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by Capt. David Faggard
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

10/6/2009 - **BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** -- In a Soviet-era aircraft hangar here, a rivalry born during America's Civil War and the Battle of the Red River, is still alive and well - although now that energy is supporting the Afghan people.

Major Tobin Griffeth, an avid University of Texas fan, and Capt. Katie Illingworth an University of Oklahoma alum, created a personal game honoring the two schools' annual rivalry which every year is the talk of the two bordering states. They enlist family-member support back home giving one point to the corresponding school which donates one box of items like school supplies, clothes and shoes to the people of Afghanistan.

Texas is in the lead with 10-0 points over Oklahoma, but according to the captain, "boxes are coming."

"Yeah right," the major quipped to the captain flashing a "Hook 'em Horns" hand-signal to the captain.

"We started this because it's the right thing to do," Major Griffeth, a Schertz, Texas native and graduate of University of Texas, Arlington, said. "In a war where we'll spend millions on bombs or missiles, it only makes sense to spend money on clothes, or socks" the major said reflecting on personal observations of the Coalition counter insurgency.

"I think this is a basic way we could help stop the Taliban and the insurgency -- by winning their hearts and minds," the major, a graduate of North Kentucky's Law School said. "It's also a way for Americans back home to get out there and start helping. They [Afghans] don't have much and they hear nothing but bad things about America."

They team with Army Task Forces on the ground and the local Chaplaincy who often meet with local village elders, country-wide, to distribute the aid given from Texas and Oklahoma citizens.

War puts the rivalry game in perspective.

"It's somewhat trivial," Captain Illingworth, an Oklahoma City native and OU graduate said about the rivalry game back home. "But, it's not as trivial as some think. Our rivalry is a big deal and this is a unique channel that allows people back home to support their teams and support America. The energy is there already; we're just trying to re-direct it somewhere else."

The group asks that no food or money be sent, but donations of winter clothes, school supplies and shoes are accepted.

Donations can be sent via flat-rate priority boxes: CJTF-82-OSJA APO AE 09354, addressed to Major Griffeth for Texas or Captain Illingworth for OU.

The game started when the two officers were asked by their families what could be done to help. Soon, a U.S. Postal worker in Texas started to send boxes as well, and now college fraternities, churches and an Eagle Scout are assisting. Even the hometowns are involved and donations are streaming in, according to the captain.

It's the goal of the two to get help from other universities too. They hope other college rivalries start and mentioned the Alabama, Auburn rivalry, as well as the Army and Navy rivalry.

Major Griffeth is deployed from Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas and Capt. Illingworth is deployed from Hickam AFB, Hawaii. Captain Illingworth is a graduate of Catholic University's Law School in Washington, D.C. The lawyers are deployed supporting Operation Enduring Freedom's Combined Joint Task Force 82 in the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate. They are both fiscal and contracting lawyers.

Photos

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BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Major Tobin Griffeth and Capt. Katie Illingworth, Contract and Fiscal lawyers with Combined Joint Task Force 82's Office of the Staff Judge Advocate stand together in front of a large group of Humvees. Major Griffeth and Captain Illingworth created a game that would harness the energy of fan support for the University's of Texas and Oklahoma's heated rivalry. Donations of clothes, shoes and school supplies are sent in to the duo where the help distribute it country-wide to ground patrols to help the Afghan people. "This war will be one person at a time, and through the children," Major Griffeth said. (U.S. Air Force/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)

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Steve Satterfield, Afghanistan

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