bagram

Story and photos by Spc. Kelly Hunt
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – The collaboration of the United States military and three coalition partners is increasing engineering productivity on base with every passing month.

Together they are creating changes all over base, from smoothing out Disney Drive to rebuilding the flight line.

The unique structure making up Task Force Giffin includes more than 1,250 Soldiers from the United States, a Slovakian team of 45, more than 100 Soldiers from the Republic of Korea Eng. Unit and a group of 100 Polish engineers.

“It’s really a unique mix, one I’ve never seen before,” said Lt. Col. Paul Craft, deputy commander, Task Force Griffin about the coalition engineering teams. “It really is neat how much we’ve been able to work as a coalition.”

Each team brings a specialty to the effort due to their various engineering backgrounds.

The Korean and Slovak units deal mostly in construction, according to Maj. Steve Fleishman, S4 logistics officer, Task Force Griffin.

The Korean forces are also the only coa-

lition partner with their own batch concrete mixer on Bagram, he added.

The Polish team is mostly a Sapper unit, responsible for mine clearing efforts and demolition work on base.

“Those (troops) have been working really hard clearing mines on post and they’ve done some great work here,” Fleishman said.

The good relationship between all the forces has come in handy more than once, said Craft. In addition to getting the work accomplished faster and more efficiently, their combined efforts have also saved lives.

One Soldier from the 205th Eng. Battalion ran into some trouble when operating a bulldozer for construction efforts.

“This young man scraped off some soil as part of preparing the site and triggered a mine,” said Craft. “It was the Polish who were working not a hundred yards away who rushed over and got this young man into an ambulance.”

“We always talk about it, that we’re a coalition effort, but this task force has the

— See **ENGINEERS**, Page 10



Slovakian engineers Sgt. Kollar Erich and Cpl. Lubomir Spodwiak work on Bagram's flightline as part of the Coalition engineers' efforts here on base.

452nd CSH leaves behind legacy of excellence

Story by Sgt. Stephanie Hall
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Soldiers with the 452nd Combat Support Hospital bid farewell when they handed the medical responsibility for Operation Enduring Freedom to the 325th Field Hospital, out of Independence, Mo., in a Transfer of Authority ceremony here March 25.

The 452nd CSH, an Army Reserve unit out of Milwaukee, Wis., operated as the command and control for Task Force-44, which encompassed all the U.S. and

coalition medical elements deployed throughout Afghanistan.

From their arrival in June, until their departure in March, the 452nd CSH Soldiers proved that they were skilled enough to crumble a mountain of obstacles, and in its wake, leave behind a legacy filled with medical triumphs.

“(They) have had a diverse and difficult task list, and have accomplished each task and exceeded the standards every time,” said Maj. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, commander of the Combined Joint Task Force-180.

As the only trauma level surgical care recovery unit in Afghanistan, the 452nd

CSH has cared for more than 21,000 patients, including more than 1,000 inpatients, 13,000 outpatients, and performed more than 1,000 surgeries. The 452nd CSH also provided under-the-cover services such as: preventive medicine, food and water inspections, and blood distributions.

“Those accomplishments are just phenomenal,” said Austin. “Not many organizations in our military could accomplish such feats.”

Their reach did not end at Bagram’s entrance control points, said Austin.

— See **MEDICAL**, Page 10



Spc. Jason D. McGowan, a hydraulics shop technician with Co. D, 140th Avn., overhauls a UH-60 Blackhawk brake to ensure it works correctly.



Spc. Todd N. Hoffmann, an engine mechanic with Co. D, 140th Avn., works on a scrap engine that the Soldiers found lying around Bagram. This engine will be used as a training device once it has been fixed.

Aviation mechanics keep Bagram flying



Soldiers with Co. D, 140th Avn., help their replacements put together a CH-47 Chinook after the aircraft was flown, piece by piece, to Bagram.

Photo page by Sgt. Stephanie Hall
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – When it comes to keeping rotary-wing aircraft flying high in the skies of Afghanistan, Soldiers with Company D, 140th Aviation Battalion, wield their tools with competent know-how and capable hands.

These aviation mechanics know that it's up to them to ensure aircraft stay in excellent shape so aviators can stay focused on their missions, knowing that their equipment will not fail them.

"We're an aviation repair unit, (and) we make sure we have aviation assets ready to take the infantry quick reaction force (Soldiers) to the mountains," said 1st Sgt. Jim L. McClellan, company first sergeant.

This company of approximately 70 Soldiers is an Aviation Intermediate Maintenance unit, which means they perform the second of three maintenance levels on the aviation equipment, said Staff Sgt. David P. Coss, training noncommissioned officer in charge. The types of aviation aircraft that they work on are the UH-60 Blackhawks, CH-47 Chinooks and AH-46 Apaches.

Without an aviation maintenance company, these aircraft wouldn't make it off the ground; much less fly a mission, said McClellan. "If we don't fix them, they don't fly."

Because of the level of importance of the job, these Soldiers have to work well together, and the cohesion of this particular group runs like a well-oiled machine, despite its rough start, said McClellan.

When the call came down for an aviation maintenance unit to deploy to Afghanistan, there wasn't one available to deploy right away. To rectify the situation, Army National Guardsmen from Arizona and California quickly formed Co. D.

"We put this unit together in 30 days, from the time we were notified and activated to the time we arrived at Fort McCoy," said McClellan.

When they met at the mobilization station Fort McCoy, these Soldiers quickly rounded up the necessary heavy equipment to perform their mission and accomplished all deployment readiness in about 23 days, said McClellan.

He said it was because of the Soldiers that the entire process was accomplished with relative ease: "Me, as the first sergeant, I can't do it, (and) the commander can't do it. If my Soldiers don't want a piece of my unit, it doesn't go."

New school helps open doors to diversity

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Johnny A. Thompson
4th Public Affairs Detachment

GULBAHAR, Afghanistan—Afghanistan’s future took a step toward gender diversity with the opening of the Namaz Jay Primary Girls School here, Mar. 23.

The school, which took more than 18 months to complete, marked the introduction of a process in helping Gulbahar and Afghanistan gain equality for its women.

“This is a historical moment for Afghanistan,” said Younis Qanoni, Afghan National Minister of Education. “Because women will play a tremendous role in the country’s future, we want (educational) equality between the girls and boys of Afghanistan. The (nation’s) new policy will not accept a difference between them because we need a nation of educated people to lead the country in the future.”

Qanoni added that last year 1.8 of the 4.2 million students enrolled in school were girls. He said opening schools, such as the Namaz Jay Girls School, is important for the Afghanistan educational system because an estimated 5.6 million Afghan children are expected to enroll within the next few years.

The new school, which cost more than \$100,000 to construct and renovate, consists of 16 classrooms and an office, indoor restrooms

and a new well.

The school will house 12 teachers and 320 students for the spring school semester and is expected to provide educational services for more than 1,200 students and families in Gulbahar and surrounding villages this year.

“It is an honor to witness the opening of this much needed school,” said Maj. Charles Westover, guest speaker and commander of the Parwan Province Reconstruction Team. “The education of Afghanistan’s youth is one of the highest priorities of President Karzai’s administration, and (the U.S.) is proud to be a part of this educational movement.”

More than 600 people attended the school opening, including the Afghanistan National Minister of Education, Parwan and Kapisa Province governors, a representative from the Afghanistan Minister of Interior and representatives from the U.S. and Korean forces.

During the ceremony several Afghan dignitaries offered words of praise to the U.S. and international forces for helping fund the girls school and helping rejuvenate Afghanistan.

“This is the period of reconstruction for Afghanistan,” said Qanoni, “and it was made possible by the international community and the United States. We are trying to train our (youth)



An Afghan girls troupe performs a celebratory song as part of the Namaz Jay Primary Girls School.

under the new (policies) of Afghanistan and the international community and the U.S. have our gratitude for their hand in that process.”

Qanoni said that the U.S. has been a major supporter of the Afghan community through periods of communist and terrorist regimes, adding, “(The U.S.’s) commitment to education shows that education is the key to a brighter future.”

Reiterating Qanoni’s words, guest speaker Suraya Sadeed, executive director of Help The Afghan Children foundation said, “We are grateful for the contributions and the commitment the U.S. has given and shown to Afghanistan. Our youth will have a brighter future because of people in the U.S. who care.”

Help The Afghan Children is a charitable foundation based in Vienna, Va. The charity, founded in 1993 by Afghan citizens that live in the U.S., was established to help improve educational and healthcare conditions in Afghanistan. To date the foundation has fostered projects that have helped more than 160,000 Afghanistan citizens.

The school opening concluded with a song dedication by an Afghan girl troupe and a ribbon-cutting ceremony involving Qanoni and Westover.



Maj. Charles Westover, Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team commander and Younis Qanoni, the Afghanistan National Minister of Education cut the ribbon officially opening the Namaz Jay Primary Girls School.

Kabul compound medics train Combat Lifesavers

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Ron Burke
211th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KABUL, Afghanistan – Twelve people gasp for breath and suck down water as Staff Sgt. Thomas Leonard paces back and forth in front of them.

A medic here at the Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force Compound, Leonard offers a little encouragement. “You need to be fit to be a medic,” he says during the brief break. “Imagine doing this for several casualties!”

This was the scene after 12 Combat Lifesaver students completed a low crawl, a fireman’s carry, a litter carry, as the fitness portion of the Combat Lifesaver course.

For two days, 10 Soldiers, a Marine, and a civilian attended several first aid classes

for Level I first aid training as part of the very first CLS course administered by the CJCMOTF medical team from the Army National Guard’s 1163rd Area Support Group, out of Louisville, Ky.

They quickly learned that this was no ordinary course.

“You’ve got four casualties out there!” Leonard bellowed, as eight people rushed past him.

“I’m burning! Help me!” Master Gunnery Sgt. Craig Stafford shouted as he jumped around, trying to rip off his shirt. Two Soldiers immediately opened their water bottles and generously doused the Marine with water as he flopped to the ground. They simultaneously opened their aid bags and began to treat the “burn victim.”

The second day was the practical exercise and “stress test,” where the trainees had to use what they had learned to save lives. Leonard watched as the teams scrambled to assess the condition of “casualties” and determined what needed to be done in order to stabilize them and prepare them for evacuation.

Army Capt. Michael Rice, the commander of the three-person medical team, walked by, observing the action and asking the trainees questions while they worked.

“Kabul is a prime high-visibility target,” Rice said, “So we put a call out for one or two people per house for medical training.” The compound houses hundreds of military personnel, local Afghans, and civilians working on any given day. “It’s all about force

protection—even our ambulance is an SUV,” he quipped.

Indeed, Leonard specifically tailored the course to handle the stresses of a potential attack on the compound. Even the combat medic bags had tools and equipment specific for treating injuries within the compound. “What if we were getting rocketed and we had to low crawl down the alley over there to get to a casualty?” he asks. “It could happen.”

In the scenarios, each team of two had to quickly assess, treat and prepare each casualty for medical evacuation. The injuries varied from burns to an amputated limb to an open head and chest wound. Treatments included applying field dressings, splinting fractures, stabilizing a casualty with a head or spinal injury, inserting an intravenous needle, and transporting casualties to a collection point.

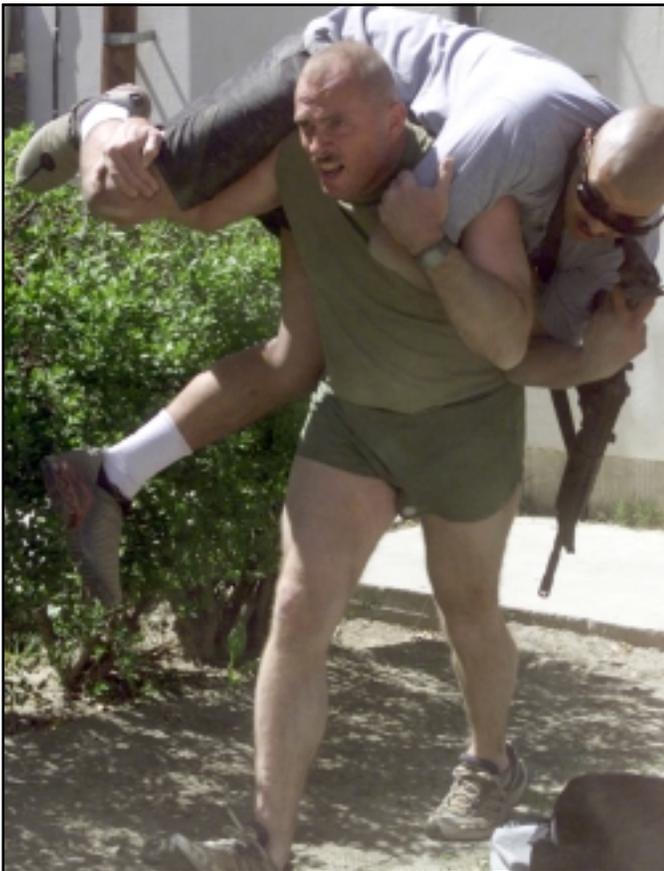
“If I give you a written test, yeah, you may score highly on it...but you’re no good to me or anyone unless you can perform out here in the field,” Leonard told the trainees. “If you think that this is hard, imagine how it could be if you had multiple casualties.”

Sgt. Eric Adams, another medic on the team, watched Pfc. Phillipe Villagran and Pfc. Francis Rich, both assigned to Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, treat Stafford for his “burns.” Rich scribbled information on a wide strip of white tape that was affixed to Stafford’s shoulder.

“The trainees have to log their casualty’s vital signs, note if they have a tourniquet, and what their medical category is and display that information on a piece of tape,” Rice explained. “Then they must bring him to the casualty collection point and place him in the appropriate category – either immediate attention, delayed attention, minimal attention or expectant.”

After the training, the new combat lifesavers happily accepted hard-earned certificates of completion.

“The realism was great,” Pfc. Paul Slaton said as he dusted himself off. “The stress test was very realistic and I liked the hands-on training.”



Master Gunnery Sgt. Craig Stafford charges ahead with his “casualty,” Pfc. Phillipe Villagran, during the physical training stress test portion of Kabul Compound’s first combat lifesaver course. The fireman’s carry was one of four events that each trainee had to complete.

Coalition friendship thrives till the end

Task Force-44 celebrates with their international partners-in-medicine before heading home

Story and photo by Spc. Kelly Hunt
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Medical Task Force-44 Soldiers said good-bye to their coalition partners in medicine during a celebration at the Egyptian Forces compound Mar. 23.

The gathering gave Soldiers the opportunity to end their 10-month tour in Afghanistan with friends and offered the Egyptian and Korean medical troops the chance to meet the incoming American Soldiers that are replacing TF-44 troops.

Task Force – 44 is being replaced by the Army Reserve’s 325th Field Hospital out of Independence, Mo.

“This is a good thing that we do to make a good bond between us,” said an Egyptian spokesman about the celebration. “When people get together from different nationalities, there’s an environment of friendship that will spread all over them. All these factors can spread peace and freedom around the world.”

The focus of the celebration was friendship, recalling memories and building the foundation for a successful working environment with the incoming troops.

The conversations circling the group were an expression of the unique friendship the three countries possess, and the non-stop snapping of camera shutters made this a moment none would forget.

“Tonight was the Egyptian’s way of showing us that they appreciated our friendship,” said Col. Richard Haile, hospital commander, TF-44. “It’s been a great relationship all around.”

Separately, the three nations’ forces administer medical care to local nationals and coalition troops, but they dis-



wait for Hunt for cutline

covered that working together was more productive and more fun.

“There are a lot of benefits,” said an Egyptian spokesman, referring to the interaction between the Bagram hospitals.

“The exchange of expertise between the three hospitals allows (us) to (do) good work for the local nationals here and this allows us to find cures for the critical cases and most of the emergency cases we find daily,” he added.

Medical providers from the hospitals shared knowledge, experience and staff members, and all of this offered providers different views on possible treatments and various sources to turn to when they needed help.

“(Working together) helped us focus on the needs for delivering health care in this country,” said Haile. “It’s given us a different view of what health care delivery is like in Egypt and Korea, and (it) has fostered a professional relationship between the doctors.”

Providing extended care for patients

is one example when the Egyptian medical forces pulled through for TF-44 Soldiers, said Haile.

But the list of benefits from working together doesn’t stop there.

“(The Egyptians) help us with mass casualty situations, (and) they help us with treating patients that show up at the front gate,” he said. “There’s been an interchange of knowledge back and forth – It’s just a tremendous relationship that we have.”

The relationship between the three coalition hospitals has proven so successful that all involved said they wanted the bond to continue even as rotations come and go.

“This (relationship) will extend with the next mission here and I (hope that) these bonds will also fortify with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States for the sake of spreading freedom, prosperity and peace,” said an Egyptian spokesman. “When we unite together, we can fight terrorism.”

ENGINEER, from Page 5 ———

ability to work together in a way that I've never seen before in my career," he said. "It's been a unique experience for us."

This opportunity to work together with various countries is building friendships throughout the participating countries, and has offered some troops a chance to experience other cultures.

"I think we have a good relationship with other coalitions and, of course, the U.S. forces," said Maj. Jerry Kucharski, senior staff operations officer, Poland forces. "We are openly friendly. We are part of the same family."

Kucharski said that standing together with all the coalition partners in the fight against terrorism, is the way to win this war.

"What happened in your country, we agree wasn't right," he said. "We support war against terrorism, and we take part in operations (supporting that effort).

"Terror everywhere must be under pressure, (and) other countries should try to fight terror," said Kucharski.



Slovak engineer, Warrant Officer 1st Class Jan Svab fills HESCO walls by Bagram's flightline.

Working together has brought these coalition members closer to accomplishing their engineering mission in Operation Enduring Freedom and has given troops from four countries an opportunity to learn from one another, closing the gap between their cultures and creating a united front against terrorists.

MEDICAL, from Page 5 ———

"Along with direct medical and surgical treatment provided to U.S. and coalition Soldiers, the 452nd CSH, created and led a variety of humanitarian operations to assist the Afghanistan national health care system in providing quality health care for citizens and health care facility rebuilding efforts," he said.

The 452nd CSH has left a trail of accomplishments visible in the improved health care all over this country, said Col. Richard Stone, commander of TF-44. "Over these many months, (they) have never wavered from (their) commitment to quality and compassionate health care," he said.

That commitment produced many victories, but also allowed many Soldiers to see the realities of their medical profession. "(They) have stood firm in the face of unbelievably difficult and sad events – some that have taken the lives of our brothers," Stone said.

Through this intricate system of

health care known as TF-44, the 452nd CSH was able to assist and help guide its coalition counterparts in directions toward improving medical care and awareness to countless Afghan nationals as well as U.S. and coalition elements.

With intense dedication to its mission, TF-44 was the CJTF-180's "secret weapon," said Austin. "Because of this business, TF-44 has never been able to shut down for even a day, or even a couple hours."

"Our Soldiers know if they go down, we will most likely get them off the battlefield, and once they're placed in the hands of our medical professionals, our Soldiers know they have an excellent chance of surviving," said Austin. "Because of that, our Soldiers are willing to go farther, they're willing to face greater dangers, and they're willing to fight more, and therefore, the 452nd (was) our secret weapon."

Stone said that the 452nd CSH could not have handled the enormity of the

mission without the help of the coalition medical forces. Together, "TF-44 has been a model of medical excellence for the rest of the world's deployed medical forces," he said.

Ready to follow that model, and maybe make a few additions of its own, the 325th FH has taken over the entire OEF medical task force, or TF-325, with an already full-fledged commitment, said Col. Walter D. Branch, commander of TF-325.

"Col. Branch has already impressed me with his ability to adapt to operations here in Afghanistan, and has a firm grasp on the extremely difficult mission that his unit has accepted," said Austin.

"Task Force-325's motto is 'Fight For Life.' This reflects on the fact that life has its freedom, is precious and worth fighting for," said Branch. With that in mind, his unit is prepared to fill the rather large shoes of TF-44. "Standards are high, and we're going to try to raise them."

Airmen tackle vital 'phase' of Air Force mission



Staff Sgt. Daniel May, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron phase inspection craftsman, installs a hydraulic filter bowl after changing an A-10 Thunderbolt II's hydraulic filters.

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski
455th Expeditionary Operations Group Public Affairs

BAGRAM, Afghanistan—Phase maintenance. These are two words that may not mean a lot to someone who doesn't work on the aircraft maintenance or operations side of the Air Force house.

But spend a few minutes talking with the supervisor of the A-10 Thunderbolt II phase maintenance team that's deployed here from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Az., and the words are sure to become more meaningful.

Then, watch his equipment maintenance Airmen crawl all over a depaneled A-10, like a NASCAR pit crew going after a stock car, and a real appreciation for this critical process in the overall flying mission here is bound to hit home.

Phase maintenance here boils down to this: When an A-10 accumulates 400 hours of flying time, it requires the automobile equivalent of a complete overhaul. The aircraft is not permitted to resume flying again until it has been "phased." This includes extensive scheduled maintenance, everything from cockpit checks to wing inspections, engine work to electro-environmental troubleshooting, and egress assessments to fuel systems evaluations. In all, 12 different aircraft maintenance shops do a thorough examination of 12 different compo-

nents of the A-10.

Once phase maintenance is understood, it's obvious how crucial it is. Since an airplane is grounded until the scheduled maintenance is performed, the mission here, in a sense, revolves around the men and women who roll up their sleeves in the south clamshell hangar and the flightline back shops to carry out this critical work.

Think about this for a moment: before the current maintainers arrived from Davis-Monthan, there was no such thing as phase maintenance at Bagram. This unit brought the capability to Afghanistan. Previously, when an A-10 reached 400 flying hours, it had to be sent home, swapped out for another one.

"No doubt, having a phase crew on location gives the flying mission a much broader leeway. It eliminates limits on flying hours," said Master Sgt. Valentino Colasito, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, equipment maintenance and component maintenance flight chief.

It's not hard to see why Colasito feels that, from an operations standpoint, the introduction of phase maintenance has been "the real success story" of his five months here. He said that 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron pilots, who fly the jets that his Airmen maintain, have remarked that these are the best post-phase aircraft they've ever flown.

He also pointed out that his crew has phased 16 aircraft since November, providing the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron with an additional 6,400 flying hours. In addition, each "Warthog" was phased in just four to five days, whereas back home the process normally takes 10 to 12 days for each one. It takes a skilled and motivated work force to produce those kinds of results.

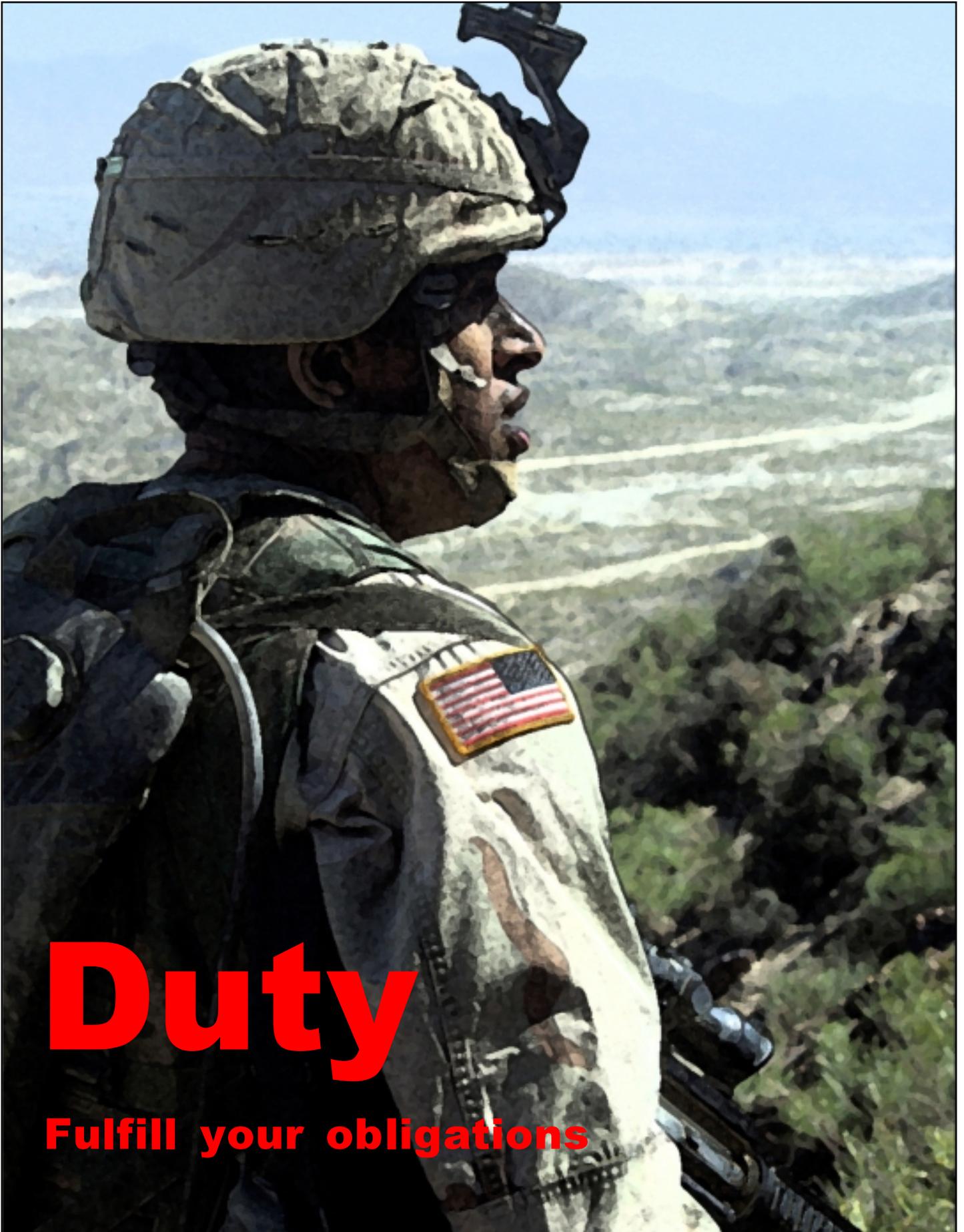
"They know they have a job to do; they know why they put on the uniform day in and day out. They know what needs to be done and it gets done," said Colasito. "We've set the bar high for the next group."

Staff Sgt. David Kastning, an A-10 phase inspection team member, said that he's proud to put on his desert BDU's every day to go to work and support Operation Enduring Freedom.

"I'm glad to be here. I think everybody is. We've got a very important job to do, keeping our aircraft maintained and available to fly to meet the mission," he said. "We all play a part in making the whole machine here run smoothly."

Just as impressive as the work of the well-oiled phase maintenance production line is the fact that these Airmen have done it for two fronts in the war on terrorism: Operation Iraqi Freedom and OEF. Along with the aircraft maintained for OEF, the nine-man team phased five A-10's for operations in Iraq, where phase maintenance isn't available.

"These dedicated maintainers have been the lifeblood for A-10 operations in both OIF and OEF," said Lt. Col. Kelly Larson, 455th EAMXS commander. "Not too many Airmen can say that. I'm extremely proud of what this group has accomplished."



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