MOUNTAIN Warrior Weekly

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704th EOD; Making Kandahar a Safer Place One Explosion at a Time

Story and photos by
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Sgt. 1st Class Peters unloads UXO in prep for disposal detonation

Kandahar, Afghanistan -- Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. With it's many conflicts with military forces such as the Russians, Pakistanis, Indians, Iranians, English and Chinese Armies, each force has contributed to the arsenal of landmines littering Afghanistan's many terrain features. From dusty lifeless plains to massive overwhelming mountain ranges flowing with rivers and abundant foliage, Coalition forces have found weapons caches and a buffet of landmines that have been left behind. These unmapped mechanisms of death lie beneath the earth, aimlessly awaiting an innocent drifter to cross their path so they can release their plethora of shrapnel. Coalition forces have marched through the mine ridden provinces of Afghanistan time and time again in search of Bin Laden and the Taliban. Thanks to the extremely well-trained men and women of the 704th Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) Company from Camp Shelby, Miss., the many mines and weapons caches that they have come across have not had the opportunity to fulfill their purpose.

"Our whole mission here is force protection, no matter who it is." said Cpt. Patrick A. Stamm, Company Commander, from Destin, Fl. "We deal with any and every kind of high explosive hazard."

The 704th has been in Afghanistan for five months, and since their arrival here in Kandahar they have successfully helped keep the soldiers free of any

Fighting for Those we Love;A Soldier's Story

Story and photo by
Staff Sgt. Dave S. Thompson
211th Mobile Public
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My unit was on alert for six months before we officially received orders for Afghanistan. Throughout that period, my wife would ask me from time to time, if I had received any updated information on departure dates. I would shake my head no and then quickly change the subject. "Perhaps they won't need you guys after all," she'd say, trying to muster as much optimism in her voice as she could. But her words held no conviction, and out of the corner of my eyes, I could see the worry she tried so hard to conceal.

I found myself, in the days before departing, working hard to take care of those items that had been on my "to do list" for so long. I replaced the O-ring in the leaky faucet, drained and cleaned the hot tub, replaced the warped boards on the side of the house, etc, etc. Back then, I was much more agreeable and compliant to her requests…and her demands. I suppose that somewhere within my subconscious, I was apologizing for having to leave, and somehow trying to fill the void my absence would create.

It's been said that the hardest job in the Army is being an Army Wife.

From the Top

Oklahoma Guard ready to train Afghan National army

By Master SGT. Bob Haskell

ARLINGTON, Va. (Army News Service, Nov. 6, 2003) — For the first time, one of the National Guard's 15 enhanced brigades will lead Task Force Phoenix, the mission to train the new Afghan National army.

The training mission has so far been led by the active-duty 10th Mountain Division and 50 Soldiers from the Vermont National Guard.

The new task force of 500 Soldiers and a small contingent of Marines, commanded by Brig. Gen. Thomas Mancino and centered on the 45th Enhanced Separate Brigade, has spent the last few months at Fort Carson, Colo., and will deploy to the central Asian country in December and will remain until June 2004.

"When Headquarters, Department of the Army asked us to assist in this effort, we jumped at the opportunity," said Col. Roosevelt Barfield, chief of Training for the Army National Guard in Arlington, Va. "The Afghan National army is a major part of post-hostilities in Afghanistan and the cornerstone for winning the peace."

"Many of these Afghan troops are already combat veterans. Our job is to turn them into a professional army that is already engaged in combat operations," said Maj. Eric Bloom, a spokesman for the 45th Brigade. "That includes teaching them what officers do and what noncommissioned officers do because the Afghan army has not had a (noncommissioned officers) corps in the past."

To that end, Army Guard NCOs and officers from 19 states have been at Fort Carson since September boning up on how to train their Afghan National army counterparts.

The Soldiers will be responsible for conducting nine-week basic training courses for about 4,000 Afghan nationals at the Kabul Military Training Center outside of the country's capital city.

The task force will also supervise programs for training new officers and NCOs and combat leaders at the center as well as courses in managing ranges and training areas, said Maj. Tom Hanley, a member of the Army Guard's Training Division.

"After that training (the Afghan soldiers) will be able to fight terrorists with U.S. Special Forces," he said.

Other Army Guard soldiers with the 45th Brigade will be embedded as trainers within two Afghan light infantry brigades and an armor and mechanized infantry brigade that have already been organized at Pol-e-Charki and Kamari bases in Afghanistan located in the vicinity of Kabul in the western part of the country, near the Pakistan border.

The Marines will help train Afghan soldiers assigned to a quick reaction force, Bloom said.

An Afghan army corps headquarters will also be trained how to lead those brigades, said Bloom who explained that the Afghani corps headquarters is equivalent to an American division.

The intent, Bloom added, is to have the corps and brigade staffs trained in time for the national elections that the transitional government has scheduled for next June.

The lessons for the Afghani soldiers range from personal hygiene, including shaving and brushing teeth, to combat tactics, he explained

"Patience and understanding cultural differences is the key to this kind of training," Bloom observed.

Even paying the soldiers is a lot different in Afghanistan than it is in the United States.

Most Afghan soldiers do not have bank accounts and direct deposit, Bloom pointed out. The soldiers live in a country where the winters can be harsh and where the 28 million people have just 67,000 passenger cars and commercial vehicles.

That means that after receiving their monthly pay, the soldiers have to be given a few days to take the money to their families in villages throughout the country, Bloom said. And they have to be given a few days to get back to continue the training that is essential for keeping the soldiers' families safe, he said.

The first battalion of Afghans graduated July 2002. Both the Americans and French have been training the recruits.

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(all submissions are subject to editing for size)

"Making the world a Safer Place for our posterity"

While we soldiers are whisked away to foreign lands to fight battles, defend freedom, and rid the world of terrorists, our significant others remain at home to hold down the fort. And, what about our children? Those little bundles of joy who wake us up at 7 o'clock on Saturday mornings with the TV volume blaring Scooby Do re-runs. How difficult must their job be?

As I boarded the C-17 cargo plane with members of my unit, I thought about my family and the reasons I was going away in the first place. The blazing images of 9-11 flashed in my mind. The crumbling towers, the smoke, the horror, were all so vivid. In that moment, all my doubts disappeared and I instinctively tightened the grip on my M-16 rifle. I stole a final glance at the manicured lawns and green trees in the distance before the aircraft's cargo doors closed, obscuring my view.

While the loadmaster performed his final calculations and the pilots completed their pre-flight checks, an Army Chaplain took the opportunity to lead us in a word of prayer. At that moment, I was talking to my wife on the cell phone. I promptly positioned the phone so she could hear the Chaplains words. He prayed for God's protection over all the soldiers and for comfort and strength for our families left behind. As I said goodbye to my wife, she asked me to thank the Chaplain for his comforting prayer. Moments later, the thunderous roar of the airplane's engines drowned out all the chatter as the big craft took to the sky.

While I shifted in my seat trying to get comfortable for the 18 hour flight, I couldn't shake the flood of emotions that had enveloped me. I thought about my wife and pictured her face, the tears streaming down her cheeks, when we had said goodbye the day before. I remembered the way my children had clung to my legs, not wanting their daddy to leave. It was for them that I would fight, and for all the other men, women, and children in the world that respect human life, dignity, and freedom.

My family and I had taken a vacation before I departed, at Sea World and Fiesta Texas. I reflected on the fun times we had and could still hear the shrill sounds of my children's laughter as they slid down the water rides and roller coasters. My wife had held my hand a little tighter than usual as we walked from one attraction to the next. I found myself taking special notice of the things around me, things I usually took for granted.

That evening back in the hotel, after spending an action packed day at the amusement park, I slipped away to the balcony while my wife got the children ready for bed. As I looked out at the large pond in the middle of the hotel courtyard teaming with tropical fish, and the sloping fairways of the golf course beyond, I savored the beauty of the place. I said a silent prayer of thanks for the precious time we all enjoyed that day. I felt a deep sense of admiration and gratitude to my brothers and sisters in arms who had fought before me to preserve this moment, this freedom I enjoyed.

The airplane shuddered as it hit some turbulent air, shaking me out of my reverie. I looked around and saw the members of my unit, my fellow soldiers, caught up in their own state of reflection, and wondered what was going through their minds. I felt proud to be a soldier in the most powerful Army in the world. The flag sewn unto my right shoulder stood for freedom and represented my home, my family…my life. Terrorists had invaded our land, violated our sovereignty, and murdered our people. They had scared our children and tried to cripple our way of life. I was prepared to do my part in preventing another 9-11.

Now, after three months in Afghanistan, my appreciation for my country and family has increased ten fold. I see the dust and desolation all around me and am thankful for the manicured lawns and green fields back home. I spoke to my five year old son the other day, and he asked me, "Daddy, when are you coming home?" I responded, "soon son."
"How long is soon daddy? he asked. "As soon as I'm finished doing my part in making the world a little safer for you to grow up in," I replied. He somehow seemed satisfied with this response and I heard him giggle as he handed the phone over to my wife.

Just then, a photograph of my family, standing in front of our home, caught my eye. I had recently received it in a care package from my wife and had proudly displayed it on my desk. In the picture, the children's bicycles were laid down carelessly in the driveway behind the cars; a place I'd told them a million times not to leave them. I could almost hear myself warning them that I would drive right over their bikes if they continued leaving them there. I smiled to myself. My wife's flower gardens were in full bloom and I could just make out the taillights of my '84 VW Rabbit project car in the garage; my pride and joy. The children were all smiles, my twin nine year olds both missing front teeth. My wife, standing tall and proud with one hand holding the leash connected to our 110 pound black lab, looked beautiful. In the background, waving freely from the flag pole attached to our house was Old Glory. The brilliant shades of red, white, and blue contrasted nicely with our house and gave me a twinge of longing for home. A good home, in the greatest country in the world. A home worth fighting for.

WORLD NEWS

Marines Slated for Iraq Troop Rotation

By ROBERT BURNS
AP Military Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Marine Corps, which played a central role in toppling Saddam Hussein last spring, will return to Iraq as part of a U.S. troop rotation approved by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on Wednesday, officials said.

Since the Marines' departure from Iraq in September, the military effort to stabilize and rebuild Iraq has fallen almost entirely to the Army, plus multinational units led by Britain and Poland.

The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit recently began anti-smuggling operations in the Persian Gulf coastal area in southern Iraq. But no Marines have been doing stability operations, such as working with Iraqi civilians on rebuilding projects or hunting for fugitives loyal to Saddam, since the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force departed south-central Iraq in September.

Also included in the next U.S. rotation will be thousands of newly mobilized National Guard and Reserve troops as well as active duty Army units such as the 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas, and the 1st Infantry Division in Germany, according to officials who discussed the matter on condition of anonymity.

No National Guard combat brigades will be called on, beyond the three already mobilized from North Carolina, Arkansas and Washington state to prepare for deployment to Iraq next year. The extra Guard and Reserve troops to be mobilized will be combat support forces such as military police.

Instead of relying almost exclusively on the Army to provide reserve forces for support, the Pentagon intends to mobilize specialists from the reserve components of the Air Force and Navy, too.

On Capitol Hill, Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said troop orders were being issued Wednesday and Pentagon officials planned to publicly release details on Thursday.

Pace said members of Congress were being briefed on the plan Wednesday. He declined to give reporters details.

Pace said that by May the Pentagon expects to have just over 100,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, a drop of 30,000 from present levels. The Pentagon also hopes to have about 170,000 Iraqi security forces by then - compared with about 100,000 now - and two multinational divisions of about 12,000 each.

The Pentagon has struggled to set the troop rotation for 2004 because of the Bush administration's inability so far to persuade its international partners to contribute significant troops. Turkey had offered to send thousands but has balked in the face of Iraqi political opposition.

The Army has shouldered most of the burden of attempting to stabilize Iraq. It has been stretched thin by multiple overseas commitments, including anti-terrorism efforts Afghanistan as well as Iraq.

The first major Army unit to be replaced in Iraq next year is the 101st Airborne Division, which played an important role in the march to Baghdad and has operated mainly in northern Iraq since then.

When the Army announced in July an outline for the next troop rotation, it said the 101st would be replaced by a multinational division to be identified later. Because that international force has not materialized, the Pentagon has been forced to call on other U.S. forces to fill the gap.

It appears the Pentagon will replace the 101st with a smaller group of forces, in part because the area in which it operated - northern Iraq - has been relatively stable and peaceful.

Some units that will return home in the next rotation will not be replaced. This includes a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, as well as the 173rd Airborne Brigade. As a result, the total number of U.S. troops in Iraq is likely to fall to near the 100,000 mark next spring. That compares with about 130,000 there now.

Also coming home in the next rotation will be the 4th Infantry Division from Fort Hood, Texas, and the 1st Armored Division from Germany.

New Secret Team Hunting UBL, Saddam

WASHINGTON — A new covert military team has been set up by top U.S. military commanders in the Middle East to hunt down Usama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and other wanted fugitives in the war on terror, Fox News confirmed Friday.

The classified team, which was first reported in The New York Times on Friday, is called "Task Force 121," and is a combination of Task Force 5 from Afghanistan and Task Force 20 in Iraq under one command. The goal is to streamline how U.S. forces are using information about "high-value targets" and to launch attacks against them.

Operations to root out Al Qaeda's top leaders in Afghanistan and the deposed Iraqi dictator will continue "24-7," one senior official told Fox News, but the combination of assets under one command umbrella provides a flexibility that was not available to commanders before. Operations could continue simultaneously in both countries with the force split, or a variety of task force assets may be allocated to Iraq or Afghanistan as intelligence points up an immediate need.

"This allows us to take advantage of events as they happen," another senior official told Fox News on Friday. "This structure eliminates a number of elements from the chain of command and coordination."

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Task Force 121 will have fewer restrictions than those imposed on the other task forces and will have the benefit of using a combination of special operations and conventional ground forces and better intelligence from the CIA about "high-value targets." The team also will not be bound to the conventional borders the U.S. military is operating within in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Pentagon officials remain confident that Saddam is alive and is personally directing, or at least inspiring, the resistance being felt by coalition forces.

"We have not got Saddam Hussein yet. We will get him," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said on "Fox News Sunday." "And I suspect he's still in the country. And I suspect he's having a great deal of difficulty operating. And we'll eventually find him."

Asked by Fox News if he thought Saddam and bin Laden will actually be caught, Rep. Robert Andrews, D-N.J., a member of the House Homeland Security team, said: "Yes they are, the question is when, not if ... I'm all for this task force and I think it's very important to get this job done."

Gen. John P. Abizaid, who commands all American forces in the strategic crescent from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, decided over the summer to disband Force 5 and Task Force 20, officials told the Times.

Task Force 121 was create for several reasons, officials said, including the fact that the Bush administration wants to stress that the war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan has not been neglected during the U.S. occupation of Iraq and that capturing bin Laden — dead or alive — is still of paramount importance.

Administration officials also are reportedly becoming increasingly frustrated that Saddam has not yet been nabbed. They believe that once he's out of the picture, most of the attacks being launched on a daily basis — against the coalition and the Iraqis helping them in reconstruction efforts — will stop.

While it is unclear whether President Bush, or the newly-formed Iraq Stabilization Group at the National Security Council, were directly involved in the decision to create Task Force 121, the Times reported, senior administration members have said in the last two months that capturing or killing Saddam would change the dynamic of the American occupation.

Man Admits 48 Murders in Green River Case

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — Uttering the word "guilty" 48 times with chilling calm, Gary Leon Ridgway admitted Wednesday he is the Green River Killer and confessed to strangling four dozen women over two decades - "so many women I have a hard time keeping them straight."

"Choking is what I did and I was pretty good at it," the 54-year-old former truck-factory employee said in papers submitted as part of his plea bargain.

Ridgway, a short figure with glasses, thinning hair and a sandy mustache, pleaded guilty to more murders than any other serial killer in U.S. history.

He struck a plea bargain that will spare him from execution for those killings and bring life in prison without parole for one of the most baffling and disturbing serial killer cases the nation has ever seen.

For a half-hour, he listened in court with an utter lack of expression as his own accounting of how he picked up each victim and where he dumped the body was read aloud. In the most matter-of-fact way, he confirmed the details, responding "yes" over and over in a clear but subdued voice.

"I wanted to kill as many women as I thought were prostitutes as I possibly could," he said in a statement that was read aloud in court by a prosecutor and opened an extraordinary window on the twisted mind of a serial killer. He also said: "I killed so many women I have a hard time keeping them straight."

He said he left some bodies in "clusters" and enjoyed driving by the sites afterward, thinking about what he had done. He said he sometimes stopped to have sex with the bodies.

Victims' relatives wept quietly in the courtroom.

"It was hard to sit there and see him not show any feeling and not show any remorse," said Kathy Mills, whose daughter Opal was 16 when she vanished in 1982. Opal's body was found in the Green River three days later.

Ridgway's lawyers said he was, in fact, sorry and will express that to the families at the sentencing, which will be held within six months. Defense attorney Tony Savage said Ridgway's emotions came "in private, in emotional ways, in tears and in words. ... He feels terrible remorse."

"The Green River nightmare is over," King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng said after the proceeding.

But Sheriff Dave Reichert - one of the first investigators on the case as a young detective - said that the investigation continues and that charges in more cases were possible. Under the plea bargain, Ridgway is not protected from the death

NEWS cont.

penalty in other jurisdictions. He has not been charged elsewhere, but admitted dumping victims outside the county and in Oregon.

Other serial killers have bragged of murdering many dozens of victims, but Ridgway's plea agreement, signed June 13, puts more murders on his record than any other serial killer in U.S. history.

John Wayne Gacy, who preyed on men and boys in Chicago in the 1970s, was convicted of killing 33 people. Ted Bundy, whose killing started in Washington state, confessed to killing more than 30 women and girls but was convicted of murdering only three before he was executed.

At a news conference, Maleng said his first reaction to striking a deal that would take the death penalty off the table was no: "If any case screams out for the death penalty, this was it."

But he said he finally agreed to bring a resolution to dozens of unsolved Green River cases. Investigators had evidence to pursue charges in seven cases but had exhausted their leads in the others, and the victims' families - including those whose loved ones had never even been found - deserved answers, Maleng said.

Since signing off on the deal, Ridgway has worked with investigators to recover the remains of some victims. Ridgway has been married three times and has a son, but none of his family members or supporters attended the hearing.

"Justice and mercy for the victims, the family and our community, and that is why we entered into this agreement," the prosecutor said.

The Green River Killer's murderous frenzy began in the Seattle area 1982, targeting mainly runaways and prostitutes. The first victims turned up in the Green River, giving the killer his name. Other bodies were found near ravines, airports and freeways.

The killing seemed to stop as suddenly as it started, with prosecutors believing the last victim had disappeared in 1984. But one killing Ridgway admitted to was in 1990, and another was in 1998.

In many cases, the killer had sex with his victim and then strangled her.

Ridgway said in his statement that he killed all the women in King County, mostly near his home or in his truck not far from where he had picked them up.

"In most cases, when I killed these women, I did not know their names," Ridgway said in the statement. "Most of the time I killed them the first time I met them, and I do not have a good memory of their faces."

He said he preyed on prostitutes "because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught."

"I picked prostitutes as my victims because I hate most prostitutes and I did not want to pay them for sex," he said. "I also picked prostitutes as victims because they were easy to pick up without being noticed. I knew they would not be reported missing right away and might never be reported missing."

He stripped the victims of their clothes and stole their jewelry, leaving some of it in the women's bathroom at the plant where he worked as a truck painter. He said he got a thrill from thinking a co-worker might find and wear the items.

He also told investigators that when he was in his mid-teens, he stabbed a 6-year-old boy for no apparent reason. The victim, who now lives in California, told investigators Ridgway lured him by asking if he wanted to build a fort, then sank a knife into his liver.

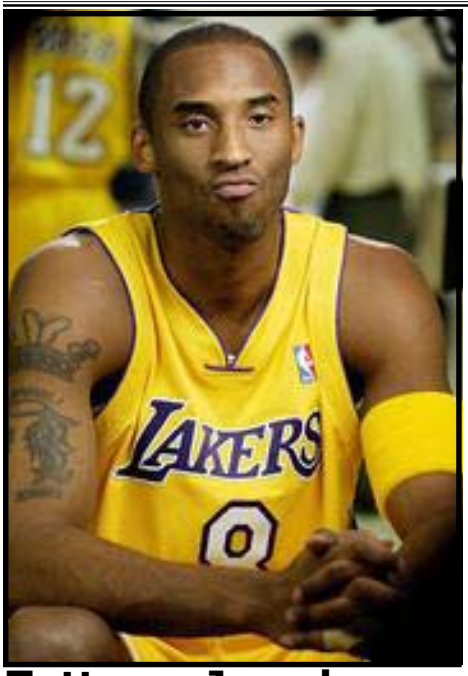
The victim said Ridgway laughed as he bled, then wiped the blade off on the boy's shoulders. The boy spent weeks in a hospital recovering.

Ridgway, who was from the Seattle suburb of Auburn, was arrested in 2001 while leaving work. Prosecutors said advances in DNA technology let them match a saliva sample taken from Ridgway in 1987 with DNA samples taken from three early victims. He was also connected to some of the victims by microscopic particles of paint found on the women; the paint had come from his workplace.

Ridgway had been a suspect as early as 1984, when the boyfriend of victim Marie Malvar reported that he last saw her getting into a pickup truck identified as Ridgway's.

But Ridgway told police he did not know Malvar. Later that year, Ridgway contacted the King County sheriff's Green River task force - ostensibly to offer information - and passed a polygraph test.

SPORTS



Tattoos, Jewelry Part of New Bryant Image

By BETH HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kobe Bryant built an image on and off the court as clean-cut and well-mannered and quickly became a role model who earned millions in endorsements.

As his eighth and most scrutinized NBA season begins, he is expressing himself in ways fans and teammates hadn't seen. He has new tattoos and a diamond earring the size of a marble, and he rides a motorcycle. He's also constantly surrounded by security guards and frequently refers to God.

The changes to Bryant's appearance and persona came during a turmoil-filled offseason, when he was charged with sexually assaulting a 19-year-old woman in Colorado.

Teammates say they don't know whether Bryant's new image is related to his legal trouble or just part of growing into adulthood for a player who entered the NBA straight out of high school.

"What you've seen is just a continual understanding of himself and his likes and dislikes and a willingness to be a little more true to himself and not so concerned about what everyone else thinks," teammate Rick Fox said.

"I think he also wants to let people know that he is an adult, that he can make his own choices and people have to respect that," Fisher said.

Bryant's tattoos on his right arm extend from his shoulder to the elbow: a crown, his wife Vanessa's name, a halo and angel wings above Psalm XXVII. His daughter Natalia Diamante's name is in script inside his lower left arm.

"This is a crown for my queen," he has said of his wife. "She's my angel. She's a blessing to me, her and Natalia."

He has worn an earring in the past, but his current one is so big his earlobe practically droops, and it's comparable to the $4 million diamond ring he gave his wife shortly after he was charged in Colorado.

The Lakers say they have no problem with Bryant riding a motorcycle, something many NBA contracts prohibit.

"Kobe grew up in Italy, so fast cars and racing, we always knew he had a fetish for that," Fisher said. "Definitely no fear of high speeds."

Bryant was raised in a religious, upper middle-class household in Italy and later in suburban Philadelphia. He's always been polite and respectful, qualities that worked against him in an unsuccessful venture into rap music a few years ago with lyrics that were considered too clean.

His longtime position as a role model and product pitchman worth millions in endorsements hasn't allowed him room for much individual growth, his teammates and marketing experts say.

"He's growing up," said Michael Sands, a media and marketing consultant in Los Angeles. "He's learning to be his own person by not being emotionally tied to his parents."

Only one of Bryant's sponsors - Italian hazelnut-chocolate spread maker Nutella - has dumped him since the sexual assault charge, but none currently airs his commercials. He has a multimillion-dollar sneaker deal with Nike and contracts with Sprite, McDonald's and Spalding.

"I don't think this is really going to hurt him that much," Sands said, assuming Bryant is acquitted at trial of the charges. "He's coming clean, he's showing up. He's respectful of the law, and that's important to a sponsor."

Since his arrest in July, Bryant has frequently cited God as one of his guiding principles.

He has recited some of the words of the scriptures inscribed on his arm, among them the Psalm of David, which reads in part: "Teach me Your way, O Lord, And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me."

"I'm sure he's always had those beliefs or that faith, but sometimes it takes something bad happening or something you wish didn't happen to get you back to a point where you put that first again," said Fisher, a devout Christian. "Maybe that's what he's going through."

Fox believes Bryant is leaning on the foundation on which he was raised as he searches for answers during a chaotic time in his life.

"Obviously, something is working for him because he's been able to come out here and continue to push through the pressure that's mounted outside the court as well as on the court," Fox said.

Despite the turbulence in his life and his new look, Bryant doesn't seem to have lost much support among longtime Lakers fans, who still cheer him loudly at home games.

"He seems like regular old Kobe," said Ricky Vieira, 24, who wore Bryant's No. 8 jersey during a recent Lakers game. "I'm still a Kobe fan even though he's got all that drama going on."

SPORTS Continued

U.S. baseball team fails to qualify for Athens Olympics

Associated Press
Nov. 8, 2003 12:26 a.m.
PANAMA CITY, Panama (AP)—

Now here's a stunner: The defending champion U.S. baseball team will be at home next summer while countries like the Netherlands and Italy compete for an Olympic medal in Athens.

Manager Frank Robinson and his team of mostly minor leaguers were beaten at their own game, falling to Mexico 2-1 Friday - a loss that eliminated them from a qualifying tournament with no second chances.

The Americans were among the favorites to win in Greece. There was even a chance future Hall of Famer Roger Clemens would have pitched for them.

Not to be.

"I can't believe it!" said Tom Lasorda, who managed the 2000 U.S. team to the gold in Sydney. "It's a shock and a disgrace that the Americans won't be represented in the Olympics."

"Baseball is America's game," he said. "It doesn't belong to the Japanese or the Cubans or the Koreans or the Italians. This is sad, very sad."

Lasorda's team had Ben Sheets, Roy Oswalt and Doug Mientkiewicz in the first Olympic tournament that included professionals.

"I know Roger Clemens wanted to play. That would've been a big draw for them. That's a shame, because they've got some good players on that team," Mientkiewicz said.

"It would've been nice to go out there and defend it, but now they're not going to get that chance," the Minnesota first baseman said. "I feel for all those guys. It's going to be hard to watch the Olympics now, that's for sure."

The Mexican team was a heavy underdog in this quarterfinal game, but got a tiebreaking home run in the ninth inning from Luis A. Garcia off Brian Bruney.

Bruney had 26 saves in the Arizona Diamondbacks' minor league system this season.

The United States threatened in the bottom of the ninth when Grady Sizemore and former major leaguer Ernie Young led off with singles.

With runners on second and third with one out, reliever Isidro Marquez got Justin Leone to ground back to the mound and retired Gerald Laird on a popup to end it.

Former New York Mets pitcher Rigo Beltran held the Americans to three hits in seven innings. Leone, of the Seattle system, homered in the fourth for the U.S. run.

"It was a well-pitched game by their pitchers," said Robinson, the Montreal Expos' manager and a Hall of Famer himself. "We were not able to do much until the ninth inning and it was not enough."

Ray Martinez tied it in the fifth with a homer off Cleveland prospect Jason Stanford. The Americans had outscored their opponents 21-0.

The U.S. roster also included Atlanta rookie pitcher Horacio Ramirez and former big leaguers Mike Lamb and Todd Williams.

"We lost a game. I don't think it's a setback for U.S. baseball," said Sandy Alderson, an executive vice president in the commissioner's office and the top American official with the team.

"I think it's a validation of the internationalization of the game. As we know, anything can happen in a game or a short series of games," he said.

Unlike basketball, the biggest stars in the United States do not play Olympic baseball, jeopardizing the sport's future in the games.

Even so, Alderson does not expect top major leaguers to participate four years from now when qualifying begins for the Beijing Summer Games.

"This is not about an eligibility issue. This is about a game played well by Mexico and unfortunately lost by the United States. Again, that's the nature of the game. Things happen," he said.

The U.S. team went 3-0 in pool play while Mexico lost all three games. But Mexico advanced when the Bahamas forfeited by failing to show up.

The Bahamas' action prompted Milwaukee Brewers general manager Doug Melvin to say: "It makes you wonder if baseball is an Olympic sport."

The two finalists in this tournament will reach the Olympics. Canada and Colombia will meet Saturday for the right to play Mexico on Sunday to determine one of the spots.

Cuba is the favorite for the other spot.

Baseball was a demonstration in the Olympics in 1984 and became a medal sport in 1996, when Cuba won the gold medal in Atlanta.

Sheets beat Cuba 4-0 to win the 2000 gold in Australia. Sean Burroughs, Brad Wilkerson and Ryan Franklin also were on that American team.

As Mientkiewicz spoke on his cell phone after Friday's loss, he got a call from Mike Neill, who homered in the 2000 gold medal game.

"A lot of us used that as kind of a leaping board. It kind of put us on the map, so to speak for baseball," Mientkiewicz said. "That kind of shows how special our team was."

HEADLINERS

Man Pays More Than $2,500 for a Beer

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — How much would you pay for a beer in Hong Kong? A New Zealand traveler paid 20,000 Hong Kong dollars (US$2,595) for his.

The man later told his bank he thought he was paying only about HK$19 (US$2.45) for the single beer, and that he believes bar employees duped him by adding additional zeros to his tab and then pocketing a big tip.

The case surfaced Wednesday in the annual report to Parliament by Liz Brown, New Zealand's banking ombudsman.

The man, identified in the report only as Mr. B, asked his bank to stop payment after he returned to New Zealand weeks later. But the bank said "it could not intervene" because Mr. B had signed the credit card receipt and told him his dispute was with the bar, Brown said in her report.

Mr. B could offer no evidence that the sales voucher had been forged, and it had not "obviously been altered," Brown noted.

Brown, who mediates complaints between customers and banks, told the man to withdraw his complaint.

Couple With Combined Age of 183 to Marry

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A couple with a combined age of 183 will tie the knot in New Zealand.

Jim Gorringe, 99, and Dinah Leach, 84, plan to wed Sunday at the St. James Rest Home in the southern city of Christchurch where they both live.

St. James' nurse manager Barbara Stanton said Thursday the home was trying to shield the couple from some of the intense public interest the wedding had generated.

"We're even fielding calls from the (United) States," asking whether they are "robust enough to fly over to appear on television," she said.

Gorringe has been married once before, while it will be Leach's third wedding. Great great grandchildren will be among the guests.

Both bride and groom emigrated to New Zealand from England years ago.

The Guiness World Records Web site lists elderly achievements including the oldest tandem skydiver, oldest windsurfer and oldest hedge maze, but does not have a listing for oldest wedding couple.

Stanton said both are sound of mind and body, and Jim is "very alert for his age" - just seven months short of 100.

He still goes to the pub three times a week for a pint of beer, although he said on New Zealand television this week that he will pass on the pint Saturday.

"I don't want to go to the altar with a sore head," he told Television New Zealand's "Holmes" show.

Dinah said her marriage to Jim "was not for his money. I've known him for a long time now and we've got along very well together."

Quipped Jim: "We won't be having children."

Voters Will Decide on Lap Dancing in L.A.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Opponents of a city ordinance banning lap dancing at strip clubs, bikini bars and adult bookstores have a chance to take their gripe to the ballot box.

The city clerk certified on Monday that activists have collected enough signatures to force a referendum before the "no-touch" rule can go into effect.

The City Council must now decide whether to rescind it, place a referendum on the next citywide ballot in 2005 or add a question to the Democratic presidential primary in March. They have 20 days to decide what to do.

Council members voted unanimously in September to require dancers remain at least six feet from customers and put in place restrictions that also would outlaw "VIP rooms" where nude dancers perform privately.

Supporters of the law have argued that adult entertainment places contribute to prostitution and drug use.

Club owners say the rules infringed on First Amendment rights and would force many out of business. They spent $400,000 to gather more than the required 56,941 signatures to force a vote.

mines and unexploded ordinance (UXO) injuries or fatalities. Their hard work and dedication, which is equally as beneficial as it is a necessity when dealing with mines and UXO's, makes them one of the most in demand units in the military.

An EOD Specialist undergoes a grueling training process, which includes 3 months of preparatory EOD training at Red Stone Arsenal, followed by 8 months of training at Eglin AFB.

"When I first got to the school for EOD, I must admit that I was a little overwhelmed." said Spc. Richard D. Nunley, an EOD Specialist from Gilmer, TX.

The lengthy training session is necessary to produce a knowledgeable and confident soldier, capable of performing the job of properly disposing of explosive ordinance, no matter what the situation or condition.

"The decision to become an EOD specialist isn't a light hearted one," said Stamm, "You're talking about these guy's lives here, it's a pretty intense job that we do."

Soldiers of the 704th have been put to the test during this deployment, despite the unorthodox manner in which their missions have been conducted. They have adapted accordingly and have overcome any obstacle that has been put before them.

Sgt. 1st Class supervises Sgt. Martin in preparing detonation cord.

"Being attached to the Infantry and Special Forces Units has really brought a whole new front to us." said Sgt. 1st Class John B. Peters, Section Sgt. For the 704th, from Brooksville. FL. "There have been situations in which our guys have had to do more than just their job while out on missions, we have to be able to do the job of an infantryman, or a Military Policeman, if need be, and still be able to concentrate and get our job done in the event that we encounter any UXO while we're out there."

The 704th have found virtually every form of UXO possible in Afghanistan, from simple land mines, to Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), and caches of unused weapons like Rocket Propelled Grenades and conventional Rockets. With each encounter, they use the utmost precaution and awareness to prove why they are elite professionals when it comes to UXO.

"Our main purpose in life is to keep soldiers alive and safe." said Stamm, "We're the guys that keep you alive and keep you from hurting yourself with explosive ordinance."

Many people are not aware of what EOD does or what they are responsible for. But, when considering the fact that Afghanistan is one of the most highly mined countries in the world and that Kandahar has not lost any lives or suffered

any injuries related to explosive ordinance, it is clear that the men and women of the 704th EOD are the cream of the crop. They exercise the utmost in excellence and precision when protecting the lives of soldiers out in the beautiful but potentially dangerous Afghan country side.

Keeping soldiers alive is a tough job. Rest assured that when the time comes for the 704th to return home they will gladly welcome the opportunity to move on and return to their families.

While reminiscing of good times back home, Sgt. Peters reclines back in his chair and sighs for a moment, then mutters, "It's going to be nice to be able to drive down to the local catfish house and get something to eat for a change…that's for sure."

A member of the 704th carefully prepares C4 plastic explosives on a cache of UXO.

NFL WEEK 10 SCORES

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Indianapolis(7-2-0)	7	13	0	3	23
Jacksonville(2-7-0)	**7**	**0**	**7**	**14**	**28**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Houston(3-6-0)	3	14	10	0	27
Cincinnati(4-5-0)	**7**	**10**	**7**	**10**	**34**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Seattle(6-3-0)	14	3	0	3	20
Washington(4-5-0)	**3**	**14**	**3**	**7**	**27**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Arizona(3-6-0)	0	3	6	6	15
Pittsburgh(3-6-0)	**0**	**7**	**21**	**0**	**28**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Cleveland(3-6-0)	3	14	3	0	20
Kansas City(9-0-0)	**14**	**13**	**7**	**7**	**41**

Final OT	1	2	3	4	OT	T
NY Jets(3-6-0)	**7**	**3**	**0**	**14**	**3**	**27**
Oakland(2-7-0)	7	14	0	3	0	24

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Baltimore(5-4-0)	3	16	3	0	22
St. Louis(6-3-0)	**14**	**7**	**0**	**12**	**33**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Chicago(3-6-0)	0	3	7	0	10
Detroit(3-6-0)	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**12**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Tampa Bay(4-5-0)	0	7	0	17	24
Carolina(7-2-0)	**10**	**0**	**10**	**7**	**27**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Miami(5-4-0)	0	0	0	7	7
Tennessee(7-2-0)	**14**	**7**	**7**	**3**	**31**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Atlanta(2-7-0)	**7**	**0**	**13**	**7**	**27**
NY Giants(4-5-0)	0	7	0	0	7

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Minnesota(6-3-0)	7	7	0	14	28
San Diego(2-7-0)	**14**	**14**	**7**	**7**	**42**

Final	1	2	3	4	T
Buffalo(4-5-0)	0	6	0	0	6
Dallas(7-2-0)	**7**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**10**

Monday Night Football, November 10, 2003

9:00 PM	W-L-T
Philadelphia	5-3-0
Green Bay	4-4-0

Courtesy of.

Weekly Weather Forecast

Mon Nov 10	Sunny	77°/45°	0 %
Tue Nov 11	Sunny	79°/49°	0 %
Wed Nov 12	Partly Cloudy	78°/47°	0 %
Thu Nov 13	Partly Cloudy	78°/47°	0 %
Fri Nov 14	Partly Cloudy	77°/47°	0 %
Sat Nov 15	Mostly Sunny	76°/46°	0 %
Sun Nov 16	Partly Cloudy	72°/44°	0 %

Courtesy of the weatherchannel.com

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