

NG chief holds town hall meeting at Bagram

Story and photos by Sgt. Stephanie Hall
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – About 100 U.S. Army National Guard Soldiers were given a brief insight as to the direction the National Guard is headed by Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, during a town hall meeting held at the “clamshell” Wednesday.

In Afghanistan, “we are fighting war as well as rebuilding a nation,” but that will not ebb the progressive change needed within the National Guard system, said Blum. The National Guard is “essential (and) a national treasure” that needs to be taken care of he said.

With that in mind, Blum said he is deter-



Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, talks about his goals for the National Guard during a town hall meeting Wednesday at the “clamshell” at Bagram Air Base.

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‘Mountainhawks’ soar to new heights, set standards

Story and photo by Spc. C. Elijah Spencer
211th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Among the variety of aircraft operated by the U.S. Army, the UH-60 Blackhawk is possibly the most versatile and widely used of them all. It has the capability to perform air assault, medical evacuation, troop and cargo transport, and sling load missions. Each of these types of missions have been done in Afghanistan.

The Blackhawk has proven its reliability and worth time and time again here. The helicopter however, is only as resilient and sturdy as the men and women maintaining and operating it. In the case of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment, Task Force Knighthawk (Mountainhawks), the men and the machines are certainly a match made in heaven.

The Mountainhawks have been in Afghanistan for five months. In that amount of time, they have flown more flight hours than would normally be allotted for in one year of operation back at Fort Drum, N.Y.

Given the high demand of missions, a Blackhawk crew, which consists of two pilots and two crew chiefs, cannot allow themselves to be caught flat

footed. The relationship between pilots and crew chiefs of a Blackhawk is unlike any other. Everyone has to depend on each other to get the job done. Every member of the crew has a certain set of responsibilities, however everyone is always willing to do whatever is needed to keep things going.

“You can’t just pull a crew out of a hat,” said Chief Warrant Officer 3 George C. Kelly, a crew pilot from Chicago, Ill.

In the early morning darkness you can always find glimmers of a headmounted flashlight flickering back and forth on the flight line. The crew chiefs are diligently at work keeping their birds in the fittest of flying condition. Checking levels, double checking all moving parts and making sure that nothing can go wrong while in flight. They don’t do it because they have to, they do it because they want to. The pride exhibited by the Mountainhawk’s crew chiefs to their respective bird is similar that of an avid driver and his prize hot rod after spending countless hours tweaking the engine.

“For every one hour of flying, there are three hours of maintenance,” said Spc. Christopher M. Tetzlaff, crew chief, from Port Clinton, Ohio. While the spectacle of lights of the crew chiefs dances back and forth on the flight

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



Essie Mae Washington-Williams said Wednesday that she has gone public about her father because she wants her children to know their heritage.

Sen. Thurmond's daughter: 'Tremendous weight' lifted

(CNN) – The daughter of the late Sen. Strom Thurmond, a former segregationist, said Wednesday that she kept her mixed-race ancestry secret for decades out of respect for her father.

"I never wanted to do anything to harm him or cause detriment to his life or to the lives of those around him," Essie Mae Washington-Williams, a 78-year-old retired schoolteacher said at a news conference in Columbia, S.C.

"My father did a lot of things to help other people, even though his public stance appeared opposite.

"I was sensitive about his well-being and career and his family here in South Carolina."

Thurmond, the longest-serving senator in U.S. history, died in June at age 100.

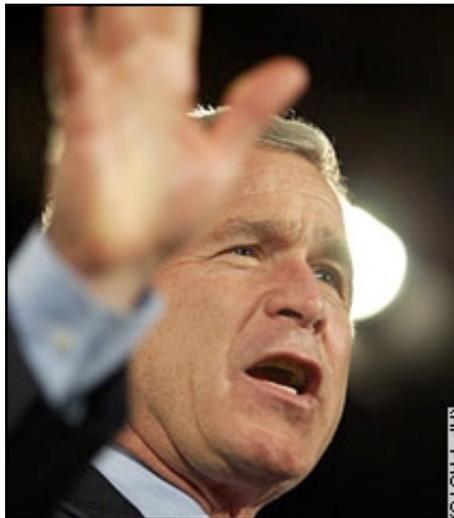
Washington-Williams said she went public with the information after Thurmond's death – and only then at the urging of her children. Her revelation first appeared Sunday in *The Washington Post*, but rumors have persisted for years.

"... My children deserve the right to know from whom, where and what they have come," she said. "I am committed in teaching them and helping them to learn about their past."

Visibly emotional, Washington-Williams said she was not angry or bitter.

"In fact, there's a great sense of peace that has come over me in the past year," she said. "Once I decided that I would no longer harbor such a great secret that many others knew, I feel as though a tremendous weight has been lifted.

"I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams and, at last, I feel completely free."



President Bush leads Howard Dean and other Democratic candidates in hypothetical matchups among registered voters, a new poll finds.

Saddam Hussein's capture boosts Pres. Bush's ratings

(CNN) – Saddam Hussein's capture caused a sharp spike in President Bush's approval ratings, according to the results of a *CNN/USA Today/Gallup* Poll released Wednesday.

The president also had a lead of more than 20 percentage points over Democratic front-runner Howard Dean in a hypothetical matchup among registered voters, the poll found.

In the battle for the Democratic nomination, the former Vermont governor still outdoes his eight rivals, but poll results show that Saddam's arrest may have blunted the candidate's momentum somewhat after he won an endorsement from former Vice President Al Gore.

Among poll respondents interviewed Monday and Tuesday, 63 percent said they approved of Bush's job performance, while 34 percent disapproved. The approval rating is Bush's highest since June and is a significant gain over his rating of 50 percent a month ago.

By contrast, in a poll done Thursday to Saturday, before news of the capture broke, Bush's approval was 54 percent, with 43 percent expressing disapproval.

The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for the most recent survey.

The poll also showed that Americans are increasingly supportive of, and optimistic about, the U.S. effort in Iraq.

Singapore quarantines 70 for fear of new SARS outbreak

SINGAPORE – Singapore's health ministry has ordered 70 people who possibly came into contact with a Taiwanese SARS patient to be quarantined.

It announced the move Wednesday after Taiwan authorities confirmed that the Taipei researcher who traveled to Singapore earlier this month had tested positive for the lethal respiratory disease.

Officials urged Singapore's hospitals to increase vigilance but said there was no sign of new cases of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in the country.

It said the 70 could have been exposed to SARS through contact with the 44-year-old man when he visited Singapore for a medical conference between Dec. 7 and 10.

Those who may have come into contact with him must stay at home until Dec. 19 – the length of the incubation period of SARS – and will be monitored by telephone, the ministry's statement said.

Pakistan offers compromise to India over Kashmir for peace

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan – Pakistan is ready to drop long-standing demands for the implementation of U.N. resolutions over Kashmir and meet India "halfway" in a bid for peace, President Pervez Musharraf has said.

For over 50 years, Islamabad has insisted on a plebiscite to allow people in the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir to decide between joining India or Pakistan, a position backed by a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions in the late 1940s.

But, speaking less than three weeks before an important South Asian summit in Islamabad, Musharraf said he was prepared to be "bold and flexible" in an attempt to resolve the perennial dispute over Kashmir.

"We are for United Nations Security Council Resolutions," Pakistan's military ruler said in an interview at his home late Wednesday. "However, now we have left that aside."

"If we want to resolve this issue, both sides need to talk to each other with flexibility, coming beyond stated positions, meeting halfway somewhere."



Capt. Troy Fontenot, 205th Engineer Battalion, asks a question during a town hall meeting held Wednesday at Bagram Air Base.

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mined to do whatever needs to be done to push the guard into the 21st Century in terms of policy, personnel requirements and mission capabilities.

To do that, Blum said he needs the help of the troops on ground to send up issues, complaints and recommendations for improving the National Guard – from issues dealing with finance to lack of necessary equipment – up through their chains of command. A group of personnel has been handpicked to help rewrite and initiate changes with any policy that may cause unnecessary hardship upon the troops, said Blum, but said that the changes will only come about if the Soldiers get involved.

“If there is anything that disadvantages the Soldiers, I want it changed,” he said.

The town hall meeting also allowed the troops present to ask questions and to bring up military concerns and issues.

Issues ranging from whether guardsmen would get reimbursed for losing money when activated, to questions dealing with noncommissioned officer and officer evaluation reports.

Blum said that many changes are currently taking place and that “I think you’re going to see changes quick.”

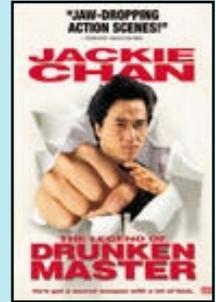
The changes will occur quickly because Soldiers are important and need to be taken care of, said Blum. From the aviators flying combat missions to the pay clerk dealing with finance, every Soldier is vital to the mission, he said.

Without their commitment, freedom may not exist, said Blum. “Remember, no one guarantees a Fourth of July,” he said. “We have to earn each and every one.”

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

“The Legend of the Drunken Master”

1530Z at the MWR building:
Returning home with his father after a shopping expedition, Wong Fei-Hong is unwittingly caught up in...



Tomorrow’s movie: “R X-Mas”

Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	<i>Today</i>	<i>Friday</i>
Uzbekistan:	<i>Partly Cloudy</i> H: 60F L: 35F	<i>Mostly Cloudy</i> H: 58F L: 36F
Bagram:	<i>Partly Cloudy</i> H: 52F L: 25F	<i>Mostly Cloudy</i> H: 52F L: 28F
Kabul:	<i>Partly Cloudy</i> H: 50F L: 23F	<i>Mostly Cloudy</i> H: 50F L: 27F
Kandahar:	<i>Mostly Clear</i> H: 59F L: 32F	<i>Clear</i> H: 59F L: 34F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

Freedom Watch falls under the supervision of the Combined Joint Task Force - 180, and is published daily, Monday - Saturday.

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Freedom Watch, an Army newspaper



publication, is produced by the 4th Public Affairs Detachment at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

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

Contents of *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.

All submissions are subject to editing for size and content by the 4th Public Affairs Detachment, located in Motel 6, CJTF-180, Bagram Air Base.

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line in the midst of darkness, another performance is occurring in the command post for the Mountainhawks.

The incorporation of computer generated weather forecast, geographical landmarks to indicate a waypoint on a flight route, sleep deprivation, coffee, and a risk assessment, all becomes a detailed mission brief through a few pecks at a keyboard and a couple of clicks of a mouse.

The crew pilots will create a mission brief that details the day's mission down to the minute and will be given to the other pilots in the flight to be put into their knee boards for reference in flight.

"Everything in the aviation world is plus or minus thirty seconds," said Capt. Joshua Higgins, company commander from Johnstown, Pa.

The Mountainhawks have been put to the test day after day, and each time they prove that they are the best assault helicopter platoon in the Army, according to Kelly. Operating a government aircraft worth over \$10 million is not an easy job, yet the men and women of Co. B do it day after day, mission after mission, without hesitation, doubt or fear. The unity and professionalism in which the crews of Co. B perform is in a class of its own.

"I've served in assault helicopter companies for as long as I can remember, and this is as fine a group of aviators and crew chiefs that I have ever worked with," said Kelly.

The Mountainhawks take finesse to a whole new level when it comes to flying, maintenance, and getting the job done. This precision and care also carries over into whom or what they are transporting. They have a sense of unity and camaraderie when on the job. This is shown by just how far they are willing to go to help out the infantryman.

"They are more than just passengers . . . they're our guys and we try to do as much as we can for them," said Kelly.

While flying, the crews integrate an inordinate amount of visual checks



Spc. Christopher M. Tetzlaff, a crew chief from Port Clinton, Ohio, secures an engine intake cover for mounting during a maintenance check.

and measures into their normal movement through the aircraft. Pilots check their kneeboard computations and look at the levels on the gauges in front of them; all while ensuring that they are steady on course to their destination.

The crew chiefs in the cabin ensure that everything behind the pilots' seats is in order and that the far right and left of the helicopter is clear of any hazards, all while scanning their areas with their guns and relaying vital flight information to the pilots.

"Everyone's pretty serious but we still have fun," said Tetzlaff.

Day after day, you can still find someone either pecking away at yet another mission brief or down on the flight line ratcheting away fixing their birds to ensure that the Mountainhawks continue to set the standard of aviation in the skies of Afghanistan.

Sgt. Maj. Tilley will accompany Christmas USO tour

WASHINGTON – The sergeant major of the Army is leading a team of Soldiers and stars on a Christmas tour overseas for the last time as the Army's top enlisted Soldier.

The "Hope and Freedom" show is to entertain troops serving in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom later this month, and is being dedicated to the memory of longtime USO supporter and comedic icon Bob Hope.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack Tilley, along with country music singers Daryl Worley and Mark Wills, comedian Al Franken, and "J.A.G." star Karri Turner, are headlining the eight-day trip to boost morale for the thousands of service members spending the holidays away from home.

"I'm really excited about this trip," Tilley said. "We just want to bring a little piece of home to soldiers during this difficult time. I spent the holidays in Vietnam away from my family and it makes a difference knowing people are thinking about you."

A number of the entertainers will be making

their second trip to the area during the holidays, including Worley who was inspired by his visits to Afghanistan, Kuwait and Uzbekistan during the 2002 holiday trip to co-write the smash hit "Have You Forgotten."

The song was a tribute to U.S. service members engaged in the Global War on Terrorism. It spent seven weeks at No. 1. This is the second year in a row that Tilley has escorted celebrities to the Southwest Asia area to help boost morale and bring some holiday cheer. The show is being sponsored by Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee and Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Peter Schoomaker

Wills, a four-time No. 1 artist and 1999 Academy of Country Music Top New Male Vocalist, is making his first trip to entertain troops. He has met and entertained wounded troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington, D.C. His 2003 hit "19 Something" spent seven weeks at No. 1. In addition, World Wrestling Federation star Bradshaw, pop singers

Karma and No Illusion, the U.S. Army Band and cheerleaders from the Washington Redskins will also be joining the tour.

Aboard to stir laughter in the crowd is Franken, a political satirist and former member of "Saturday Night Live."

Turner stars as Lt. Harriet Sims-Roberts on the CBS drama "J.A.G." She will be celebrating a birthday during the tour. Turner is also making her second trip to the region.

Bradshaw will be making his third trip to the region. The WWE superstar and author visited troops in Iraq earlier this year.

This will be the U.S. Army Band's second trip to a combat theater since World War II. The band troupe "Down Range" also toured with Tilley and the USO in December 2002, and is the only Washington-based military band to have participated in a theater of foreign combat operations.

(Information provided by the Army News Service.)



Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from SI.com)

Hall of Fame quarterback dead at 82

CLEVELAND – Otto Graham, the Hall of Fame quarterback who led the Cleveland Browns to a championship game in every season he played, died Wednesday. He was 82.

Graham died in Sarasota, Fla., team spokesman Todd Stewart said.

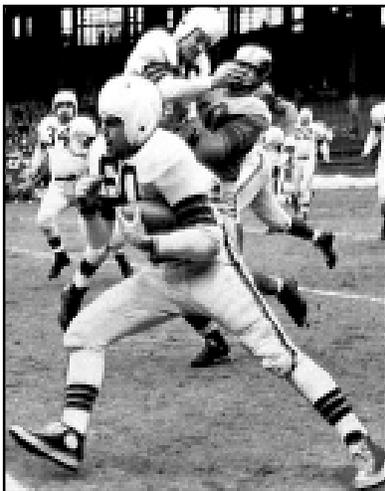
He was taken to Sarasota Memorial Hospital earlier in the day with the same heart condition that killed actor John Ritter, said his son, Duey Graham. Graham was diagnosed with the early stages of Alzheimer's disease in 2001.

Nicknamed "Automatic Otto," Graham never missed a game as a pro while passing for 23,584 yards and 174 touchdowns. He finished his career with an astounding 105-17-4 regular-season record.

He took coach Paul Brown's teams to the title game in each season from 1946-55. With Graham as their quarterback, the Browns won four championships in the old All-America Football Conference and three NFL titles. He was MVP of the AAFC three times.

Graham was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1965, and the Browns retired his uniform No. 14, which he wore from 1952-55.

Graham wore No. 60 during the first part of his career, from 1946-51.



Union rejects Boston's proposed restructuring of A-Rod's contract

NEW YORK – The baseball players' union got in the middle of the proposed Alex Rodriguez trade Wednesday, forcing the Red Sox and Rangers to seek another way to complete the blockbuster deal they had already agreed on.

Boston and Texas said they settled on all the players involved in the trade. The Red Sox and A-Rod agreed to restructure the shortstop's contract, Rangers owner Tom Hicks said.

But in a rare move, the union intervened and rejected an agreement between Boston and Rodriguez to restructure the shortstop's record \$252 million contract, changes that were needed before Texas could send the AL MVP to the Red Sox for Manny Ramirez.

Commissioner Bud Selig set a 5 p.m. Thursday deadline for the trade to be completed. He might also go against the union and approve the restructuring, likely forcing the matter to arbitration.

If the deal does go through, Boston would likely trade longtime shortstop Nomar Garciaparra, possibly to the Chicago White Sox.

Mourning to receive kidney transplant

MIAMI – Less than a month after retiring from the NBA, Alonzo Mourning is scheduled to undergo kidney transplant surgery Friday in New York, the *Miami Herald* reported Wednesday.

Mourning retired from the New Jersey Nets on Nov. 24 because of complications from the kidney disease focal glomerulosclerosis.

He has been searching for a matching kidney donor since, receiving offers from potential donors. *The Herald*, citing two unidentified sources, said it was believed Mourning is receiving a kidney from one of those donors.

Mourning's agents and doctor could not immediately be reached. A spokesman for the Nets had no information on Mourning's medical condition.

Mourning was diagnosed with the kidney ailment after returning from the Sydney Olympics in the fall of 2000.

He tried to continue playing, appearing in 88 games for the Miami Heat before signing a four-year contract with the Nets last summer.

He played in only 12 games for New Jersey before announcing his retirement.



Seven-time All-Star Alonzo Mourning retired Nov. 24 after his kidney ailment worsened.

Ohio State probe finds no misconduct

COLUMBUS, Ohio – After an "impeccable" five-month investigation, a committee of Ohio State professors did not find any instance of academic impropriety involving Buckeyes athletes, the school announced Wednesday.

"The most important conclusion, in my mind, is that the university's academic integrity is sound," Ohio State President Karen Holbrook said.

Holbrook formed a 10-person internal faculty committee to review athletes' academic performances after The New York Times reported allegations in July that athletes had received preferential treatment and had cheated in class. In particular, the article said suspended star tailback Maurice Clarett passed a class in 2002 by taking oral exams after he walked out of a midterm and did not take the final.

Clarett was subsequently suspended for accepting improper benefits from a family friend and for lying about it to investigators.

Afghanistan Hot Topics



(Compiled by CJTF-180 Public Affairs)

Desertions deplete Afghan Army

By Ann Scott Tyson

POL-E-CHARKHI, Afghanistan (*Christian Science Monitor*) – In a muddy camp east of Kabul, Maj. Gen. Sher Karimi surveys the latest hard-won gains in the struggle to forge a national defense force for Afghanistan.

Before him down the hill, a new Afghan artillery unit oils 122 mm howitzers under the patient instruction of a Mongolian trainer. Behind him stands a row of rusty Soviet Scuds and other missiles, rocket launchers, and artillery pieces trucked in Thursday night as part of a push to disarm regional militia of both small arms and heavy weapons.

Building a cohesive, ethnically diverse Afghan National Army (ANA), while gradually coaxing powerful local militia totaling some 100,000 men to lay down their arms are cornerstones of security and independence for Afghanistan. They are also vital preconditions for the withdrawal of the 16,000 U.S. and other foreign troops here.

But Karimi says that these remain far-off goals, complicated by competing allegiances among his soldiers and the nation's faction-ridden history. As ANA's chief of operations, he speaks of "the distant future, when Afghanistan is standing on its feet."

"We have problems, particularly the problem of attrition and desertion," says the Western-trained infantry officer, with the hint of a British accent.

Indeed, about half of the 9,000 Afghan Army recruits trained so far have quit, taking their boots and uniforms with them, he says. As a result, the ANA is rushing to enlist and meet a timetable of completing the Central Corps, with 10,000 soldiers in three brigades, before national elections planned for June. Even that number falls short of the goal of 12,500 ANA soldiers by June projected by a top U.S. military official, Gen. Peter Pace, as recently as September.

At the current pace, Karimi estimates it will take until 2010 for the coalition to achieve its target of training 70,000 Afghan soldiers. Deserters must be tracked down and punished rather than left alone as they are now, he says.

Afghans split over system of government

KABUL, Afghanistan – Three rockets hit Kabul early Tuesday on the third day of a convention to adopt a new constitution, as delegates warned Afghanistan risked being plunged into civil war again unless it backed a strong president.

The rockets landed near Kabul airport, only a few kilometres from the site of the Loya Jirga, but no-one was injured, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

Delegates on Tuesday agreed to split into 10 groups to

debate the constitution, with the heads of each group to present their findings. Debate on the new constitution was due to get under way later in 10 smaller tents amid sharp differences over the most suitable system of future government for Afghanistan.

Delegates interviewed by *AFP* were divided between supporters of the current draft and those who would rather see a parliamentary system to counterbalance the president.

"We want a strong presidential government which suits the present situation of Afghanistan," Haji Ghulam Khan, a delegate from eastern Laghman province, said. "A strong parliamentary system can only be successful if the country has strong political parties which we lack," he said.

Haji Abdul Sattar from northeast Kunar said a strong presidential system was "the only way to govern this country and put things on the right path." The 502 delegates to the Loya Jirga are to debate and ratify the constitution, paving the way for the country's first elections, scheduled for June 2004.

President Hamid Karzai has repeatedly said he will only stand in the presidential polls if the Loya Jirga approves the presidential system laid down in the draft document. But some delegates said Afghanistan needed a strong parliamentary system with a prime minister to meet the criteria for democracy.

"All I do is stand inside by the door, and I get all the free tickets I want."



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support