

April 21, 2008

Freedom AFGHANISTAN Watch



Heroes



Rescue



New Toys

Joint Chiefs Chairman Discusses Vision for Future

By John J. Kruzal
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, – The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stressed the need for more troops in Afghanistan, reduced deployment lengths, improved care for the wounded and a transition from “peacetime” to “wartime” processes.

Adm. Mike Mullen discussed his outlook on a variety of issues in a Pentagon Channel podcast interview April 7.

“The Afghan mission is really critical, and one that we are very dedicated to and that we know we need to get right, and we need to win in Afghanistan in the long run,” he said. “[But] we have not been able to resource it with a significant number of additional troops in the last year or two because of the troops that we have committed to Iraq.”

The continued commitment in Iraq, he said, has made Afghanistan an “economy-of-force” operation and, he added, that Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan would be aided by additional military trainers and combat troops.

“We really need trainers more than anything else to help us continue to develop the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police,” he said, noting that the U.S. military is trying to balance the requirements of the operation in Iraq with needs in Afghanistan, even as it works to balance the health of the force. The chairman noted that President Bush had earlier committed additional U.S. forces to Afghanistan for next year.

On deployment lengths, the admiral said that although the force is not in imminent danger of breaking, there is a need for greater balance. He told Soldiers and Airmen at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., that his goal is to scale back 15-

month Army deployments “as rapidly as we can.”

“Probably the single biggest thing that is on [soldiers’ minds] is the length of their deployments,” Mullen told the Pentagon Channel. Mullen said he and other military officials meet with troops frequently to get a feel for the mood on the field and at home. He said his wife, Deborah, spoke with military spouses on his most recent trip.

“We really need to build longer times in between deployments,” the chairman said, noting that families also sacrifice during deployments. “We recognize that families are a very important, literally, critical part of carrying out our mission, and so we want to be in touch with the pressures that they are under.”

Speaking about military health, Mullen said that while medical care itself is top-notch for wounded warriors, access to that care is often hampered with long delays and confusing procedures. He said troops need assistance in navigating the complex system. And some troops, he acknowledged, have expressed displeasure at the quality of mental health care. “And we need to move out as rapidly as we can to fill those needs,” he said.

“Our system has a way of focusing on the disability side,” Mullen said. “I am very [eager] to put the emphasis on the ability side, to put them in a position to be all they can be for the rest of their lives. That is what they want to do and we need to assist them in every way possible in doing just that.”

Finally, the chairman said troop deployment cycles and administrative processes appear to be functioning at a level normally associated with times of peace. The system should be modified to better assist current wartime operations, he said.

“We haven’t changed the processes to represent the fact that we are a nation at war, and certainly a military at war,” he said. Mullen identified career progression and promotion opportunities as examples of processes that could use an overhaul.

“We might be better off by starting in some cases with a clean sheet of paper,

recognizing we are at war and, in fact, writing a process that is more responsive, more agile, [and] gets to the target more quickly,” he said.

This entails innovation and creativity, he said, and “not just taking the process that existed in the past.”

“That kind of emphasis is what I would like to see,” he said, “... to create the kind of outcomes that we need for those who are serving so nobly in such a challenging time.”

“Probably the single biggest thing that is on [soldiers’ minds] is the length of their deployments.”

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COVER: Air Force Staff Sgt. Ernest
Kunde, 305th Expeditionary Rescue
Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk crew
chief, removes the dust cover off the
gun of a HH-60 before an alert mission.
Sergeant Kunde is deployed from the
920th Maintenance Squadron, Patrick
Air Force Base, Fla. (U.S. Air Force photo
by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester) See re-
lated story on page 8.

BACK COVER: The sun creeps to-
ward the horizon on a stormy, windy day
at Camp McCool on Bagram Airfield, Af-
ghanistan. (Navy Lt. Rebecca Hagemann)

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101st Airborne replaces 82nd Airborne in Afghanistan

Story by Army Pfc. Mary L. Gonzalez
CJTF-101 Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – On the 101st day of 2008, the headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) officially became Combined Joint Task Force - 101 and took command of the Regional Command – East sector of Afghanistan from the 82nd Airborne Division in a transfer of authority ceremony here today.

Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Schloesser, commander of the 101st Airborne and CJTF-101, praised the 82nd Airborne for their effective service over the past 15 months to improve the lives of the Afghan people, and promised to continue in that mission.

“We pledge to work together with our Coalition and Afghan partners in an effort to build a strong government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan... to improve the quality of life for the people of Afghanistan who have seen too much violence and terror over the last 30 years,” Schloesser said.

He added that the transition of authority also reflects the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance, the International Security Assistance Force and the U.S. government’s total commitment to the security and prosperity of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

“The purpose of the ceremony today is not about words,” said Army Maj. Gen. David M. Rodriguez, outgoing commander of RC-East and commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. “It is about better opportunities for the future of the Afghan people and it is about the Coalition’s enduring commitment to this nation.”

Since the Taliban era, there are 8,000 more schools and 140,000 more teachers, Rodriguez said.

About 70 percent of the girls and 97 percent of the boys in RC-East now have access to a state-sponsored education, as well as access to basic healthcare that has increased to nearly 80 percent, he said, resulting in a 25 percent reduction in infant mortality, adding up to about 90,000 lives.

“All of that is a large investment in a prosperous future for Afghanistan,” Rodriguez stated.

“We pledge that we will continue to support the Afghan National Security Forces as they provide security for the Afghan people by working together with our Coalition and alliance partners and interagency organizations,” Schloesser said.

RC-East is comprised of 14 provinces in eastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan.



Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Schloesser and Division Command Army Sgt. Maj. Vincent Camacho of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) uncasing the division colors during the Transfer of Authority Ceremony at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan on April 10. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) is assuming command of Combined Joint Task Force-101, Afghanistan (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Tyffani L. Davis)

This transfer of authority also marks the first time since World War II that the two well-known Army divisions have replaced each other on the battlefield. The 101st Airborne Division, known as the “Screaming Eagles,” is based out of Fort Campbell, Ky. Approximately 7,200 Soldiers from the division’s headquarters, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade and 101st Sustainment Brigade are now serving in Afghanistan as part of CJTF 101. The division’s 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigade Combat Teams are currently deployed to Iraq.

Additional Regional Command-East facts:

- There are an estimated 8.9 million people living in RC-East
- RC-East is 124,675 square kilometers, roughly the size of Georgia and South Carolina
- There are seven ethnic groups in RC-East
- RC-East shares 450 miles of border with Pakistan
- There are 15 Provincial Reconstruction Teams in RC-East

Medic recognized for actions during insurgent assault

Story by Army
Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Army Sgt. Kyle S. Dirkintis, a medic from Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), also known as “The Rock”, was awarded a Bronze Star for valor April 1 for his actions at Ranch House Outpost, Kunar province.

Dirkintis, a Racine, Wis. native, woke to the sound of gun fire Aug. 22, 2007, something he hadn’t heard during the first three months of his deployment at Ranch House, a remote outpost defended by 25 Soldiers.

Minutes after the first shot, roughly 20 insurgents breached the outpost’s perimeter.

“We were pretty surprised,” said Dirkintis. “We didn’t know what was going on. It was the first time we had been in contact out there.”

Dirkintis and the rest of 1st Platoon, Chosen Company, put on their gear while Soldiers manning the perimeter exchanged gun fire with the approaching insurgents.

As Dirkintis headed toward the fight, a volley of rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire hit the aid station and tactical operations center. The insurgents had taken up positions at the Afghan Security Guards’ post.

The fleeing ASG left half the perimeter unguarded, which allowed the insurgents to breach the wire.

ASG is a privately owned Afghan security company.

“Post 4, post 3 and post 2 had all called in and said they had made contact,” said Dirkintis. “At that point in time, we sustained our first casualty in the fight. Our forward observer received some shrapnel to his face.”

Dirkintis treated the Soldier’s shrapnel wounds while insurgent fighter’s approached 40 meters south of his position.

“I exchanged weapons with him (for the Soldier’s M-4) and ran down to the TOC to let the guys know what was going on with the casualty. Rounds were skipping by me. I was seeing rocks explode every where. You could hear RPG after RPG exploding. I kept thinking is this really happening?”

After moving to the TOC to inform 1st Lt. Matthew Ferrara about the in-

chine-gun and small-arms fire. Unable to advance, both Soldiers stayed put and returned fire. The fighting between the forces was escalating and Phillips told Dirkintis to get inside the building.

“Rounds started coming through the building so I went back outside and got behind some sandbags,” said Dirkintis.

Once outside, Soldiers manning post 2 yelled down that insurgents were maneuvering around the living quarters. Phillips threw hand grenades around one corner while Dirkintis wheeled around to fire down another corner.

“As soon as I kneeled and looked around the corner I took a shot to the chest,” said Dirkintis. “At first I didn’t know I had been shot. My vision had gotten real blurry. It was difficult to breath. My entire body felt really, really numb.”

The force of bullet knocked Dirkintis to the ground and punctured a lung.

“I tried to crawl to all fours and to get up, but that’s when I started coughing up blood,” said Dirkintis. “I just couldn’t get up. It hurt really bad.”

Dirkintis continued to try to get up and get back in the fight. Unable to stand, he was dragged by Phillips 30 meters

to the mortar pit. While the battle raged on, Dirkintis helped Soldiers find medical supplies in his aid bag and struggled to keep conscious.

For the next hour and a half, Soldiers used hand grenades, claymore mines, small arms and heavy weapons to repel the attacking Taliban. A-10 Warthog jets strafed a section of the base occupied by insurgent fighters. By the end of the fighting, 11 of 25 Soldiers defending Ranch House Outpost had suffered injuries.

Dirkintis was medevaced to Germany where he recovered and, against doctors advice, volunteered to come back to Afghanistan.

Dirkintis now works in the pharmacy on Forward Operating Base Fenty, Nangarhar province.



Army Sgt. Kyle S. Dirkintis, a medic from Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), was awarded a Bronze Star for valor April 1 for his actions at Ranch House Outpost, Kunar province. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Nicholas Sternberg)

jured Soldier, the building was hit by a RPG.

“I remember the lights came down from the ceiling and it got really dusty in there,” said Dirkintis “I can’t remember if the radios had gone down or not, but the antennas had gotten blown off the roof and turned into a bunch of twisted metal.”

After the RPG hit the TOC, Army Staff Sgt. Eric Phillips ran inside and informed Ferrara and Dirkintis that post 3 was under heavy attack and a Soldier had been shot at post 2.

“I grabbed my aid bag and went outside with Phillips,” said Dirkintis.

Tactically moving toward post 2, Dirkintis and Phillips took cover behind post 2’s living quarters where they were pinned down for 15 minutes by ma-

Afghanistan opens new civil order police training center

Story and photos by
 Marine Staff Sgt. Luis P. Valdespino Jr.
 CSTC-A Public Affairs

Afghan and American leaders celebrated the grand opening of a new facility for training Afghan National Civil Order Police in Adreskan, Afghanistan, April 7.

The Afghan Minister of Interior, Abdul Zazar Moqbal, and U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Robert W. Cone, commanding general of the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan, participated in a grand opening ceremony then toured the Herat Province facility with other CSTC-A and Afghan National Police personnel.

The opening of the Adreskan training center “means a greater capacity to train ANCOP – especially out here in the west,” said Army Col. Mark Russo, Regional Police Advisory Team West commander.

Afghans and Americans present at the grand opening said the new facility is more than just a new training ground. It is also a symbol that the ANP and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are serious about providing for the security and protection of Afghans throughout their country, explained Sgt. 1st Class



The Afghan Minister of Interior, Abdul Zazar Moqbal, and U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Robert W. Cone, commanding general of the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan, join in a combined press conference at the new Adreskan Afghan National Civil Order Police training center April 7 in Herat Province after a grand opening ceremony.

Christian Leva, team sergeant for Team Enforcer Police Mentor Team.

It is a definitive sign that the security of Afghans in this part of the country is important to the government and ANP, said Leva.

The local community leaders respond favorably to ANP having a training ground in Adreskan, Leva said. Building the facility had a positive influence on the local economy by providing jobs here, he added.

Many Afghans previously would only see ANP while they were patrolling or conducting missions seeking insurgents in the villages and districts, Leva said. Having a training center in Adreskan means ANCOP and other ANP will receive local training. Additional police in Herat Province will reduce time responding to insurgent and other criminal activities, said Leva.

The school opens with two classes, an ANCOP class of 343 students and an Afghan National Auxiliary Police sustainment class of 86 policemen. The ANAP will have the opportunity to become regular ANP upon graduation of a three-week course, said Air Force Col. Lansen P. Conley, CSTC-A ANP Integration Branch chief.

An ANCOP instructor, ANP Maj. Abdul Wasee, said he looks forward to teaching at the new facility. He said the center will help to turn even more Afghans into productive citizens for their country.



Afghan National Civil Order Police-in-training tour the new Adreskan ANCOP training center April 7 in Herat Province after a grand opening ceremony.

Czech Republic begins reconstruction effort in eastern Afghanistan

By Air Force Master Sgt. Larry Schneck
AFN Afghanistan

The Czech Republic inaugurated a Provincial Reconstruction Team at Forward Operating Base Shank, Lowgar Province, eastern Afghanistan, March 19.

The European nation deployed a contingent of soldiers to the eastern area of the country, 50 miles from the border with Pakistan. The partnership of Czechs and Afghans is crucial as the Afghan people expand their governance capabilities, and as the Afghans develop and implement their vision for a stable, economically sustainable nation that leads its people and secures its territories.

The mission of the PRT is to carry out construction improvements such as water projects, agricultural development, new schools, roads, government buildings, and other infrastructure.

“I think we can concentrate on development of agriculture or water and because we have a good experience also from the past,” said Martin Bartak, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic and Afghanistan are historical partners. The former country of Czechoslovakia was involved in industrial projects, especially in the area of public water improvements.

The minister expressed support for the mine exploration industry, saying his country has technical expertise in that area it can train and mentor the Afghans.

“People in the Czech Republic are beginning to understand that the Czech Republic is, in fact, quite a rich country, and that our responsibility now is to help other countries,” said Igor Klimes, Czech civilian project manager.

The U.S. Army 508th Special Troops Battalion has oper-

ated in Lowgar and surrounding provinces and welcomes the Czech soldier’s arrival. “We already have a pretty good understanding of the area,” said Army Captain William Wash, 508th STB in charge of civil military operations. “Teamwork is always better than trying to go it alone. So, they decided to come here to Lowgar (Province).”

The Czechs recently joined the international North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Their PRT at FOB Shank is part of the U.S.-led Coalition helping to rebuild this nation of 32 million people.

Last June, they sent an advance team to pave the way and prepare for this new mission. Before the ceremony to mark the official beginning of the new Czech PRT, Hamid Karzai, president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, accepted the credentials of the first residing ambassador of the Czech Republic to Afghanistan.

The Czechs are proud of their nation’s work with the international community. “I can say quite proudly we’re a regular member of NATO (and) of the Alliance,” said Bartak. “We behave like a good ally and we do our job here. We try to enlarge our effort in Afghanistan, because we understand how important it is.

“We need to be sure that whatever we do here; it’s on Afghan’s

demand. And whatever results we have is for the good of the Afghan people,” said Bartak.

The Czech’s efforts combine civilian and military resources from a country willing to help Afghanistan. This is the fourth mission performed by the Czech Republic in support of the NATO Alliance and U.S. Coalition. The Czechs are serving alongside Germans in northern Afghanistan, at a field hospital in the capital of Kabul, and on security missions in the south with the British.



The Czech Republic raised their national colors over Forward Operating Base Shank in a ceremony inaugurating a Czech-run Provincial Reconstruction Team. The Czech Republic is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a Coalition member of the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force 101. (508th Special Troops Battalion courtesy photo)

Outside the box:

305th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron

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

Locating and returning downed pilots, aircrew and special operations forces in the area of responsibility has taken a back seat for the Airmen of the 305th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan.

Filling a role outside their traditional Combat Search and Rescue duties, the 451st Air Expeditionary Group unit's mission, under the tactical control of the Army, is to provide aeromedical evacuation for injured International Security Assistance Force soldiers and local nationals.

Since January, the rescue squadron, including the 33rd ERQS, is credited with executing more than 250 combat sorties, flying more than 260 hours while providing medevac coverage that saved 106 Coalition lives.

Since deploying here in mid-March, the 305th has completed 51 missions -- providing overhead cover for 23, and executing 14 transports with injuries involving life, limb or eye and 14 transports with injuries other than life, limb or eye.

The unit accomplishes this mission with the unique capabilities of the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters.

"We'll go out with a DUSTOFF, that is the Army medevac, during the day," said Air Force Lt. Col. Brett Howard, 305th ERQS Medevac Operations deputy director. "They will generally be the primary aircraft, but they do not have weapons on their aircraft like we do, so we provide overhead cover."

The Pave Hawks are also equipped with Forward Looking Infrared. FLIR is a system that provides the ability to conduct operations at night and during periods of low illumination. This capability allows the unit

to shift roles during night operations and become the primary mode of transportation with an AH-64 Apache as its escort, said Howard.

"We may get a patient who has received battle field dressing treatment or maybe somebody who has been packaged up at one of the (forward operating bases) that does not have the same level of treatment and care as what's available at Kandahar," said Howard.

There is no discrimination between patients; everyone treated is provided the same level of care.

During a recent medevac of an Afghan National Police officer who suffered a gun-shot wound to the leg, basic first aid was administered in the field to include splinting his legs for stabilization, according to Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Everly, 305th ERQS flight medic.

"When we got him, I started an I.V. and continued medical care, preparing him for the receiving facility here," said Everly.

Everly pointed out the forces in the field face challenges when administering medical care to the wounded.

"Their hands are tied because of whatever operations are going on (and) any bad guys in the area," said Everly. "Once we get in the air and out of the area, we have the opportunity to do a little bit more."

Aeromedical staging operations are a critical feature of airpower in the Area Of Responsibility. If a wounded patient is alive upon arrival at an Air Force Theater Hospital, he or she has a 98 percent chance of survival.

"We are here in Afghanistan supporting coalition forces and the Army's DUSTOFF program," said Everly. "As long as our brothers and sisters are in harms way, I want to be here."



(main) Lt. Col. John Phalon, 305th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk co-pilot, prepares to fly a mission during a alert call March 31. Phalon is deployed from the 305th Rescue Squadron, Davis Mothan Air Force Base, Ariz.

(U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Demetrius

Rescue Squadron



(above) Maj. Paul Anderson, 305th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk pilot, responds to an alert call March 31. Anderson is deployed from the 305th Rescue Squadron, Davis Mothan Air Force Base, Ariz.



(top) Air Force Maj. John Buterbaugh, 305th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron doctor, prepares his gear for a mission during an alert call here March 31. Buterbaugh is deployed from the 306th Rescue Squadron, Davis Mothan Air Force Base, Ariz.

Bagram first to operate new transporter

By Air Force Capt. Toni Tones

455 Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

The first Air Force High Deck Patient Loading Platform was designated operational with the transfer of five patients during a KC-135 channel mission from Afghanistan to Germany April 9.

The HDPLP is a special purpose vehicle with an enclosed lighted and climate-controlled cabin designed to access high deck platform airframes, such as KC-135, CRAF 767 and KC-10, for servicing and loading and unloading patients. The platform has various configurations, but the most common is for mixed capacity which holds up to six litters and 10 ambulatory patients or staff.

There are only three of these vehicles in the Air Force inventory; two at operational locations, Bagram and Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and one for testing at Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

“This new capability enhances the safety of ambulatory and litter patients giving them every possible means of a full recovery,” said Lt. Col. Robert Rocco, 455th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron commander. “The controlled environment limits the amount of time the patient is exposed to outside elements, diseases and viruses which can lead to infections that can affect recovery.”

Air Force Staff Sgt. Hannah Laras, 435th Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility shift leader, added the new vehicle also provides a more comfortable and safer transport to the KC-135.

“We used to use a K-loader and an aluminum ramp called the patient loading system to transfer patients, which wasn’t very stable” said Sergeant Laras. “The PLS was not meant for recurring uses. Patient safety comes first and the new HDPLP ensures that.”

Anywhere from 125-150 patients are transported per month from the Craig Joint Theater Hospital here to Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Facility in Germany via semiweekly medical evacuation missions. These patients require specialized medical care unavailable at the forward deployed locations.

“Patients already receive outstanding ‘care in the air’ through our AE missions and world-class support at the various medical treatment facilities,” said Colonel Rocco. “With the procurement of this vehicle, Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines will get the same world-class support as they’re being transported from the hospital to the aircraft.”

The responsibility of getting the patients safely to the aircraft rests on the shoulders of 12 Airmen and Soldiers, assigned to the Patient Administration section, who operate and maintain the vehicle. The Soldiers, assigned from the 602nd Area Support Medical Company, serve anywhere from eight to 15-month tours, while Air Force members serve six to eight-month rotations.

“This is a 100 percent joint endeavor,” added Rocco. “We are getting the maximum strength by instituting the Army-Air Force approach of overlapping tours...this equates to continuity, experience and expertise. This winning team can’t be beat.”

Getting the vehicle here and operational required multiple agencies’ support; Air Mobility Command, U.S. Air



The first Air Force High Deck Patient Loading Platform aligns with a KC-135 to offload patients being transferred from Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan to Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center, Germany April 9. The new HDPLP, a special purpose vehicle which limits the time a patient is exposed to outside elements, is one of three vehicles in the Air Force inventory. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

Forces Central, 455th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, Task Force Lifeline, and a three-person training team from 435 CASE.

“They were the unsung heroes in the process,” said Rocco. “There are some unique requirements for this vehicle. Each agency ensured we got what was needed and we have the resources to remain fully operational for at least eight months.”

The vehicle cost \$346,000, but if it saves one life it’s worth it, said Rocco.

“I want to be able to look and tell the parents, spouse or kids of a patient terribly wounded in Afghanistan that we are doing everything humanly possible to get their loved one to a hospital back home for follow-on care. This vehicle gets the Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Coalition forces to the quality care needed to make a full recovery.”

You're only as old as you think you are

Story and photos by Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephen Ocenosak
AFN Afghanistan

When you see Pat Kockritz walking around Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, you're instantly filled with a sense of appreciation. Her spry walk and upbeat attitude would easily fool anyone who tried to guess her age. She's quite possibly the oldest person deployed in theater; working for the American Red Cross at the age of 82.

Born in Kentucky in 1926 and now living in Virginia, Kockritz first started volunteering for the Red Cross in Nashville, Tenn. She moved there after her husband Art, a World War II veteran who served in the Philippines, passed away. "When my husband died, Red Cross brought my daughter and her family home from Germany," Kockritz said, whose son-in-law was stationed there in the military, "it was great to have my daughter and her family with me at that time."

Kockritz continued by saying the first hand experience with the Red Cross gave her the inspiration to join the organization. Disaster Services is

where she spent her first decade with the Red Cross. During that time she worked over 20 disasters.

"The last disaster I did was [Hurricane] Isabel, and Isabel hit me where I live as well as where I work, and you don't like to do them in your own backyard," Kockritz stated.

Kockritz is now a reservist with Service to Armed Forces, the branch of the Red Cross which acts as the emergency communication link between servicemembers and their families.

When she originally signed on to come to Afghanistan, the tour was six months, but was later reduced to four. "I had mixed feelings about that," she expressed with an authentic can do attitude.

"She's a prime example of just because you've reached a certain age in life doesn't mean you have to stop doing things," said Gene Simmons, Bagram Red Cross office team leader,

"And goodness knows, she's doing it. Every night, seven days a week," "She's an inspiration to this team and Red Cross teams across the theater who trained with her," boasted Debra Weaver, Bagram Red Cross team member.

Work ethic aside, "It can be a real tear jerker," Kockritz said in regards to deliv-



Pat Kockritz, Bagram Air Field Red Cross team member, is deployed here for four months. The Red Cross team serves as the emergency communications link between servicemembers and their families.

ering messages as she recounted one of her toughest cases. "I didn't take the initial intake, but I worked on the case and this woman called about her nephew. She had two nephews in Iraq, and her son was in Iraq and another at Ft Sill. Her sister was also in Iraq as an emergency person. She was a nurse and was sent to an I.E.D incident and her son was there, dead. Oh, we both cried on that one."

"They take it to heart," explained Army Maj. Cynthia Hargrow, human resources manager for the 101st Joint Logistics Command, "They're meticulous because they want to make sure that they're getting the correct information in a timely manner to that servicemember or civilian, and they do a great job."

"I've always wanted to do things in a helpful vein," Kockritz added to her reasons for working with the Red Cross. "I spent more time doing that than I did trying to make money, make a living. My poor husband had to do it all. I did work periodically. I'm kind of a calico cat in jobs. I've done a lot of things, but I like this best."

Relaying emergency messages from birth announcements to the unfortunate death notifications, Pat Kockritz likes her job so much she said she hopes for her next deployment with the Red Cross to be in Iraq.



Left to right, Pat Kockritz, Gene Simmons and Debra Weaver, the Bagram Air Field Red Cross team, pose for a picture in their office. Clara Barton, at the age of 60 inspired by Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman and founder of the Red Cross Movement, started the American Red Cross in 1881.

'MARCH MADNESS'... Bagram style

By Capt. Toni Tones
455 Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

There was music blaring, ball slapping, pump fakes and of course, a lot of trash-talking at the 455th Expeditionary Services Squadron-sponsored 3-on-3 basketball tournament here April 6. The tournament began March 30.

But it was teamwork and pure hustle that led a 24th Ordinance Battalion four-man squad to victory after beating 44 other teams in a double-elimination bracket system. The team who scored 15 points first, or outscored the other team in 15-minutes, walked away victorious and advanced to the next bracket.

The team of Clinton Jefferson, Jose Green, Damontae Griffin and Brandon Burton, based out of Hunter Army Air Field, Ga., now have bragging rights as Bagram's "kings on the court" and the prizes; a plaque and \$50 AAFES gift card for each player, that go along with it.

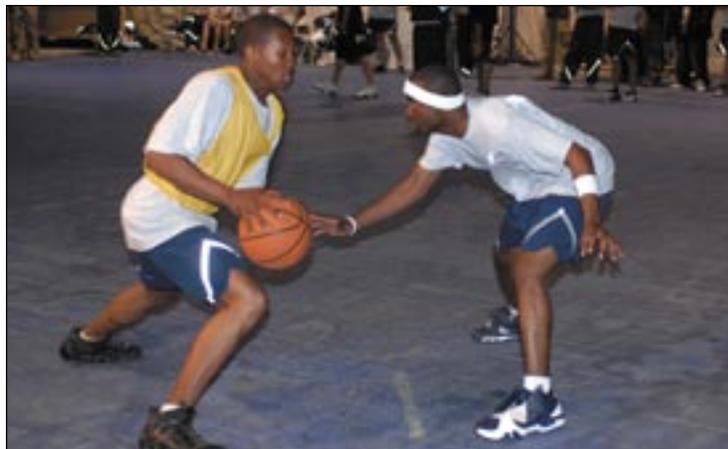
"It (the win) means a lot to us and the company," said Jefferson. "We've been here for 14 months so it's a nice going away gift."

"Not to mention it's a great boost for morale," added Green.

Second place winners each received a \$30 AAFES gift card and were Albert Banks, Sam Roberts, Jaime Blye, and Samuel McIntyre, a team of Air Force members and contractors assigned here.

"We wanted to win and set out to give our all," said Banks. "They had a good team and we just couldn't kick it off at the end. Everyone loses at some point, but this was good exercise...especially for me because I'm mad out of shape."

Promotion of fitness, morale and esprit de corps are the



Senior Airman Eric Wooten, 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron force protection escort, drives past Staff Sgt. Kevin Clark, 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Squadron services journeyman, in the 3-on-3 March Madness basketball tournament held here April 6. Wooten is deployed from the 81st Communications Squadron, Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., and Clark is deployed from the 919th Services Flight, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

underlying missions for each Services event.

"Although we're deployed and removed from a lot of the basketball excitement stateside, this was our version of 'March Madness' for the Airmen," said Senior Airman Courtney Blich, event coordinator. "This gave the players an opportunity to exercise and build esprit de corps, while boosting the morale for the spectators."

This year, 455 ESVS has sponsored more than 300 events for Airmen deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Military Long Drive Championship field expanded for second season

Story and photos by Tim Hippi
FMWRC Public Affairs

It's about time for the Army's big hitters to start swinging for the 2008 Military Long Drive Championship Presented by 7UP.

U.S. Coast Guard Airman Ryan Hixson won the inaugural event organized by the Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command with a drive of 367 yards. He earned \$10,000 and a berth in the 2008 RE/MAX World Long Drive Championship in Mesquite, Nev.

"Unbelievable," said Hixson, who prevailed against four other finalists



U.S. Coast Guard Airman Ryan Hixson tees it up during the finals of the 2007 Military Long Drive Championship at Mesquite, Nev. Hixson won the Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command event with a drive of 367 yards that earned him \$10,000 and a berth in the finals of the 2008 RE/MAX World Long Drive Championship. First-round competitions in the 2008 Military Long Drive Championship will be hosted by 27 installations July 11 through Aug. 31. Six competitors will advance from four second-round regional sites to the finals Oct. 23 in Mesquite.

under the lights in Mesquite and more than 650 competitors at 25 qualifying sites. "To have an opportunity to come out here and be treated the way we've been treated, and then to come away with a victory, it's overwhelming."

The finals of the Military Long Drive Championship will be contested on the same grid and weekend as the World Long Drive Championship – in a desert oasis resort town where the best in the business of tape-measure tee shots congregate annually to crown their champions.

The field for the 2008 military finals has been expanded to six competitors who will square off Oct. 23 in Mesquite. The champion will win \$10,000 and an exemption into the 2009 RE/MAX World Long Drive Championship, which means another all-expenses-paid trip to Mesquite.

The object is to drive a golf ball as far as possible, but it also must remain in bounds.

"You've got to balance it," Hixson said. "In the finals, I hit one 366 in the grid and was pretty comfortable with that, so I felt like I could just rear back and let it go. Then again, when you swing that way, it's kind of tough to hit the grid."

An extra round of competition has been added to the Military Long Drive Championship this year. The inaugural finalists were determined on paper in 2007 by comparing yardages, which made it virtually impossible to account for the differences in altitude, climate, facilities and weather conditions at various sites.

This year, local winners will advance to four second-round qualifying venues where they will compete for spots in the Military Long Drive Championship at Mesquite. The competition is open to all active-duty service members, Reservists, National Guardsmen, retirees and Family mem-



Army Sgt. 1st Class John Merritt of the Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Va., competes in the finals of the 2007 Military Long Drive Championship in Mesquite, Nev.

bers 18 and older from all branches of the military.

Twenty-seven sites currently are set for first-round competitions between July 11 and Aug. 31. Dates and times will be determined by officials at each respective site.

The following installations will host first-round competitions: Fort Dix, N.J.; Fort Lee, Va.; Fort Meade, Md.; Carlisle Barracks, Pa.; Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; Fort Benning, Fort Gordon and Fort McPherson, Ga.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Campbell and Fort Knox, Ky.; Fort Jackson, S.C.; Fort Wainwright, Alaska; Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.; Fort Lewis, Wis.; Fort Riley, Kan.; Fort Bliss, Fort Hood and Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Fort Huachuca, Ariz.; Fort Sill, Okla.; Heidelberg, Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, Germany; and Camp Casey and Yongsan, Korea.

The second-round sites have not been finalized. For more information, visit www.ArmyMWR.com.

Photos From the Field



U.S. Air Force Capt. Trevor Ambron, a Provincial Reconstruction Team, Gardez, physician assistant, gets more familiar with his M-4 on the range. (Photo by Senior Airman Brian Haney)



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LEFT: A U.S. Soldier mans a MK.19 in a HUMVEE turret as storm clouds roll in and blot out part of the sky at Bagram Air Field. *(Photo by Navy Lt. Rebecca Hagemann)*
RIGHT: Airmen from the 819th Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers drill a test hole to operationally check a water-well digging rig. *(U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)*



A Soldier mans an M-249 light machine gun while maintaining a perimeter during a village medical outreach in Gadaykhel, Kohe Safi District, Parwan Province. Coalition and International Security Assistance Forces treated nearly 400 Afghans in Gadaykhel. *(U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman James Bolinger)*



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