

Bagram canines 'nose' mine detection

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

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Despite the bright yellow “beware of mine” tape that decorates the areas, fields on the outskirts of Bagram Air Base are freckled with dog and handler teams each morning working hard to clear the base of hazardous mines left behind in Afghanistan from decades of fighting.

Each area is searched one section at a time in 10-meter increments by a team. Once the area is cleared, a second team searches the same area, making doubly sure that they are not leaving any mines behind.

“If there’s something in the ground, they’ll find it,” said Allen Stokes, RONCO, an American de-mining corporation, in reference to the mine dogs. “If they find any explosive content, they will indicate it.”

The trained mine detecting dogs are an asset to the de-mining efforts on base, but even these heroes need a partner.

“Mine dogs don’t go into mine fields alone,” said Stokes.



Dog handler, Mirsad Pojata from Bosnia and trained mine detecting dog Kimba, rest for a moment during a long day searching and clearing the mine fields surrounding Bagram Air Base.

The dangerous work belongs to man and canine teams where trust and training are the only two qualities they demand from one another. They train together daily, building a bond that gets them through each day.

“You see the faith they have in their dogs,” said Stokes about the handlers. They walk behind their dogs without hesitation

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Tops in Blue entertain Bagram troops

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Russell Wicke
455th Expeditionary Operations Group Public Affairs

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – The Air Force’s Tops in Blue team contributed to the war on terrorism when they performed for more than 800 soldiers, airmen and coalition partners here the evening of Oct. 11.

Because Tops in Blue was established in 1953, their tour this year celebrates 50 years of performances around the world.

Known as the Air Force’s Expeditionary Entertainers, Tops in Blue is a team made up of 36 of the most talented vocalists, dancers and musicians, all serving in the Air Force on active duty, said U.S. Air Force Services Agency officials.

Although their tour will take them throughout the U.S. and more

than 27 different countries, totalling nearly 150 performances in nine months. Capt. Dee Dee Vasquez, Tops in Blue tour director, said their priority is the troops deployed into combat zones.

“The people here are the heroes we are singing about,” said Vasquez, who is a U.S. Air Forces in Europe communications officer from Ramstein Air Base, Germany. “Bagram is the first location [on this tour] we have been that operates in black-out conditions at night and where everyone has to carry a weapon.”

Performers said it was an honor for them to be here, in more ways than one. “Tonight was special for us,” said Senior Airman Jamie Coffey, Tops in Blue vocalist. “When we stepped off the plane and saw pieces of Mig [aircraft] and other evidence of a war-torn country, it made me

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



An armed American rushes to the scene of the bombing.

Suicide bomb kills 6 Iraqis

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Six Iraqis died and 32 people, including three U.S. soldiers, were wounded Sunday in a suicide car bombing near the Baghdad Hotel, which houses Americans and members of the Iraqi Governing Council, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

Iraqi security forces fired at the vehicle as it drove through a checkpoint and down a side street near the hotel, where it detonated, said Col. Peter Mansoor, a U.S. Army spokesman at the scene.

At least one car exploded about 100 meters from the Baghdad Hotel about 12:50 p.m. (5:50 a.m. EDT). A Pentagon official in Washington said two cars were involved and both exploded.

Lt. Col. George Krivo, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition occupying Iraq, said it was not clear whether one or two explosions had occurred.

“Whether or not both cars had explosives in them has yet to be determined. That will have to be the result of some forensic investigation,” Krivo said.

The hotel houses members of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the U.S.-led administration in Iraq, spokesman Charles Heatley said. It also houses members of the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, the nucleus of the Bush administration’s hopes for a future Iraqi government.

The attack reduced nearby structures to rubble and shattered windows blocks away, but the hotel itself was not damaged.

Mansoor said: “As far as I know, there were no casualties inside the hotel, and the building was undamaged. (Security forces)

did their job, and they prevented a greater loss of life. The security worked.”

Ahmed Kathmn, a senior official of the Iraqi Interior Ministry, said most of the six dead were Iraqi police and security personnel. It was unclear whether the death toll included anyone involved in the bombing.

Kathmn and a doctor at nearby Kindi Hospital said 32 people were wounded in the attack.

At least two of the security officers who died were working for a U.S. company to provide security for the hotel, a U.S. official in Baghdad told *CNN*.

One U.S. soldier suffered a broken arm; the others suffered only minor wounds, Krivo said.



Sen. Joseph Biden said on NBC’s “Meet the Press” Sunday that Bush has lost control of Iraq policy.

Senators rap Bush’s PR effort

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration’s progress-in-Iraq public relations campaign needs more work before its next installment hits the road next week, the leading members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said Sunday.

Richard Lugar, the committee’s chairman, said the administration’s stars at times don’t appear to be in the same game, much less on the same page of the playbook.

The Indiana Republican said he heard four “distinctly different” speeches from top administration officials last week.

“The president has to be the president,

over the vice president and over these secretaries,” he said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Last week, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice delivered speeches on Iraq in an effort to build support for the U.S.-led occupation and reconstruction effort.

Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, the committee’s ranking Democrat, said there has been “no clear articulation” from the Bush administration of its goals in Iraq and how to accomplish them.

Committee approves \$87 billion for Iraq, Afghanistan

WASHINGTON — A House committee handed a victory to President Bush on Thursday by approving nearly \$87 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan and fending off lawmakers who wanted Iraq to eventually repay some of the aid.

The Republican-led House Appropriations Committee approved the legislation by 47-14, paving the way to likely approval by the full House next Wednesday or Thursday. All 14 “no” votes were from Democrats, but 15 Democratic members voted for the measure.

The Senate plans votes next week on its own, similar package.

A week of White House lobbying paid off as Republican advocates of using loans rather than grants ended up not even forcing votes on their proposals because of certain defeat.

In recent days, many committee members heard personal pitches from Secretary of State Colin Powell, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and Bush himself that loans would slow the rebirth of Iraq’s economy and sow suspicion that the United States wanted to control the country’s oil.

The bill has about \$65.3 billion for U.S. military expenses in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and \$21.6 billion to rebuild those two nations and aid other countries including Liberia.

Most of the money from both categories is for Iraq.

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through the minefields.

The dogs are “extremely well trained,” he said. Taught in Holland, the dogs come to the handlers already packed with incredible skills. There are only a few problems. One is the language barrier.

“They all speak Dutch,” said Stokes about the dogs. “They’ve learned all their commands in Dutch.”

The handlers are from various countries, including Bosnia and South Africa. Differences in communication haven’t stopped these teams from completing their missions. They have overcome the language barriers through training.

Getting the dog and handler on the same sheet of music usually takes three to four weeks, said Stokes. Once the two are paired, it is almost impossible and irresponsible to separate them as a team.

“You don’t mix and match them around or you’ll have more problems than in marriage,” he said. “The handler always has the same dog.”

A good handler needs to take control and

show the dog who’s boss, but also needs to give the dog a certain level of responsibility.

“They have to work with the dog,” said Stokes. “They have to understand how the dog works; the dog doesn’t work with him. They’re like naughty children.” They’ll take advantage of a weak handler.

After a dog and handler are teamed up and are confident in their training, the only thing stopping them from clearing a minefield is the weather.

“We work until it’s too hot or too windy,” said Stokes. “If it goes over 55 degrees centigrade, we pull the dogs, and if the wind goes past a specific speed, we pull the dogs as well because the scent is blown away.”

Too much water on the ground prevents accurate readings from the dogs as well because they cannot sniff through the water.

“That’s what limits the dogs,” said Stokes. And that’s about all that limits them. The teams work thirteen days in a row before they rest for a day proving that making Bagram safe is their top priority.

To ensure that they work to their fullest potential, teams coordinate with the military, using

all resources available to complete the job.

“We have a daily conference with (military personnel),” said Stokes who added that the two sides “work hand in hand” to determine which area will get de-mined next and with what equipment they will accomplish the task.

“We just compliment each other,” he said. The job takes both groups of personnel to be successful.

Once a mine is detected by the handler and dog team, it’s location is marked.

“Part of my job is to pick up whatever is found, either myself or the team leader,” said Stokes. “If it’s something we can’t move, we leave it there (and) give the position to the Army (who) have teams that come out and destroy it.”

Handlers take pride in their work and in their dogs, but Stokes said the job is like any other. It’s just something they have been doing for years in their own countries and now they have the opportunity to affect other populations with their skills.

“We’ve been doing it for years (and) it was just a natural thing to just carry on doing it,” said Stokes.

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realize what this is all about.” Coffey, who is a security forces airman with the 375th Security Forces Squadron, Scott Air Force Base, Ill., said Tops in Blue reached the highlight of their tour at Bagram. Others on the team said they agree with Coffey.

“Tonight was amazing,” said Staff Sgt. Charles Cook, Tops in Blue vocalist from the 48th Security Forces Squadron, Royal Air Force, Lakenheath, England. “This is what I joined Tops in Blue for: to bring entertainment to a combat environment.”

“The people here are unbelievable,” said Tech. Sgt. John Link, Tops in Blue musician from the 16th Electronic Warfare Squadron, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. “This was one of our best shows because the way the audience received us. This place is giving us a sense of what we really do as expeditionary entertainers.”

The Tops in Blue team were not the only ones impressed that night.

“I’ve had nothing but positive feedback from all levels on how great it was,” said Col. James Whitmore, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander. “The reaction to the show from all service members and coalition partners was incredible. They loved it.”

Those who have seen Tops in Blue perform before said this was a climax performance.

“Those guys get better every time I see them,” said Lt. Col. Doherty, 455th Expeditionary Services Squadron commander.

“This was the best show I’ve ever seen them do,” said Tech. Sgt. Mike Boyter, 455th ESS Services noncommissioned officer in charge. Boyter organized and arranged for the Tops in Blue show here.

“I believe most Air Force personnel here felt a great sense of pride as they watched their fellow airmen put on a world-class performance,” said Whitmore. “The airmen in Tops in Blue have dedication, professionalism and drive that are second to none. I’m proud to have them on the Air Force team.”

Their performance, however, is not the total of what makes these Expeditionary Entertainers so impressive to their deployed audience.

Vasquez said most show productions have set up crews and technicians who build the set and tear it down with each performance on the road. This isn’t the case for Tops in Blue.

“Each of our performers work hard before and after each show, setting up and tearing down the set themselves,” she said. “When you do more than 140 performances in less than a year, it gets very exhausting.” But some performers believe the extra responsibility sharpens the unity of the group.

“When you have a mission like this where everyone must work hard and close together, you quickly learn to become one entity,” said Coffey. “That is the best part about this to me. Everyone becomes like a family.”

“A lot of us come from a gospel background,” said Cook. “Sometimes at the end of the day, some of us will get together and sing praise to God. It’s an amazing feeling. Tops in Blue has made me a better NCO, person and father.”

Bagram troops said the entertainers’ unity was obvious in their performance and it resulted in morale boost.

“Any event we can arrange to provide entertainment for the troops is a huge morale boost,” said Whitmore, “particularly here where we don’t get off the compound much. I’d have them back next weekend if I could.”

New Public Affairs Office opens to shed light on ANA progress, activities

Kabul, Afghanistan -- The Afghan National Army's Public Affairs Office at the Kabul Military Training Center opened its door to the sound of applause Sept. 25 when Brig. Gen. Asifi, KMTC commander, cut the ceremonial ribbon to celebrate its opening.

The PAO provides the ANA with a valuable resource to get the word out to the world and to the people of Afghanistan about the positive effects the national army is having on Afghanistan. With the number of notable events occurring on a daily basis within the ANA, it is invaluable to have an office staffed with soldiers who can shed some light on the progress of the ANA, said Capt. Shapoor who is learning about public affairs work.

"We have already been on several recruiting and ANA awareness trips to help educate people about the ANA. Yet, our biggest impact is coming from weekly radio broadcasts highlighting ANA activities," said Shapoor. "The radio broadcast, heard in Kabul province, is gradually working its way around to radio stations throughout Afghanistan. This is a great opportunity for the ANA to be heard and get involved in the community."

The 10-minute weekly broadcast informs listeners about points of interest within the ANA.

"Our being able to work in and with the local media allows us to coordinate coverage for ANA events and helps contribute to a better understanding of the ANA by the people in local Afghan communities."

In addition to informing the Afghan public about the ANA through radio broadcasts and stories from independent media sources, soldiers who work in the PAO are also being trained in photojournalism and will be able to use their PAO skills to educate and inform fellow soldiers about new programs and events affecting their lives in the ANA. They have become skilled in interviewing techniques, various writing styles and photography.

The opening of the new PAO office marks another milestone in the continued growth and professionalism of the ANA.

(Information from CJTF 180 press release.)

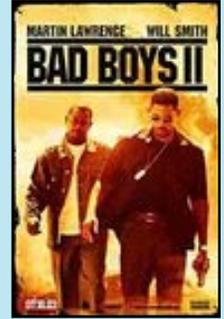
Bagram Air Base MWR presents

"Bad Boys II"

1530Z at the MWR building

Narcotics cops Mike Lowrey (Smith) and Marcus Bennett (Lawrence) head up a task force investigating the flow of ecstasy into Miami.

Tomorrow's movie was not available at press time.



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Tuesday
Bagram:	Clear H: 72F L: 39F	Clear H: 70F L: 41F
Kandahar:	Haze H: 84F L: 15F	Haze H: 84F L: 46F
Kabul:	Haze H: 72F L: 37F	Clear H: 70F L: 39F
Uzbekistan:	Sunny H: 77F L: 38F	Partly Cloudy H: 80F L: 37F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from ESPN.com)



The German Women's team celebrates their victory in the World Cup after defeating Sweden 2-1 on Sunday. A free kick in overtime gave the Germans, who knocked the U.S. out last week, the victory.

German women's 'Golden Goal' takes World Cup victory

CARSON, Calif. — Somewhere on the bottom of the pile of women in white jerseys was a most unlikely hero.

Germany won the Women's World Cup for the first time, 2-1 over Sweden on Nia Kuenzer's header in the eighth minute of overtime Sunday.

A substitute who came on 10 minutes earlier, Kuenzer soared high to deflect Renate Lingor's long free kick over the outstretched arm of goalkeeper Caroline Joensson, who was brilliant all day.

The German players mobbed her and rolled together on the ground, while Sweden's beaten players lay motionless and stunned.

"I was confused," Kuenzer said of her momentous goal. "I wasn't sure what happened, and then my teammates are jumping on top of me and we are all on the ground."

Kuenzer, in her 30th game with the national team, came on with only two minutes remaining in regulation.

She got an earlier chance in overtime that was denied, but her header moments later was true.

"Every soccer player dreams of scoring the deciding goal in the World Cup," she said through an interpreter. "But expect it?"

She vigorously shook her head and laughed.

"No."



Beckett became the first pitcher to throw a postseason shutout against the Chicago Cubs since Babe Ruth did it for Boston in Game 1 of the 1918 World Series.

Beckett blanks Cubs, sends series back to Chicago

MIAMI — Josh Beckett and the Florida Marlins put history on hold — at least for a couple of days.

With the Chicago Cubs set to clinch their first World Series trip in 58 years, Beckett buzzed Sammy Sosa in pitching a two-hitter and leading the Marlins to a 4-0 win Sunday in Game 5 of the NL Championship Series.

"We needed a good outing from a starter. I knew that going in. They had roughed us up pretty good," Beckett said. "We needed to pitch better."

Ivan Rodriguez, Mike Lowell and Jeff Conine homered and the Marlins played the role of ultimate spoiler in closing the gap to 3-2 and send the series back to Wrigley Field.

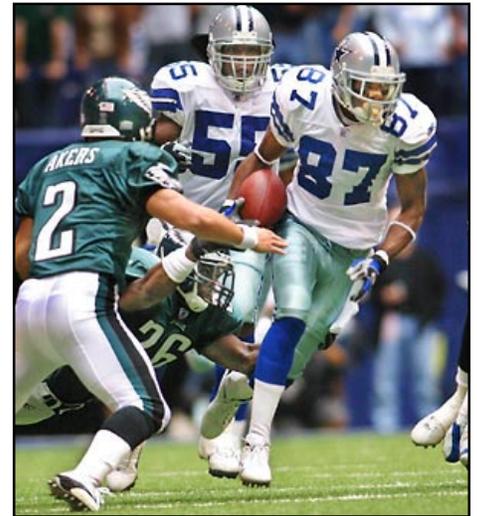
"I had an idea we were going to go back home," Cubs manager Dusty Baker said. "Now we're going back to our fans and our people, and it's going to be exciting and electric."

Despite nearly a century of failure in their past, the Cubs aren't about to panic.

Mark Prior is set to start in Game 6 Tuesday night against Florida's Carl Pavano. If he's needed, fellow ace Kerry Wood would pitch Game 7 the next day as Chicago tries to reach the Series for the first time since 1945.

"We feel confident with those guys on the mound, especially after a loss," Baker said.

Only three times in LCS history and five times in World Series play have teams come back from a 3-1 deficit to win a best-of-seven matchup.



Zuriel Smith's 54-yard kickoff return set up the game-winning field goal for the Cowboys.

Cowboys' special teams doom Eagles in 23-21 victory

IRVING, Texas — The four-game winning streak is nice. So is being first in the NFC East.

Still, the strongest proof yet that the Dallas Cowboys are a completely new team under coach Bill Parcells lies in beating the Philadelphia Eagles and how they did it: with big plays from the opening kickoff to the closing minutes.

Dallas snapped a six-game losing streak against its division rival Sunday with a 23-21 victory over Philadelphia on Billy Cundiff's 28-yard field goal with 1:11 left.

The Cowboys started as well as possible, when Randal Williams foiled an onside kick by returning it 37 yards for a touchdown. Dallas was ahead after just three seconds, the fastest score to begin a game since the NFL began using a scoreboard clock in 1970.

"This is a new era," Dallas quarterback Quincy Carter said. "This is a new football team. Coach Parcells has brought a whole new toughness to this team."

Afghanistan Hot Topics



(Compiled by CJTF-180 Public Affairs)

New Afghan election law bans warlords

KABUL, Afghanistan - The Afghan government banned warlords Sunday from taking part in politics, a move that would prevent some of the country's top leaders from participating in next year's pivotal elections.

The new law is seen as crucial to helping the country become a stable democracy, as Afghanistan has long been dominated by private militias whose rivalry kept the country at war for 23 years.

"Nobody with armed forces behind them can continue their political activities," Justice Minister Abdulrahim Karimi told a new conference Sunday. The law, if enforced, is likely to affect several of the nation's leaders.

The Northern Alliance, which supported Hamid Karzai in becoming president after the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001, is a collection of warlords - many of them provincial governors or national politicians.

There are also warlords in Karzai's Cabinet. Defense Minister Mohammed Fahim, for example, maintains one of the largest private armies, and many of his soldiers are based in the capital, Kabul.

Fahim is an ethnic Tajik and seen as a potential political rival to Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun. It was not clear how the government, which has little power outside Kabul, would enforce the law.

Approved by the government Saturday, the law also dictates that a political party must have at least 700 members before it can be registered.

"This is another important step toward democracy," Karimi said.

The measure comes as political leaders start to position themselves for general elections in June. Karzai's government is a coalition of several ethnic groups and political factions; it will be a major challenge for him to keep it together.

Fahim and other members of the Northern Alliance met earlier this month in the capital while Karzai was overseas, and are believed to have discussed withdrawing their support for the president.

Karzai's administration appears to be becoming less tolerant of criticism as the polls draw closer.

On Saturday, it shut down the country's second most-popular newspaper, state-run *Armon Mali*, apparently after it ran a series of critical articles.

Deputy Information Minister Abdul Hamid Mubarez denied the government closed the newspaper to end the criticism and said it was because there were now enough privately run papers for the public to read.

U.S. soldier wounded in firefight in Afghanistan during gunbattle with suspected rebels

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — U.S. troops fought a gunbattle with three suspected rebels on the outskirts of the Afghan capital, the U.S. military said Sunday.

One American soldier was slightly wounded and an insurgent was captured.

The firefight occurred Saturday near a training center for the Afghan army in the northeast part of Kabul, the U.S. military said in a statement from Bagram Air Base, the military headquarters north of the capital.

It said the U.S. troops were observing a training exercise at the center when insurgents attacked them.

The American troops returned fire and called for backup from the International Security Assistance Force, a 5,500-strong NATO-led peacekeeping mission charged with keeping the peace in Kabul.

The rebels fled into a nearby building before one of them was captured, the statement said. It did not say what happened to the two other attackers.

The name of the wounded U.S. soldier was not released. He returned to duty after being treated.

Taliban and al Qaeda rebels have been launching increasingly bold assaults in recent months, raiding police stations, killing aid workers and confronting U.S. troops in growing numbers.

