

FREEDOM

March 15, 2004

Watch



Marines visit local orphanage

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Bagram Idol hits the spotlight

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Good medicine

Sgt. Estella Brown, a licenced practical nurse with Task Force Victory, checks the throat of a young boy. He came along with his sister to be seen by medics during a Co-operative Medical Assistant (CMA) mission, held by TF-Victory Civil Affairs team Feb. 16, in Kuhday Dad village in Ghazni Province.

**Photo by Spc. Gul A. Alisan
55th Signal Company (Combat Camera)**



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Cover Photo by Staff Sgt. Vernell Hall, 55th Sig. Co., Combat Camera
Military vehicles, traveling in a convoy headed by Co. C, 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Regt., drive through Paktika Province in snowy conditions in late January.

EagleCash card changes

The overall check cashing policy for finance offices in the Combined Joint Task Force 180 area of operations is \$400 in personal checks a month. In addition, service members may also get a casual pay for up to \$200 (to be deducted from your military pay).

This makes \$600 the total maximum money amount available to military members in any given month.

Service members may get all of it (\$600) in local currency (e.g., Afghani), put it all in the EagleCash card, or receive \$200 in U.S. dollars (cash) and split the other \$400 in local currency, EagleCash, or a combination thereof.

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Marine Red Dogs visit local orphanage

Story and photos by Cpl. Lana D. Waters
Marine Forces Public Affairs

CHARIKAR, Afghanistan – For the past couple of months, a group of Reserve Marines from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, Marine Aircraft Group 42, deployed here, have been receiving toys and school supplies from back home as part of their unit’s campaign to help the local kids.

Until recently, “Operation Red Dog – Afghanistan’s Children” has only received small shipments, but last week, the Marines were bombarded with thousands of school supplies from a Saint Joseph’s Elementary School in Marietta, Ga.

With the abundance of supplies and the lack of space to store them, the Marines decided it was time to make a large delivery to a local orphanage.

Corporal Ethan Cross, one of the Marines responsible for carrying out the program, knew the Air Force was planning a humanitarian trip to the Charikar orphanage, so he asked them if the Marines could come along to drop off the school supplies. The 455th Expeditionary Operations Group agreed and within days the convoy was off to the orphanage located about 20 miles away from the base.

The bumpy, dusty trip was a real eye-opening experience for the Marines, who had never really experienced anything like this before.

“It was a complete culture shock coming from Atlanta, where you don’t see anything like that at all,” said Cpl. Anthony A. Weiss, the Marine responsible for starting Operation Red Dog-AC. “Their standard of

poor (is) so much worse than ours. Right when you pull off base into the town of Bagram, you see these Connex boxes where people have set up shop ... and when the store is closed up, they live in there. It kind of jerked at my heart a little bit.”

Along the route to the orphanage, there were several small villages the convoy passed through



Maj. Dave Deep and Cpl. Anthony Weiss, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, pass out school supplies to children at an orphanage in Charikar, Afghanistan.

with several small children smiling and waving as the vehicles went by.

“As we went through, we started taking handfuls of candy out and throwing them to little kids we saw on the streets,” said Weiss.

As soon as the convoy pulled up to the orphanage, the vehicles were mobbed by children of all ages, who were all very curious about everything.

As the Marines and airmen unloaded the trucks full of toys, clothes, and school supplies, Weiss decided to hand out a few pencils he had stashed in his cargo pocket. This soon escalated into a mob scene.

“About 20 little kids ran over and start grabbing pens and pencils out of my pockets,” said Weiss, joking that one kid even kicked him.

Even though his first experience in dealing with these kids wasn’t the best one, Weiss was still humbled by it.

“There were a lot of sick looking kids, and it was really sad,” Weiss said.

Once everything was taken off the trucks, the airmen and Marines began passing out everything to the kids in an assembly line fashion, but that quickly became a nightmare as well.

What amazed Weiss the most about this was what the kids headed for once they did get through the human barrier.

“The kids ran past the clothing and past the toys the Air Force was giving out and ran right to the school supplies that we were giving out,” said Weiss.

The outburst didn’t last long before the headmaster rounded up the children and staged them in a nearby classroom. Then two by two the kids came out, collected their new wares and went about their business.

As the convoy was pulling away, the children once again gathered around the vehicles to get one last glimpse of the American service members. On the way back to Bagram, the Marines thought about the impact they had made on the kids they’d met that day.

“If you can put positive knowledge and positive ideas into that innocence, you can affect them for the rest of their lives in a positive way,” said Cross.

With the first mission for Operation Red Dog-AC being a success, the Marines plan to push harder and go further for the people of Afghanistan in the future.



A child runs with her new treasures.

Mongolians, coalition ring in Lunar New Year at Camp Phoenix

Story by Staff Sgt. Robert R. Ramon
Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix

While most Soldiers in Afghanistan celebrated the New Year on Jan. 1, one group of Soldiers at Camp Phoenix celebrated the New Year nearly two months later – the Lunar New Year, that is.

The Soldiers of the Mongolian Army, serving under Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix (CJTFP), celebrated the Lunar New Year on Feb. 21.

The Mongolian Army serves as part of CJTFP's mission to train up the fledgling Afghan National Army.

The Lunar calendar is ancient – dating back more than 4,700 years – and is used in many countries including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

At the Mongolian Army's building in Camp Phoenix, Col. J. Vanchinsuren, commander of the Mongolian Mobile Training Team (MTT), and his Soldiers hosted a celebration attended by fellow coalition Soldiers.

"I'm very happy to have you here for the New Year," Vanchinsuren said through an interpreter. "We've been here for four months, and we are proud to be training the ANA with our fellow coalition Soldiers," he said while standing at the head of the table next to Brig. Gen. Thomas P. Mancino, commander of

CJTFP.

Traditional Mongolian cuisine, including lamb, red beans, white rice, raviolis filled with beef and lamb, cookies, fruits, dried cheese, and Airag, the traditional drink consisting of tea and fermented mare's milk, covered the table as the Soldiers sat at their places and listened intently.

With Mongolian music playing in the background, Vanchinsuren, wearing his homeland's traditional hat, described Mongolia's traditions during Lunar New Year celebrations.

"In Mongolia, we usually put the whole lamb on the table, but for now this will have to do," said Vanchinsuren as he motioned toward the sliced lamb meat nicely placed in a dish.

The celebration this year, known as "Year of the Monkey" by the Chinese zodiac, took place from Feb. 21 through Feb. 23.

In Mongolia, on the eve of the New Year, an annual national wrestling match takes place, and on New Year's Day, Mongolians' wake up early and travel to the countryside to visit their nomadic family members. Everyone wears new clothes, and each family makes lots of food and beverages to symbolize being clean, rich and happy in the coming year.

The celebration and visits last up to three days, according to Vanchinsuren.

Once they arrive at their destination, family members eat and drink together, and share

warm words and wishes for the new year, according to Capt. Amarbayasgalan Shambaljamts, a Mongolian MTT member. Mongolians also use a special greeting called a *zolgo*.

"The *zolgo* is a greeting for the oldest and most respected men and women," Shambaljamts said. "You hold a blue silk cloth called a *khadag* in your hands, palms up, and embrace the other person while holding it."

"Who's the older of the two of us?" Mancino asked Vanchinsuren, and found out he was the the elder of the two.

Vanchinsuren held the *khadag* in his hands as he reached over to embrace Mancino.

Vanchinsuren then greeted every Soldier in the room in the same fashion, regardless of his or her age.

Outside, a rare Afghan rain fell gently from the sky as friends in different nations military uniforms enjoyed lively discussions over the Mongolian meal.

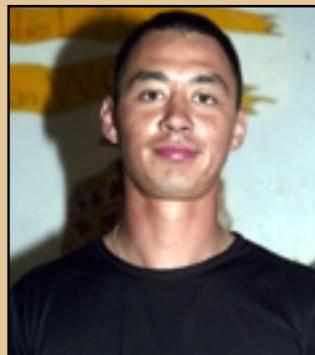
When asked how he felt about being here in Afghanistan during the New Year, Vanchinsuren thought for a moment before answering.

"Rain is a very good sign; the grass grows better, so that's a very good sign," said Vanchinsuren. "For that reason, I know that it's right that I'm here now."

Mountain Voices What do you like most about your job?



Sgt. Paul Roberts
Co. C, 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Regt.
"I'm a senior medic and I like it because we get to save people's lives, help people out when they desperately need it. This is my family and I get to take care of (them)."



Cpl. Charles Rising
Co. C, 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Regt.
"I'm a squad leader for the 60 mm motor section for the Charlie company, and I like it because it's a pretty cool job, you get to fight still and use your mind."



Pfc. Justin Shumney
Co. C, 1st Bn., 87th Inf. Regt.
"I'm the NBC guy for Co. C, 1-87 Inf. and I like the job because it's independent. I'm the only one in the company."



Spc. Colin Galloway
Co. C, 1st Bn. 87th Inf. Regt.
"I'm a cook ... what I like about being a cook is that it's about getting good food out to the guys and I feel good when they tell me how good it is. It just makes me feel like part of the team."

Shopping options expand to frontline troops

Story by Spc. Kelly Hunt
4th Public Affairs Detachment

SALERNO, Afghanistan – A Forward Operating Base may lack in size compared to other installations, but this hasn't stopped Soldiers stationed at Salerno FOB from bringing amenities to troops here.

Due to the small populations at FOBs, Soldiers stationed at them lack several things that larger bases have including a Post Exchange.

But the population at Salerno grew to the point where they needed something substantial, so troops decided to start their own PX/BX run solely by Soldiers in a combined effort with Army Air Force Exchange Service.

The FOB's version of a PX/BX may seem relatively minuscule, but inside, the building is stocked with essentials and items to keep troops entertained during their deployment.

The one-of-a-kind Salerno shop was opened Christmas Eve for troops and has been appreciated ever since.

Soldiers want this store here, said Capt. Aram Donigian, 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment task force



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Troth TF 1-501

Troops stationed at Salerno line up at the door of the Soldier-run Post-Exchange. The one-of-a-kind PX/BX is now a model for smaller bases throughout Afghanistan.

adjutant. Operating the store is an additional duty for troops at Salerno, but their dedication keeps the store open until a permanent PX/BX can be established.

The initial \$30,000 in merchandise that stocked the store was provided through Army Air Force Exchange Service and offered the basics for troops. A representative from Salerno signed for the supplies and was responsible for the merchandise advanced to the FOB.

The concept is called an Impressed Fund and allows places that do not have an operating PX/BX the option of man-

aging a small one themselves.

Salerno houses nearly 1,000 troops, and store operators find themselves sold out of supplies in about 10 days.

"We've done about \$100,000 total in business the first month and a half that we've been open," said Donigian.

Store operators keep troops happy by questioning them on what they would like to see in the store and by maintaining a close eye on inventory.

"As we're doing this more, we know

See **PX**, Page 10

Aid station keeps TF Phoenix ready to fight

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Robert R. Ramon
Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix

KABUL, Afghanistan —When most Americans are in need of emergency medical care, help is usually just a quick phone call away. U.S. Soldiers serving at Camp Phoenix here may not have a phone readily available, but medical assistance can be there just as quickly.

The Camp Phoenix Aid Station is on call at all times for the approximately 900 Soldiers who make up Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix (CJTFP).

"Our mission is to support U.S. and coalition forces with medical care so they're able to do their mission," said Maj. Ted M. Ware from Yukon, Okla., the officer in charge of the Camp Phoenix Aid Station.

CJTFP's Soldiers' are from National Guard units from more than 20 states, the Oklahoma National Guard's 45th Infantry Brigade Head-

quarters, and contingents from seven different countries.

"If they came here with no medical support, they'd be very concerned and unable to fully concentrate on their mission," said Ware. "Our presence here is a big reassurance to them, and they can fully concentrate on their jobs."

Staffed with 25 medical professionals from the 45th Inf. Bde., including two physicians, two physician's assistants, two registered nurses, a pharmacy operations officer, a noncommissioned officer in charge who is also a registered nurse in her civilian job, and 17 medics, the Camp Phoenix Aid Station is more than capable of providing medical care on par with that found in the U.S.

"Obviously, we're not back home," Ware said. "However, you're going to get the same medical care in this theater as you'd get back home even though some of our equipment may look a little different than what you're used to seeing in the civilian world."

The aid station personnel are capable of providing advanced

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Sgt. 1st Class Richard Newton and Sgt. Jacob George, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, perform "Open the Eyes of My Heart."

Idolizing Bagram..

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

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – The first ever Bagram Idol drew out hidden talent from around the base, here. Contestants competed in a talent contest Feb. 26, showcasing vocal and stage skills for the grand prize of \$150 in Army and Air Force Exchange Services gift certificates.

The event featured 14 contestants who performed rock, pop, R&B, country and original songs at the Bagram Clamshell in front a lively audience and three critical judges.

Each contestant was given a rating of one to 10 – 10 being the best – by three judges. The judges included two stand-up comics who had performed for Bagram earlier in the week and Master Sgt. William C. Hagzan, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 10th Mountain Division.

Hagzan good-naturedly played the part of Simon from the popular reality show American Idol, much to the enjoyment of the audience and contestants.

Butch Bradley and Sam Fedele, the other two judges, were a part of a comedy show traveling throughout Afghanistan.

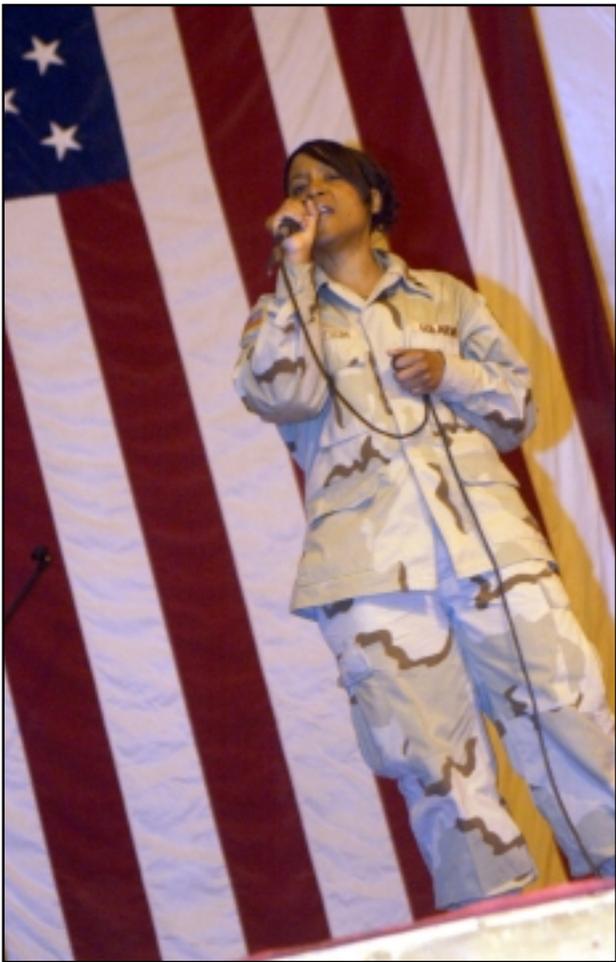
Their acts have been featured on HBO.

Bagram Idol was one of the "most highly attended events" since the USO shows during the holiday season, said Capt. Charles A. Musante, CJI, Combined Joint Task Force-180. "The feedback from the several people was really good, and people had fun," he said. Musante and Maj. Rachel Saxby, also with CJI, worked with Danny Alsup, the Bagram Morale, Welfare and Recreation coordinator, to put the event together.

The winner of the grand prize was Sgt. 1st Class Timothy J. Murphy, Assault and Obstacle platoon, 41st Engineer Battalion.



Sgt. 1st Class Timothy J. Murphy, 41st Engineer Battalion, won the very first Bagram Idol with his rendition of the song "Brandy."



Spc. Tiffani Lindstrom, 110th Military Intelligence Battalion, sings her heart out to the song, "Greatest love of all."



Left - Spc. Clifton Williams, 805th Military Police Company, performs his own original song for the judges.

Below - The crowd enjoys the very first Bagram Idol at the Bagram Clamshell Feb. 26.



From left, Sam Fedele, Master Sgt. William C. Hagzan, HHC, 10th Mountain Division, and Butch Bradley judge the first Bagram Idol.

West Point opens doors to Afghan Applicants

Story by Spc. Douglas DeMaio
Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan – For the first time, Afghan candidates may have an opportunity to attend West Point this fall.

A total of 146 nations have been invited to select six nominees to apply for admission into the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Out of 840 international nominees, only 10 will be chosen, with no more than two selected from any one nation.

Thirteen Afghan nominees were interviewed and tested by three U.S. Soldiers Feb. 4, to determine Afghanistan's six most qualified nominees to apply to West Point later this year.

U.S. Army Lt. Cols. William Gray, Donna Brazil and Maj. Bill Caruso, from the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan, worked with the Afghan Ministry of Defense in the selection process of the nominees.

The selected Soldiers took an English comprehension and writing examination to assess their ability to understand English as a foreign language.

In addition, each candidate was interviewed by a board that included Brazil, Gray, and Afghan National Army Brig Gen. Abdul Rahim Wardak, Minister of Training and Education for the Afghan Ministry of Defense.

"What we are doing is setting them (nominees and the MoD) up for success," said Brazil, the chief of the Military Academy Afghanistan implementation support team, and graduate and former professor at West Point.

To complete their application for West Point, the nominees were given a physical aptitude exam. Next, they will take the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Test of English as a Foreign Language. They will learn the results early this summer. Candidates who are accepted into the program will begin their studies in late June – and graduate in 2008.

As this is the first year that Afghani-

stan has been invited to nominate candidates, the admissions office at West Point is working with U.S. Human Resources Command on the establishment of a testing center in Afghanistan.

Afghan Soldiers selected to attend West Point will return to Afghanistan upon graduation and serve a 10-year commitment as officers in the Afghan National Army.

"Those who attend West Point and later join the ANA will bring a wealth of educational experience and also a strong foundation of values and principles to their Army," said Lt. Col. Maureen Cantwell, a 1985 West Point graduate who now serves with the ANA Plans and Design Team for OMC-A.

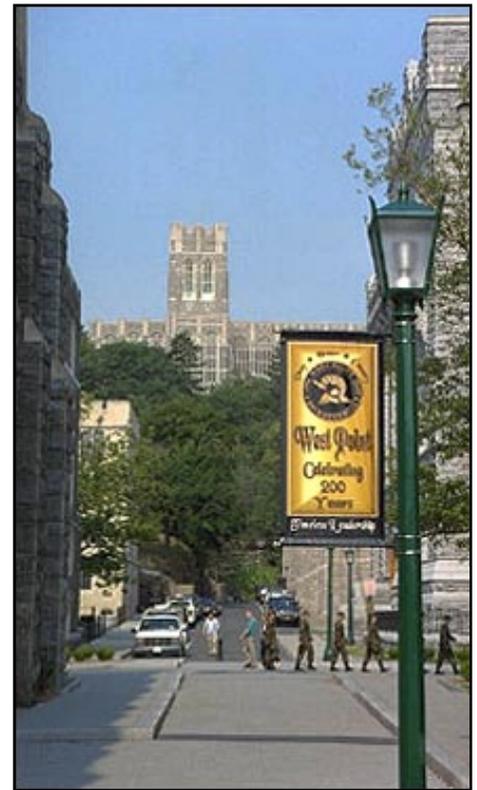
"Their country will also gain legitimacy and credibility as a competitive member of the international community in education and leadership of their new officers," she said.

There are several benefits to receiving a West Point education regardless of the individuals' plans to remain in the military, according to U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Craig Weston, commander of OMC-A.

"He will receive an excellent technical education, which will prepare him to help mold the shape of the Afghan Army as it becomes a modern force," Weston said. "A West Point education will produce an able young officer of high ideals, committed to serving the Afghan people for many years as a professional career officer in the Afghan Army."

West Point, founded two centuries ago, develops cadets in four critical areas: intellectual, physical, military, and moral-ethical. Cadets learn basic military skills, including leadership, through a demanding military program, a four-year process known as the "West Point Experience." Cadets also receive an education in the arts and sciences.

"Our young people seek experiences overseas through the military, the Peace Corps, foreign studies through the Marshall and Rhodes scholarship pro-



courtesy photo

Commemorative banners line the streets throughout West Point's campus, proclaiming "West Point - Celebrating 200 Years - Timeless Leadership."

grams, studying art at the Sorbonne, and a variety of other life experiences," said Maj. Steve Nixon, Deputy Chief of the Recruiting Assistance Team in OMC-A, also a West Point graduate. "Afghanistan will also benefit from the challenging education and training that the Afghan candidate will endure en route to a bachelor's degree in engineering, and a commission as an officer in the ANA."

Cadets earn a bachelor of science degree, which is designed specifically to meet the intellectual requirements of a commissioned officer in today's Army.

"If Afghanistan is to become a viable, strong and legitimate country that promotes human rights and individual freedoms, the officers who are leaders in the ANA can promote change within the military by valuing, demonstrating and promoting respect, integrity and honor," Cantwell said. "This would be a strong, positive impact on the ANA as well as the surrounding communities."



Two Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment pull guard while other Soldiers from their unit search a village. In late January, the Soldiers of Co. C performed missions in the southern Paktika Province to gather information and deter Anti-Coalition Militia in the area.

1-87 Inf: On patrol in Paktika Province

Photos by Staff Sgt. Vernell Hall
55th Signal Company (Combat Camera)



A vehicle convoy led by Co. C, 1st Bn., 87 Inf. Regt., drives back to its base.



A UH 60 Blackhawk prepares to land in order to transport Soldiers of Co. C, 1st Bn., 87 Inf. Regt., who sustained injuries during an ambush.



Soldiers carry another Soldier to a UH-60 BlackHawk.

AID, from Page 5

trauma management, advanced cardiac life-support and stabilizing patients until evacuated, according to Ware.

Depending on the seriousness of a Soldier's illness or injury, he can be evacuated to either the International Security Assistance Forces compound about five kilometers from Camp Phoenix, or to Bagram Air Base about 30 miles away.

Not only do the Soldiers of CJTFP reap the benefits of excellent medical care that is just a stone's throw away, but Afghan civilians are occasionally treated at the aid station.

"If someone shows up at the gate and is

in danger of losing life, limb or eyesight, we'll definitely take care of them," said Ware. "We also care for employees of the Department of the Army and Department of Defense working at Camp Phoenix."

Although the illnesses and injuries are usually minor, the Camp Phoenix Aid Station sees a steady stream of patients daily.

"On the average day we see eight to 10 people for everything from gastrointestinal and upper respiratory problems to sprained ankles," said Ware.

Despite working long hours at the aid station and having to perform the usual duties of a Soldier such as guard duty, the aid station staff remains upbeat and does everything in their power to provide the best care possible.

"(Staff members) do an excellent job here," said Ware. "They meet all challenges with cheerful smiles and a can-do attitude," he added.

Even with all the responsibilities and worries associated with providing medical care for the entire task force, Ware remembers the big picture of exactly why he and his staff are here.



U.S. and coalition Soldiers transport an Afghan civilian patient to the Camp Phoenix Aid Station in Kabul, Afghanistan.

"I support our mission 100 percent because I don't want to see 9/11 happen again," said Ware. "I think we're taking the right step in providing stability to a country that has been unstable for so many years."



1st Lt. Robin Sunday, a registered nurse at the Camp Phoenix Aid Station prepares to administer intravenous fluid to a patient.

PX, from Page 5

what to stock more of and so we're able to stock up on the items (that troops here want to buy)," said Donigian.

The money generated from sales is then used to purchase more supplies through AAFES, he said.

"We'll go up to (Bagram) and pretty much shop off the floor with the cash that we receive, palletize it and then move it back down to Salerno," he said.

The process of getting supplies from Bagram to Salerno takes four to five days.

Re-supply for the store depends on availability of flights to Bagram and usually gets accomplished every two weeks, said Donigian.

The effect that the store has on Soldiers' morale in Salerno is significant, said Donigian.

Troops can get what they need from the store, but more importantly, they can find ways to entertain themselves until they head home.

"I think that they like the treats you can get in there," said Donigian. "We've been bringing in Xboxes, Xbox games,

PlayStation games, TVs, DVD players, things they don't have access to.

"The other piece of it is that shopping is something to do, so going to the PX is just one more (thing they can do to fill their day)," Donigian added.

The store is run by the S1 section at Salerno with help from the surgical team on base, but when re-supply arrives, it isn't just these troops unloading the pallet.

"We get a lot of volunteers from different units here on post that help conduct re-supply," he said, reiterating that it's a group effort to keep this shop running.

In fact, "the system has run so smoothly and efficiently that FOBs throughout Afghanistan are looking into borrowing the plan for themselves," said Capt. Charles A. Musante, CJ-1, CJTF-180.

For more information on the Impressed Fund or on how one can be established at your base, contact Musante or Capt. Gregory Johnson, CJ-1 plans and operations officer, CJTF-180 at 318-231-4101.

Camp Cunningham honors Air Force hero

Air Force village remaned in dedication ceremony to honor fallen airman

Story by Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski
Air Force Public Affairs

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – A true American hero was remembered Thursday during a ceremony that officially dedicated the Air Force compound at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, to the memory of Senior Airman Jason D. Cunningham.

Cunningham gave his life in support of Operation Enduring Freedom while saving the lives of ten others on March 4, 2002.

The heartfelt service, attended by more than 200 Air Force members, soldiers, sailors, Marines and civilians, forever changed the name of “Air Force Village” here to Camp Cunningham.

Airman Cunningham, a pararescueman, was assigned to the 38th Rescue Squadron, Moody Air Force Base, Ga., when he was killed in action after coming under intense

small arms fire and a barrage of rocket-propelled grenades in the mountains of Paktia Province, Afghanistan, during a rescue mission there.

According to his official Air Force biography, Cunningham was the primary Air Force combat search and rescue medic assigned to a quick reaction force on that fateful day, when his team went into hostile enemy territory to save two American servicemen evading enemy capture.

In remarks delivered during the Thursday morning ceremony, which took place exactly two years to the day after Airman Cunningham’s death, Brig. Gen. James A. Whitmore, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander, spoke of the airman’s uncommon valor and of his own pride in wearing the same Air Force uniform that Cunningham donned with such distinction.

“The heroic efforts and selfless sacrifice that he exhibited on the battlefield will continue to inspire all of us who serve in Operation Enduring Freedom,” he said.

Col. Gary Woltering, 455th Expeditionary Operations Group commander, said that Cunningham’s ultimate sacrifice will never be forgotten by the men and women fighting the worldwide war on terrorism.

“Cunningham is a hero who will always be remembered for his courage and dedication to duty,” said the colonel. “He remains a comrade-in-arms to all of us who serve at Bagram,



Master Sgt. Taylor Crenshaw, 455th Expeditionary Operations Group 1st Sergeant, and Marine Sgt Maj. Jerome Alford, take a moment to reflect on the heroic life of Senior Airman Jason. D. Cunningham at the just-unveiled monument dedicated to his memory.

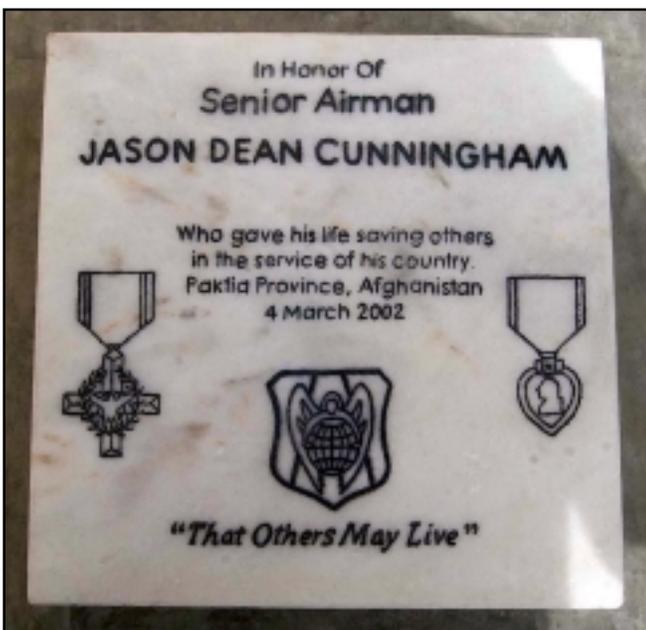
and his warrior spirit will live on in the Air force men and women who have followed him in Operation Enduring Freedom.”

From this day forward, a wooden sign with the words “Camp Cunningham,” built by Staff Sgt. Jonathan W. Proffit, a member of the 455th EOG Security Forces Squadron, will stand sentry at the entrance to the Air Force compound.

And just outside the group headquarters building, a dignified marble monument, made by 455th EOG Civil Engineers Capt. Matt Duston, Master Sgt. James Wilson and AIC Justin Cyr and unveiled during the dedication proceedings, provides permanent tribute to one of America’s “best and brightest.”

The 18 simple words etched into the stone speak volumes:

“In honor of Jason Dean Cunningham, who gave his life saving others, in the service of his country.”



A marble monument made by 455th EOG Civil Engineers was unveiled during dedication proceedings that officially named the Air Force compound Camp Cunningham

Army requests Comanche termination

Story by Joe Burlas
Army News Service

WASHINGTON – The Army plans to cancel further research, development and planned purchases of the RAH-66 Comanche stealth helicopter.

Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker told the Pentagon press corps late Feb. 23 the Army's Comanche termination recommendation to Congress is about getting the most bang for the buck for Army aviation.

"We have examined closely our resourcing plans for aviation and concluded that some of the capabilities those funds would provide are no longer consistent with the changed operating environment," Brownlee said.

From a purely business standpoint, it makes a lot more sense to upgrade the capabilities of the current Army aircraft fleet to meet the demands of the contemporary operating environment with the \$14 billion currently slated for the Comanche program versus getting the 121 Comanche helicopters designed for a different environment and a different enemy than the ones the Army faces today, Schoomaker said.

That \$14 billion represents about 40 percent of the planned Army aviation budget through fiscal year 2011.

The decision to cancel the Comanche program stems from one of Schoomaker's early directives to take a close look at Army aviation to determine how it should transform to best meet today's and tomorrow's challenges on the battlefield. The six-month study that ensued recently concluded.

Standardizing what comprises an aviation brigade was one of the

study's recommendations.

There are currently seven different types of aviation brigades in the Army today. That standardization includes the Army Reserve and National Guard. The reserve component has dozens of 1970s airframes like the UH-1 utility and AH-1 attack helicopters that had been phased out of the active Army more than a decade ago.

Given how reserve-component units have been tasked to support Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in the past two years, they should be "plug-and-play" with their active-Army counterparts — but they are mostly not due in large part to equipment differences, said Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau.

The 3rd Infantry Division's aviation brigade, recently back from Iraq, will be the first brigade to reset under the standardization plan. The future Army aviation brigades will have two battalions of 24 Apache attack helicopters each; a battalion of 30 Black Hawk helicopters; a utility battalion with eight light utility, 12 Chinook heavy utility and 12 Black Hawk helicopters and a number of unmanned aerial vehicles — for reconnaissance and possibly combat; and a maintenance battalion.

The Army plans to divert part of the terminated Comanche funds to buy more Black Hawk and Apache helicopters for the Army Reserve and National Guard.

The study also recommend that the Army replace the OH-58D reconnaissance helicopter with something more current as well as replacing its aged cargo aircraft and creating another light utility helicopter. The Army is setting up programs to determine what the new requirements are and part of the diverted Comanche funds will be used to buy those aircraft, said Lt. Gen. Richard Cody, deputy chief of staff, G-3.

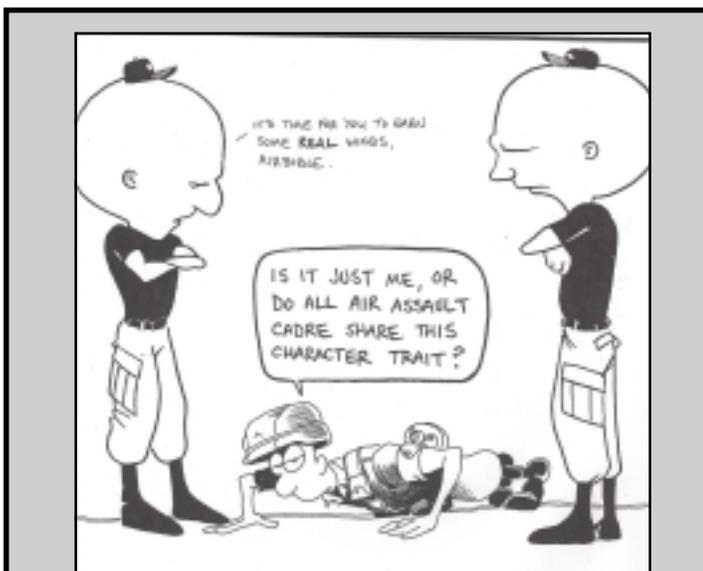
The study and recent lessons learned identified aircraft survivability as a major issue that needs to be addressed. Again, money diverted from the Comanche program could upgrade a significant portion of the Army aircraft fleet with the latest flare and chaff defense systems.

In total, the Army plans to buy approximately 800 more aircraft and upgrade another 400 beyond what current funding allows with diverted Comanche funds.

Not all of the approximately \$6.9 billion invested in the 20-year-old Comanche program will be a loss. Technologies learned during the development of the helicopter will be added to the Army's technology base for use in future aviation programs, perhaps the Joint Multi-Purpose Helicopter or Joint Cargo Aircraft, Brownlee said.

"If you told me six months ago that I would be standing here saying the Army no longer needs the Comanche helicopter, I wouldn't have believed you," Cody said. "It is the most flexible, most agile aircraft this country has ever produced with leap ahead technology. The makers of the Comanche should be justifiably proud of what they have accomplished."

However, Cody said he has determined that the Comanche is a niche-capability aircraft whose funding would be better spent upgrading the current fleet.



By Mark Baker

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