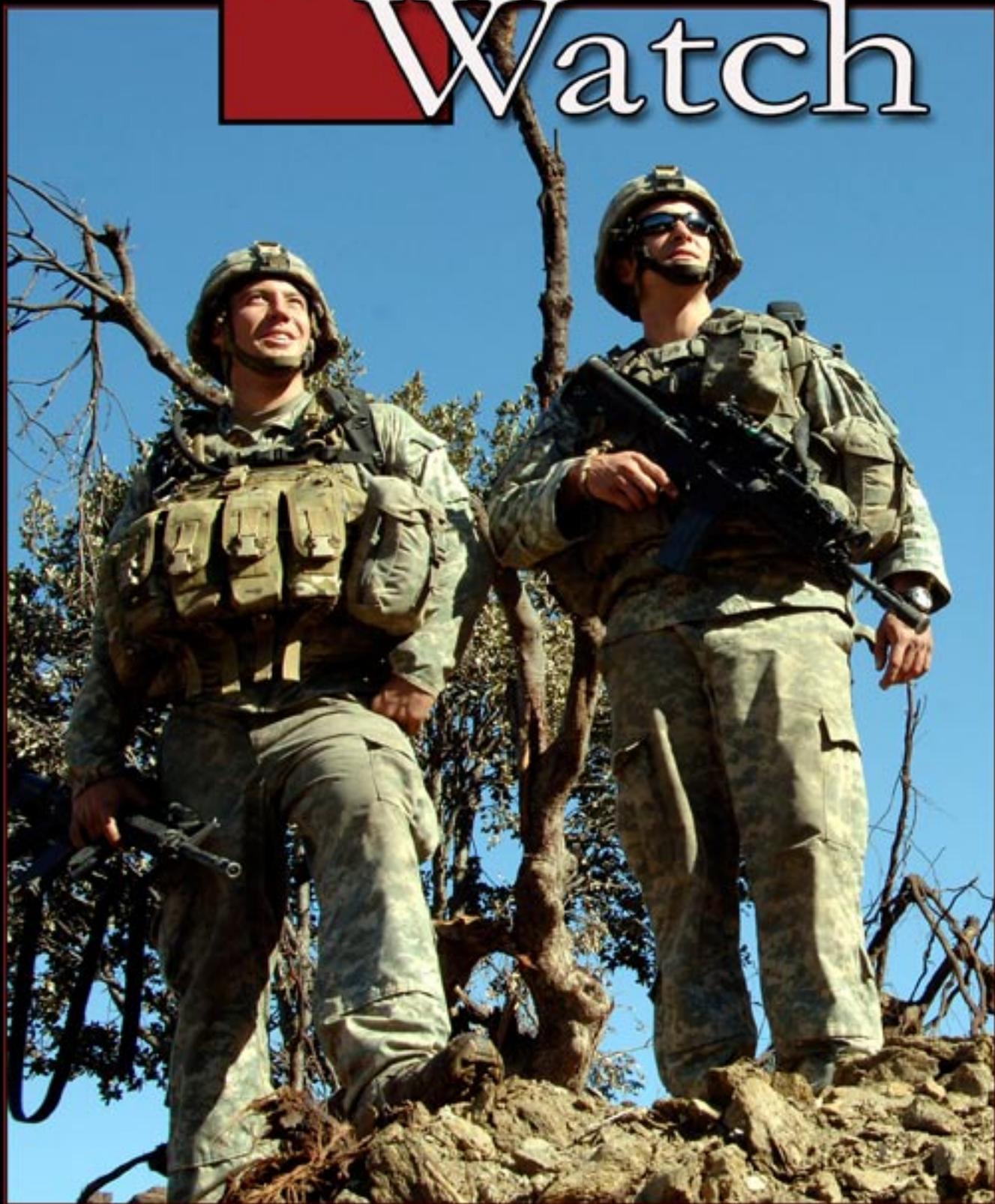


March 31, 2008

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN



Back to Business ■ Guinness Book? ■ Commo

Special Ops Marines deliver in southern Afghanistan

By Marine Staff Sgt. Luis P. Valdespino Jr.
Special to American Forces Press Service

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Special operations Marines deployed to Afghanistan’s Helmand Province operate at a fast pace.

Accompanied by a small group of Afghan National Army soldiers, the Marines are constantly on the go. Visiting villages, distributing humanitarian aid and always searching for insurgents. Their breaks between operations vary from 12 hours to three days.

Part of the two-year-old Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, they thrive on missions that have them patrolling for enemy forces. “We don’t like being on the (forward operating base),” one MSOC Marine said.

In the northern part of the province, an MSOC Marine said, his Marines were attacked four times throughout a four-day mission. He described how they overcame enemy machine-gun positions, mortar attacks and rocket-propelled grenades. “Needless to say, we silenced their weapons,” another MSOC Marine said.

On their next mission, a three-day assignment in the province’s north-central region to visit villages, the Marines slept on the desert ground – in sleeping bags, but not on cots. On foot patrol through the first village with no schedule constraints, they took no shortcuts. In full combat gear, they searched all compounds, streets and paths in the village. When it was secure, they set up distribution sites for the humanitarian aid they brought with them.

On the second day, the unit came under attack within five minutes of arriving at a small village. Immediately, the MSOC Marines positioned themselves throughout the village and began engaging the enemy insurgents. Halfway into

what turned out to be a nearly four-hour battle, a Marine who seemed to never rest said with a grin, “We’re not done yet.” He seemed unfazed that earlier a rocket-propelled grenade missed him by less than two feet.

Despite several other close calls, the Marines relentlessly pursued the insurgents until they secured the village, and the Taliban fighters were either killed or fled. Before they were done, the MSOC hospital corpsmen cared for and treated villagers injured by insurgents.

Afterward, Marine leaders met with village elders and committed to return with much-needed aid and support, as long as the Marines had the villagers’ support.

(Marine Staff Sgt. Luis P. Valdespino Jr. serves with Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan Public Affairs. He recently spent 16 days embedded with a Marine special operations company deployed to Afghanistan’s Helmand province from the 1st Special Operations Battalion, Camp Pendleton, Calif. The names and specific locations of special operations personnel are not used in this article for their security and for the security of their mission.)



A special operations Marine examines a poppy plant handed to him by an Afghan National Army soldier (right) in Afghanistan’s Helmand province during a patrol through a village in which they were looking for Taliban fighters. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Luis P. Valdespino Jr.)



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COVER: Soldiers inspect a local
house that was a target for the new Ex-
calibur artillery round on February 25,
2008 outside Forward Operating Base
Vegas. FOB Vegas is in one of the most
dangerous areas in Afghanistan. (U.S.
Army photo by Spc. Jordan Carter)

BACK COVER: The Seabees serv-
ing at Provincial Reconstruction Team
Farah, hoisted the Seabee flag in honor
of the Seabees 66th birthday, March 5.
(Photo by Gina Gillespie, Forward Media
Team, PRT Farah)

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Voting assistance made easy



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Help for Soldiers coping with Post Traumatic Stress

By Army Pfc. Daniel M. Rangel

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Thousands of servicemembers are returning home this spring. As they return to their regular lives, reintegration with their friends and loved ones can be a challenge, especially for those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“PTSD can occur after any kind of trauma,” said Air Force Dr. (Maj.) Kellie Griffith, Task Force MED psychiatrist at the Combat and Operational Stress Control Clinic here.

The three primary symptoms of PTSD are: re-experiencing, where one relives a traumatic event through nightmares, flashbacks or intrusive images; hyper-vigilance, which includes irritability and jumpiness; and avoidance, not wanting to think about the trauma again and doing anything to avoid it, Griffith said.

Another common symptom is what’s called sense of a foreshortened future. It’s the belief that the future isn’t going to work out.

Griffith confirmed the scope of those needing help stretches across the ranks.

“People will feel that since they’re in charge they should have their stuff together,” Griffith said. “They feel like they can’t come in there, that it’s showing weakness, that nobody else in their unit is seeking help. That’s not true.”

Often servicemembers are hesitant to seek help fearing possible professional retribution, but of those seeking help, treatment affects the careers of less than 5 percent, according to Griffith.

Any questionnaire for future military employment divulging your mental-health history will be sent to a health care professional, such as a flight surgeon, for review Griffith said.

“You should be judged by a mental-health provider as opposed to just some random person who may or may not be a fan of mental-health treatment,” she said.

Plans to cope with PTSD include combinations of therapy, sleep medication and medication specifically for PTSD.

“The gold standard of therapy is exposure therapy,” Griffith said. “The concept behind PTSD is that in your brain you have normal memories and you have abnormal or traumatic memories. The normal memories are stored in such a way that they’re filed away appropriately. They don’t intrude upon your day-to-day life. Traumatic memories are more like they’re hanging around your neck. They can come up and intrude upon your day-to-day life at any moment.”

“Exposure therapy seeks to bring up the memory, have you look at it and have you remember what you’re able to tolerate,” Griffith said. “It makes you face it and realize it’s not going to kill you. Eventually, patients get to a point where it is better filed, it is more likely to just stay in their brain and not intrude upon their day-to-day life.”

Griffith warns of the futility of self-medicating after returning home.

“If people [have avoidance type symptoms], a lot of times they’ll start drinking more,” she said. “They’ll drink to sleep and they’ll drink to feel numb. Alcohol is a depressant. Even though you drink the first couple of drinks and feel kind of loopy, feel kind of good, overall it’s a depressant. It’s not getting those memories filed away any better.”

Confronting the issues with those who have endured similar problems is far more effective for reducing symptoms, Griffith recommended.

“I encourage people to continue to talk with people from their unit, especially people who have been through the traumatic events with them,” she said.

Not only do mental-health professionals encourage servicemembers to proactively deal with their issues and those of their battle buddies, it’s the guidance from the senior leadership of Combined Joint Task Force-82.

“The battle buddy is going to be the most important part of the chain,” said Army Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Capel, 82nd Airborne Division senior enlisted Soldier.

Everyone returning from deployment will have issues re-integrating, which is normal, but Capel draws the line of where Soldiers and their buddies must seek help.

“We [define] post-traumatic stress as issues that individuals can’t deal with on their own,” Capel said.

Keeping combat stress to a minimum is a by-product of Capel’s overall leadership method.

“Additional stress comes in depending upon what type of environment we operate,” Capel said. “If you’re in a well-trained, well-disciplined unit, your battle fatigue is going to be low because you know for a fact that any enemy you go up against, you’re going to take them out.”

“Nobody here is trying to fire anybody for going to see mental hygiene or get help because they’re suffering from some type of post-traumatic stress — nobody,” Capel said.

For Soldiers dealing with symptoms of PTSD there is a pre-screening program in place to determine an individual’s stress levels at the Army’s Medical Protection System through the Army Knowledge Online Web site. Soldiers must complete the screening before returning home.

Capel recognizes all Soldiers returning home after such a long deployment will deal with issues, but believes things will return to normal before long.

“Fifteen-month deployments almost broke everybody down to their knees, but guess what — it’ll go away, and we’re dealing with it,” Capel said. “As we stand here now with about 30 days to go, you see a smile on a lot of peoples’ faces ... and as for those depression stages, they won’t last long.”

For thousands of Soldiers, reintegration will be a challenge, but there is a system in place to help troops cope with their problems and begin their lives back home again.

Afghan National Police return to Zormat

Story and photos by
Spc. Nathan W. Hutchison
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ZORMAT, Afghanistan – Afghan National Police returned to patrolling their normal beat here, after completing a six-week training course at the Jalalabad Regional Training Center.

The new ANP worked with the Afghan National Civil Order Police and Coalition forces targeting a madrassa (religious school) believed to be housing weapons and insurgents in Dowlat-dai Village.

ANP and Coalition forces moved into position and with search permits in-hand, the ANP along with the ANCOP, which is a security force providing temporary services to the district, searched the madrassa and its occupants.

“Intelligence had indicated there was training and weapons there,” said Army Capt. James E. Chapman, commander, Troop B, 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. “In the past, it has been pretty notorious for training people to make [Improvised Explosive Devices].”

Chapman said that although no enemies or weapons were found, the mission was still a success.



Afghan National Police go over a map with Army 1st Lt. Phillip J. Richards, fire support officer from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, to find the appropriate route to the objective in Zormat District, Afghanistan.

“The successful part was getting the ANP out into the population,” said Army 1st Lt. Phillip J. Richards, fire support officer from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4-73rd Cav. “The people were a little concerned about the ANP coming back to the district because the old group had caused problems.”

Because of the need for police in Zormat, the ANCOP patrolled the district while a new police force was recruited

and trained.

“There is a timeline in place for the exit of the ANCOP, but it’s more event-driven than time-driven,” said Army Capt. Louis Serria, part of the ANP Embedded Training Team, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kan. “There are certain events and things that need to happen, but once those happen, and we feel good about it, the ANCOP will leave.”

Richards said he was pleased with the performance of the ANP during the mission. The ANCOP did a good job of passing their knowledge to the new group, according to Richards.

“We don’t go into the homes and buildings during these missions out of respect for their religious practices,” Richards said. “The ANCOP showed the new guys the proper ways to search and the places to look that the inexperienced eye might miss.”

Once the search was complete, ANP officers spoke with the people to show appreciation for the cooperation.

“I think it’s key that these guys are back,” said Serria. “The police are imperative to securing and maintaining justice in these areas. Police are meant to have a closer tie to the community than the [Afghan] army.”



Afghan National Police and Civil Order Police move towards their objective during the ANP’s first mission since their return to Zormat District.

Teamwork puts F-15E back in the fight

By Air Force Maj. Holly Grant

335th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Unit

From the maintainers, to the aircrew, members of the 335th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron and 335th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Unit worked together with outside agencies to turn around and quickly bring a combat asset back to the fight after a setback.

In late January, Air Force Staff Sgt. Chris Petty, a 335th EAMU electro-environmental specialist, was troubleshooting an issue with F-15E aircraft 89-0492. His team discovered circuit breakers popped on the jet during operational checks. The problem...the wiring harness in the right main landing gear wheel well was damaged from chafing against a metal bulkhead.

“After further examination, Tech. Sgt. Dan Currie and I found a total of 57 broken or damaged wires,” said Petty. “Mr. Jeff Kerns, one of our engineers, immediately realized the severity of the situation.”

Kerns requested the depot engineers from Robins Air Force Base, Ga., construct a new harness for the technicians to install.

“Jerry and Alan Byrd, two brothers who are engineers at the depot, went above and beyond,” said Kerns. “They worked over the weekend to build the harness and ship it to us as soon as possible.”

When the wiring harness, totaling 84 wires, arrived, the 335th EAMU specialists immediately started to splice wires to return the aircraft to flying status in support of the



Tech Sgt. Daniel Currie (left) and Staff Sgt. Christopher Petty, work on the electrical distribution harness on an F-15E. Currie and Petty, are deployed from the 335th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)



Members of the 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron pose in front of Aircraft 89-0492. The team worked on the aircraft 19 hours replacing a right side electrical distribution harness. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

wing’s primary mission of expeditionary combat operations.

“The work was very intense,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Rob Townson. “The harness had a large number of wires to keep track of which made it especially challenging.”

Townson, Petty and Currie, along with Air Force Staff Sgt. Jason Cramer, worked 19 hours, over two shifts, to install and perform continuity checks on all the wiring involved. From the day the damage was discovered, to the successful operational checks, totaled 13 days. A good portion of that was allocated to shipping the wire harness from the U.S. to Bagram.

Prior to the wire damage, aircraft 89-0492 had been grounded for nearly a month and had to undergo an operational check flight before returning to combat. Crew chiefs, Air Force Staff Sgt.’s Aaron Leffel and Keith Chism, replaced numerous aircraft parts, performed operational checks and reviewed more than 180 pages of aircraft forms and associated computer records ensuring every task was complete and correct. Tech. Sgt. Judd Camp and Air Force Staff Sgt. Nicholas Tonino from Quality Assurance inspected the work and found zero defects.

The final stage was getting the Strike Eagle airborne for an operational check. Senior Master Sgt. Dale Wright, 335th EAMU Lead Production Supervisor, and Air Force Maj. Kevin Currie, a 335th EFS pilot, coordinated with the Combined Air Operations Center to get the aircraft up with two other F-15Es for support. Aircraft 0492 completed a successful check flight under the control of Air Force Capt. Kevin Pritz, 335th EFS pilot, and Air Force Capt. Bryan Simpson, Weapon Systems Officer.

“Without the hard work of the maintainers that day, it would have been impossible for us to get the jet airborne,” said Pritz. “They fixed, prepped and got the jet ready for us to check it out, and it flew with minimal problems thanks to their hard work.”

Military working dog retires

By Air Force Capt. Toni Tones
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

Airmen and Soldiers paid special tribute to Military Working Dog Black, who retired on Feb. 29, after 63 dog-years of faithful and dedicated military service to the Air Force.

“Today we recognize a true partner in our fight, Black, who is far more special than some kind of mascot,” said Air Force Col. Thomas Huizenga, 755th Air Expeditionary Group commander. “Black has been a true partner-warrior; a model of what a real wingman should be.”

Black was born in February 1997 and selected by the Department of Defense to join the elite force of military working dogs in April 1999. Black then started the basic patrol dog course and explosive detection training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, completing the course in four months. Black was certified in August



Air Force Col. Thomas Huizenga, 755th Air Expeditionary Group commander and Air Force Staff Sgt. Jessica Shoemaker, Afghanistan military working dog program dog handler, pin a 755 AEG medallion, the Commander's Coin given only to top performers for Integrity, Service and Excellence, on Black who retired after 63 dog-years of military service to the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)



Air Force Col. Thomas Huizenga, 755th Air Expeditionary Group commander and Air Force Staff Sgt. Jessica Shoemaker, Afghanistan Military Working Dog program dog handler, stand at attention with Black, who retired after 63 dog-years of military service to the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

“The relationship between a dog and his handler is special.”

-Sgt. 1st. Class Byron Sago

1999 as a detector dog on nine different explosive odors and moved to his first duty station at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla.

“Black has, in his nine years of service, seen more deployed time than most of us gathered here,” said Huizenga. “He’s served honorably and well, and earned his retirement with his loyalty and dedication to his duty and his partners.”

Throughout Black’s career, he was temporarily assigned in direct support of the Global War on Terror effort to Southwest Asia in 2000 and 2001, Bahrain and Southwest Asia in 2002, Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2007. Black also worked domestic missions deploying twice to New York after Sept. 11, 2008.

“The relationship between a dog and his handler is special,” said Sgt. 1st. Class Byron Sago, Afghanistan MWD program manager. “They do everything together and that bond is unbreakable. We ask a lot of the dogs and they don’t complain or say a word. They are the best soldiers anyone can ask for.”

Air Force Staff Sgt. Jessica Shoemaker, Black’s last handler, recited the poem, “The Guardians of the Night” in dedication to him.

“Words can’t explain how I feel,” said Shoemaker. “The poem is the best example to describe how important companionship, friendship and loyalty are to both the dog and the handler. It’s like the poem states, only others like us will understand our bond.”

Black has protected the U.S. from all enemies, foreign and domestic, and the lives of the handlers who loved him. He will return to his first dog handler, Tech. Sgt. David Moore, where he will live out his remaining days in peace and comfort...enjoying a few Milk-Bones.

Spreading the Wealth

C-130 aircrews, Army riggers reach air

By Air Force Capt. Toni Tones
455th Air Expeditionary
Wing Public Affairs

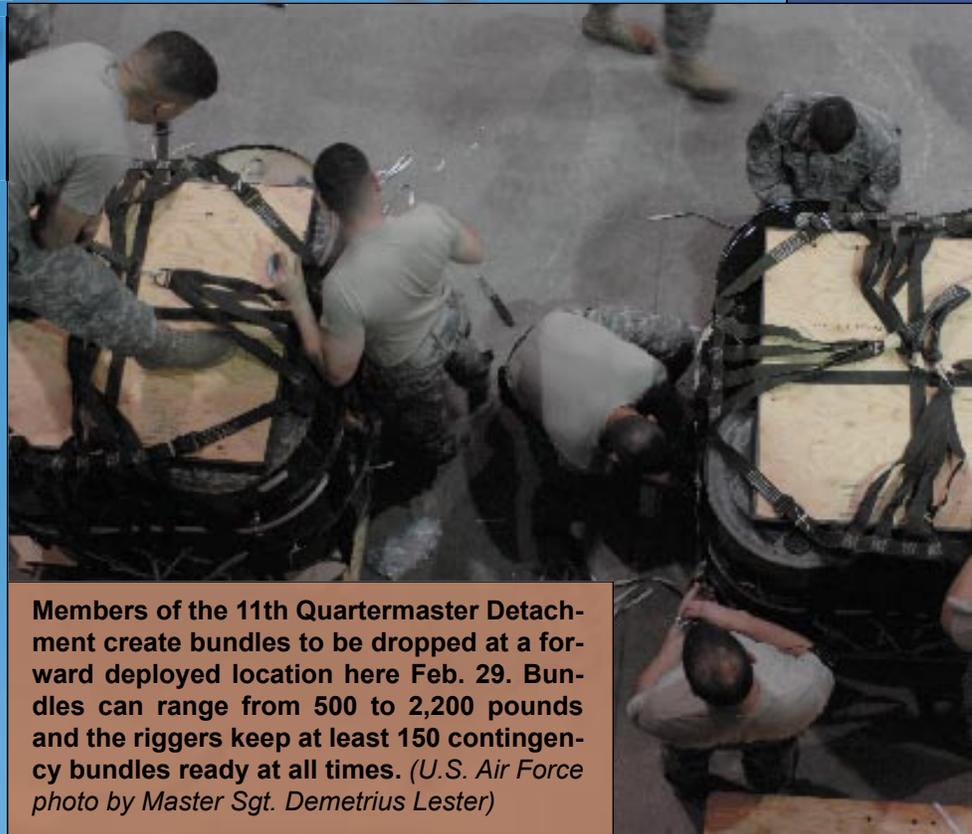
February marked an airdrop record for the C-130s of the 774th Air Expeditionary Squadron, but not without the support of the Army's 11th Quartermaster Rigger Detachment and Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force riggers here.

The joint team delivered approximately 1 million pounds of humanitarian aid to villagers, and supplies to forward deployed forces in Afghanistan in February. This was a 40 percent increase from January operations and breaks the previous record from September 2007.

"This winter has been very harsh and cold...bad weather and impassable roads were the primary reasons for the increase (of air drop operations)," said Lt. Col. Scott Morris, former 774 EAS director of operations. "We had to deliver the cargo to the villagers and the troops--airdrop was the best means to get it there."



Members of the 11th Quartermaster Detachment create bundles to be dropped at a forward deployed location here Feb. 29. February marked a new record of approximately 1 million pounds of airdrop. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)



Members of the 11th Quartermaster Detachment create bundles to be dropped at a forward deployed location here Feb. 29. Bundles can range from 500 to 2,200 pounds and the riggers keep at least 150 contingency bundles ready at all times. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

"Rotary wing aircraft can also be used to deliver supplies, just not as much and it's not as safe as the higher flying cargo aircraft," said Chief Warrant Officer Joe DeCosta, airdrop system technician and detachment commander. "There are two types of airdrop being used in OIEF, LCLA (low cost, low altitude) with CASA 212's and container delivery system, or CDS, using Air Force C-130s and C-17s. LCLA is very effective for small groups, but it will never replace the amount of supplies that can be delivered by CDS."

The CDS is the Army's system for building and rigging bundles using parachutes, plywood skid boards and energy dissipating materials, or honeycomb. The bundles can range from 500 to 2,200 pounds.

The 21-person detachment is set up to rig 50 CDS's with over 100,000 pounds of supplies a day for a 12-day sustainment period, but could probably double that if needed, added DeCosta. For February, the detachment created more than 480 CDS bundles

totaling 650,000 pounds for airdrop throughout Afghanistan.

Nearly 35 percent of the supplies delivered in February was humanitarian assistance to Afghan villagers living in extreme weather. The HIA bundles consist of essentials to include blankets, coal, oil and stoves. More than 100 people died from the severe conditions, Afghan government reports.

The other 600,000-plus pounds of supplies to coalition troops at forward locations who are defeating insurgents by bringing peace and stability to the region.

"We keep approximately 150 contingency bundles ready at all times to respond to any type of emergency or humanitarian situation that could arise," said DeCosta. "We sustain all classes of supplies, to include Ready to Eat, water, fuel, the units request...we've created bundles of Gatorade, ice cream, fruits, v

h drop record

even some of the frozen food served in the dining facilities.”

A rigger quality checks the bundles then stages them the night prior for transport to the aircraft. Once it's loaded onto the aircraft, the loadmaster and joint airdrop inspector check the load with a different rigger to ensure everything is secure and ready to drop.

“The only way for this to work is when the Army and Air Force work together,” said Master Sgt. Mike Pierson, 774th EAS joint airdrop inspector from the Delaware Air National Guard 142nd Airlift Squadron. “Operating here in a combat environment is where it all pays off.”

The C-130s of the 774th EAS continue to fulfill their role as the backbone of intra-theater troop and supply movement—with the help of the riggers from the 11th Quartermaster.

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Above: Paratroopers from 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, watch as an aircraft flies overhead dropping supplies in Paktika Province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Micah E. Clare) Left: Spc. Joshua Black, (center) connects a static line to an anchor cable on a C-130 while joint airdrop inspectors, Master Sgt. Mike Pierson (left) and Senior Master Sgt. Stan Martinez inspect the load. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

Spartan Day for the 173rd Special Troops Battalion

By Spc. Gregory J. Argentieri
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

The 173rd Special Troops Battalion marked Feb. 29 as Spartan Day. The unit took a moment to celebrate their 300th day in eastern Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey O. Milhorn, commander of 173rd STB, and his entourage, commemorated Spartan Day by visiting Sky Soldiers located throughout Nangarhar province, and praising their service, pinning Afghan Campaign Medals and eating cake.

“It’s a hell of a milestone,” said Milhorn of Shalimar, Fla., to his paratroopers. “We are two-thirds of the way in; you have accomplished so much and you make us all proud every day with your high standards.”

Spartan Day was established to give the Soldiers something to look forward to and a chance to acknowledge their hard work.

“It’s an opportunity to compliment all of the Soldiers battalion wide, and then focus their efforts on the days we have remaining so they can continue to watch each other and to protect the family as best as we can,” Milhorn said. “It is amazing, when you look back at where we began and where we are today.”

The 425th STB Soldiers have all played an instrumental role in keeping the wheels rolling, from cooks to mechanics, administration to logistics

and communications to intelligence. Headquarters and Headquarters Company’s part in STB has traditionally been one of support, but in the Nangarhar Province they have actual battle space to patrol and protect in addition to their many responsibilities.

The HHC Military Police Platoon partners with, trains and mentors the Afghan National Police. They recently implemented a 9-1-1-like emergency call center for Nangarhar Province. The Jalalabad Provincial Coordination Center’s 1-0-0 Emergency Call Center is modelled after the U.S. 9-1-1 system. It is the first of its kind in Afghanistan.

The Engineer Company has been busy with a myriad of building projects. The most important was forming personal relations with the people, local government officials, sub-governors, tribal leaders and village elders. The Sappers construction projects include; building forward operating bases, roads, schools, bridges, health clinics and digging wells. None would be possible without the help and cooperation of the locals.

To get this party started right, the Spartan convoy, carrying Milhorn and his personal security detachment, rolled out of the Jalalabad Provincial Reconstruction Team compound first thing in the morning.

“We got on the ‘Nangarhar 500’ route of running between FOBs by

ground to visit with all the Soldiers from the battalion,” said Milhorn. “We started out by going out to the Khogyani Fire Base. Khogyani is the home to Alpha Company, the Engineer Company. Then, we headed south to fire base Lone Star. It’s a platoon size fire base, and the southern most fire base in Nangarhar Province on the hills of the Tora Bora Mountains. Then we went back to Fenty Airfield where the Military Intelligence Company and Signal Company are located. We awarded them, and returned to the Nangarhar PRT, for the final ceremony where we awarded [campaign medals] and complimented all the Soldiers from HHC.”

“Commanders always love reenlisting Soldiers, pinning medals on their chests, promoting Soldiers, etc,” said Army Capt. Jeremy Riegel, from Dwight, Ill., company commander for HHC, and a member of the colonel’s Spartan entourage.

Riegel went on to explain how a great number of his paratroopers were new to the Army, but had amassed a great wealth of experiences from their time being deployed in Afghanistan.

“The Soldiers are doing a great job over here and they have really pulled together and accomplished a lot of great missions since we’ve been here,” Riegel said.

“Were on the down slope with 150 days left. We need to stay vigilant, stay safe and continue to take care of business,” Riegel said. “The goal is making Afghanistan into a self sufficient nation. Providing for its citizens without the need for the U.S. military, NATO and the U.N. to assist them.”

“In the end, a Spartan’s true strength is the warrior next to him, so respect and honor him and it will be returned to you,” from the movie, ‘300.’ “Only the hard and strong may call themselves Spartans, only the hard and strong.”



The commander of 173rd Special Troops Battalion, Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey O. Milhorn, celebrates Spartan Day, Feb. 29, the 300th day in eastern Afghanistan with Sky Soldiers at Fenty Airfield where Bravo and Charlie Company are located. (Courtesy photo)

Improvements being made to national communication flow

Story and photos by Spc. Nathan W. Hutchison
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

With the growth of Afghan National Security Forces since the establishment of democracy in Afghanistan, the need for consolidated information and authority has become essential. One way in which consolidated information and authority is disseminated is through Joint Regional Coordination Centers.

JRCCs are comprised of about 20 military and police personnel who disseminate information and guidance to members of smaller tactical elements. Such institutions require planning and management of units to happen in real-time, 24 hours a day.

The JRCC is an example of the movement and management of information and personnel through Tactical Operations Center-style operations.

Of the six JRCCs in place in Afghanistan, the JRCC for the eastern region, consisting of Paktya, Paktika, Khost and Ghazni provinces, is nearly fully operational.

“One of the main goals is getting all these provinces supplied with the same capabilities allowing fluid information exchange,” said Army Capt. Todd A. Book, mentor to JRCC East, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

JRCC East communicates with Provincial Coordination Centers and the National Coordination Center. So, the need for compatible equipment and programs across the board is important, said Book.

Along with technology comes training. The two-man mentor team provides help where it is needed. One place where it is focused during these early stages is computer fundamentals.

“We teach the senior [Afghan] non-commissioned officers and officers so they can train the others,” said Sgt. 1st Class



Sgt. 1st Class Eric R. Lasica (left), Joint Regional Coordination Center mentor, 508th Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, assists Afghan National Police 2nd Sgt. Farhad Sidiqi, the battle non-commissioned officer for the Joint Regional Coordination Center, on a map-reading program in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan.

Eric R. Lasica, also a JRCC mentor, 508th Special Troops Battalion, 4th BCT. “You have to start with the basics and work your way up.”

Along with computer training, Book and Lasica teach map reading and filling out and distributing reports.

“We want to get them at the same dissemination of information and information flow capabilities we have,” Book said. “Along with that, we have to maintain a consistency throughout the whole country because the information flow doesn’t stop here.”

Lasica said because information is being moved through the JRCC from the national and provincial levels, the need for accurate and expedient communications is paramount.

“We have two of the provinces up on all communication capabilities; very similar to what we would have in our own TOC,” Book said. “We’re still working with contractors to get the other two provinces on the same track. We have radio communication, but we need to get Internet capabilities to help with reports and real-time information exchange.”

There is still a lot to be done, but Book feels he has seen dramatic improvements and growth in his two months of mentorship.

“We’re working on mentoring these guys to build capability and capacity,” Lasica said. “It is a slow process, but these guys have made leaps and bounds in the last couple months.”

With the help of Coalition forces, the JRCC will have the technology and experience to maintain accurate communications throughout the government and security forces.



Army Capt. Todd A. Book, Joint Regional Coordination Center eastern region mentor, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division assists the battle captain for the Joint Regional Coordination Center on a map-reading program in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan.

New Air Terminal Operations Center opens doors

By Tech. Sgt. James Law
455 Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

The opening of a new Air Terminal Operations Center was celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Feb. 29.

“This is another milestone in our objective to transition from an expeditionary aerial port, to a strategic one,” said Air Force Col. Barry Mines, 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Group commander and the ceremony’s host. “It also significantly improves the synergistic efforts between the Army’s Arrival Departure Aerial Control Group and the U.S. Air Force.”

One of the organizations that will operate out of the 7,600 square-foot building is the Army’s ADACG.

“I think the opening of the new, upgraded facility is a move in the right direction...giving servicemen and women a better place to work and do their job,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Capel, Combined Joint Task Force-82.

Other organizations moving their operations into the new ATOC building include the command post, maintenance operations center, Combined Battle Staff and Survival Recovery Center, traffic management office, the

cargo distribution team, the movement control team and offices for the cargo yard and logistics readiness squadron leadership.

“This facility enables the aerial port for the first time to encompass all the aerial port functions under one roof,” said Mines.

Mines continued his remarks thanking the 819th Rapid Engineers Deployable Heavy Operations Repair Squadron Engineers for their “Herculean efforts” completing the project.

“With every construction there are always many challenges, and they [RED HORSE] overcame those challenges with their can-do attitude,” said Mines.

Some of the challenges were replacing a faulty septic tank, delays receiving materials, receiving the wrong materials and additional customer requirements.

Airmen from the 820th RED HORSE Squadron, Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., started the U.S. Air Forces Central funded \$740,000 project during the summer of 2007 while deployed here with the 1st Expeditionary RED HORSE Group. Airmen from the 819th RED HORSE Squadron, Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., replaced the 820th October 2007, and worked more than 20,000 hours towards completing the project.

“This project will definitely streamline many of our processes and I know the occupants are going to truly enjoy working in this facility,” said Mines.

The ceremony concluded with a guided tour of the facility by the project manager, Air Force Staff Sgt. Chris Ankoviak, 1st Expeditionary RED HORSE Group.

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Voting assistance

Abraham Lincoln best described democracy as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people ... Without free and fair elections, there can be no democratic society, and without that constant accountability of government officials to the electorate, there can, in fact, be no assurance of any other rights. The right to vote, therefore, is not only an important individual liberty; it is also a foundation stone of free government.”

For over 220 years our military has sworn to defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies foreign and domestic. From its time of inception, the Constitution has grown from the Bill of Rights to 27 Amendments guaranteeing and clarifying the right to vote. As we devote our time, energy and life to defending our rights, it is paramount that we, the military, set the example and exercise the right to vote. Federal, State and Local elections are on the horizon.

For those Soldiers deployed overseas, the ability to vote seems a hard task to accomplish; but it is not. Your Unit Voting Assistance Officer (UVAO) can provide you forms for registering, requesting absentee ballots, general information and answer any questions on voting in your particular state. Exercise the right past and present Comrades have so courageously defended over the past 220 years.

Be Smart, Do Your Part – VOTE! It's your right!

Mark these dates ...

15 January - SF 76 available; REGISTER to Vote!
15 August - Apply for your ABSENTEE BALLOT
or Use a SF 186 Federal Absentee Write in Ballot
15 October - is the DEADLINE to Mail your Absentee Ballot or SF 186 from Overseas
4 November – FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Web Sites of Interest:

Absentee Voting Frequently Asked Questions
<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/faq.html>
State-by-state instructions
<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/vagchapter3.html>
On-line Federal Post Card Application
<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpc.html>

REFERENCES:

AR 608-20, 28 Oct 04 Army Voting Assistance Program
DoDD 1000.4 Federal Voting Assistance Program

*For Assistance Contact Your Task Force Voting Assistance Officer
or the CJTF-82 Inspector General at DSN 431-4028*

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Photos From the Field



Soldiers from the Afghanistan National Army work together with the Soldiers and Marines of Forward Operating Base Able Main to reload ammunition into a CONEX after receiving indirect fire from a terrorist threat on Feb. 13. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jordan Carter)



Have a photo you'd like to see in
Freedom Watch Afghanistan?

freedomwatch@swa.army.mil



Senior Airman Sekina Moye, Bagram Mortuary Affairs, re-arranges coalition flags, March 17. Moye, a fitness specialist from the 435th Services Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, is deployed to the 755th Air Expeditionary Group and was recently selected as Bagram's Warrior of the Week for her outstanding work ethic as the only Air Force mortuary affairs technician here. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)



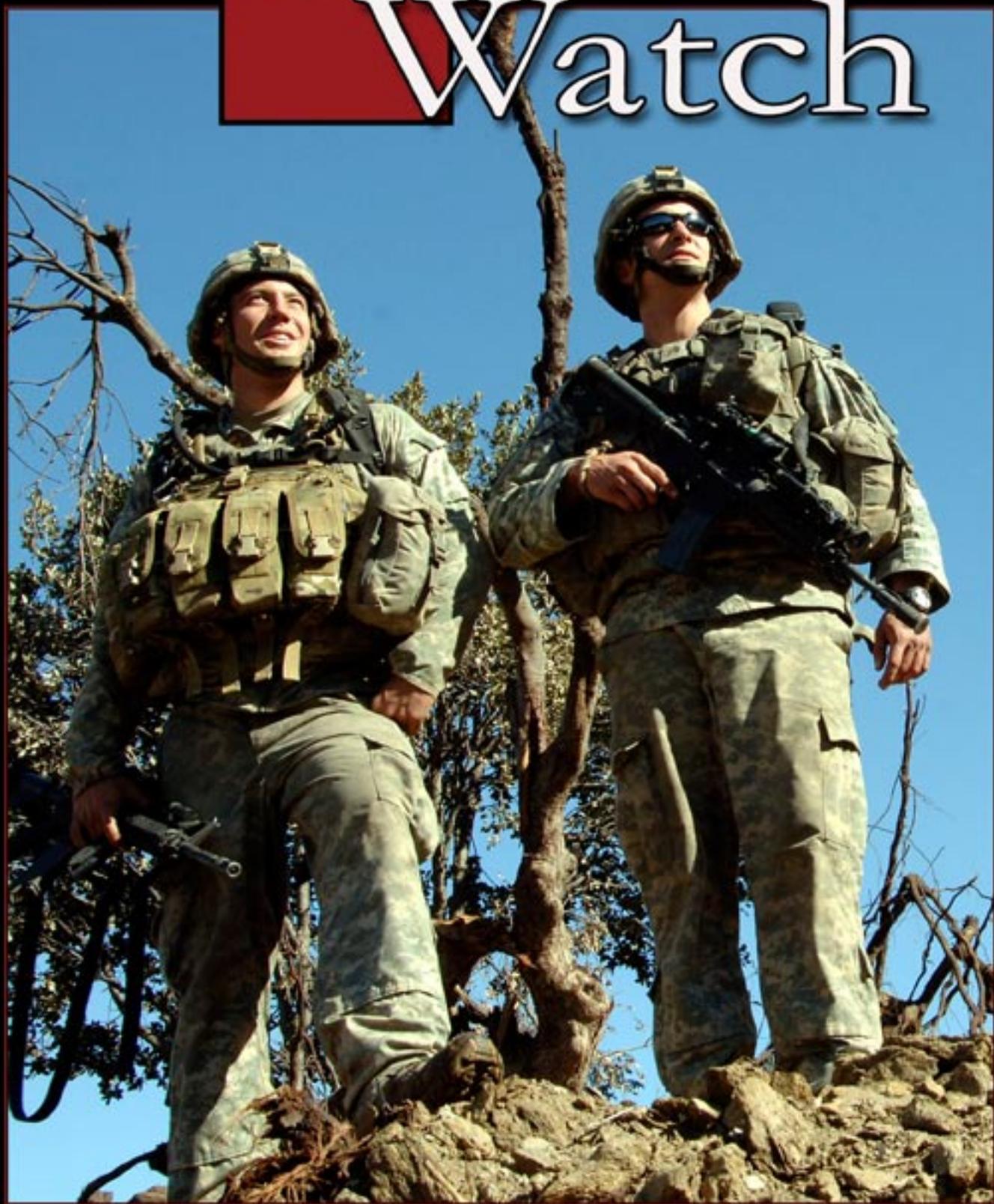
Humvees kick up dust while traveling through a mine field near Gadaykhel, Kohe Safi District, Parwan province, March 12. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman James Bolinger)



March 31, 2008

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