



THE GATHERING STORM

FALCON FLYER



PROVIDING
FRONT ROW
SEATS TO THE
AFGHAN
BATTLEFIELD

May 2010

FLIGHT SCHEDULE - MAY 2010



Spc. Monica K. Smith

PAGE 8
Soldiers from TF Falcon contend in various tasks during the "Toughest Talons" competition.



Sgt. Jason Gonzalez

PAGE 10
A Wyoming National Guard company steps in to provide medical evacuation abilities to TF Viper.



Courtesy Photo

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Soldiers of B Co., TF Workhorse, work around the clock to ensure aircraft are available for TF Falcon missions.

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FALCON FLYER

Vol. II, Issue 5
May 2010

Falcon Flyer is published in the interest of the servicemembers of the 3rd Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade.

The Falcon Flyer is an Army-funded newsletter authorized for members of the U.S. Army, under the provision of AR 360-1. Contents of the Falcon Flyer are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense or Department of the Army.

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COVER PHOTO

Sgt. Lance Grubb, a crew chief with A Co., TF Knighthawk, conducts maintenance on a Black Hawk, May 26 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Grubb and the rest of his company fly VIPs across the Afghan battlefield.
Full story on page 12



Members of TF Brawler prepare for an exfil as a Chinook nears the pick-up zone after a village medical outreach program, May 3 outside FOB Shank.

FALCON 6 SENDS...

Col. Don Galli
CAB Commander

Soldiers, Family Members, and Friends of Task Force Falcon – Since assuming command of the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, I have discovered what makes the 3rd Infantry Division unique. It's the history and the "Power of the Patch" – the Marne Patch - three white stripes on a field of blue symbolizing great victories at St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne and, of course, the Marne. As the only part of the Marne Division serving in Afghanistan, Task Force Falcon has taken ownership of the tradition of excellence in the 3rd ID and is making its own history. I am filled with pride knowing that the Marne Patch strikes fear in the enemy when they see it on our helicopters.

I have been deployed numerous times with other units and I know Soldiers. But Dog Face Soldiers are, in a word, different. We are different because we make-do with what we have. We accept what we are ordered to do and do it better than anyone could ever have expected. We remember the history of the great 3rd ID and honor it by following these immutable truths:

1. Fly Smart
2. Shoot Straight
3. Speak the Truth
4. Never Leave Your Wingman
5. Never Leave Troops In Contact

6. Take Extraordinary Measures to Save an American Soldier's Life

7. Ruthlessly Pursue the Enemy and Defeat Them

Throughout its history, the 3rd ID has been known for two things: starting a fight and finishing one. While continuing that tradition, we have started a new one – partnering with our Afghan brothers in combined-action missions. We have completed highly successful training with the Afghan National Army Air Corps through our Crew Chief, Air Assault, MEDEVAC, and Close Combat Attack Academies. This new tradition will help us meet the goal of handing the fight over to the Afghans.

No matter the situation, on the battlefield or off, training or fighting, we honor the last words of the Dog Face Soldier song: "Keep me in the 3rd Division, your Dog Face Soldier's A-Okay!" Give us older model aircraft – no problem. Send us earlier than expected – just one year after returning from our 3rd tour in Iraq – no problem. Make us the first brigade-sized element from the Marne Division to serve in Afghanistan – no problem. The Soldiers of the Marne Air Brigade are true Dog Face Soldiers and are making a difference every day.

We are the inheritors of the history of the 3rd ID and the brave men and women who served before us. We are the inheritors of the "Power of the Patch". In our first 6 months in country, we have made our families, our division, our Army and our nation proud. With 6 months left, make every day count. There is much work to be done and a mission to complete. Keep up the great work!

Marne Air! Rock of the Marne!
Falcon 6



Spc. Monica K. Smith

Brig. Gen. Kurt Fuller (left), CJTF-82 deputy commanding general of operations, stops for a photo with CW5 Bryan Batt, TF Falcon, and Col. Don Galli, commander of TF Falcon, April 24 at Bagram Airfield.

FALCON 7 SENDS...

Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley
CAB Command Sergeant Major

Hello again from Afghanistan! The brigade is now more than halfway through the deployment and we're all anxious to get back home to our families and friends. Despite that happy thought, what keeps me awake at night is the fear of accidents. As our Soldiers get closer to the end of our time here complacency has a tendency to set in and we must not allow our work to become day-to-day or routine because that's when someone is going to get hurt.

The weather is heating up here as well as back in Savannah and summer safety applies to both locations. Remember to keep yourself hydrated when working outside. In addition, take the time to apply some sunscreen if you know you're going to be outdoors for extended periods of time. To Soldiers here in Afghanistan, the

altitude only serves to heighten skin's sensitivity to the sun's rays. Do what you can to protect yourself and take a moment to look out for your battle buddies. To families and friends back home, remember to practice water safety when at the pool or at the beach. Be cognizant of your actions when grilling during the holidays or when shooting off fireworks. As our Soldiers are doing their part to return safely, I urge our families and friends to do their part to keep themselves safe till we return.

With the time I have here, I'd like to congratulate newly appointed 1st Sgt. Osborne of Company C, TF Knighthawk in Bagram and 1st Sgt. Foster of Company B, TF Knighthawk. I know they will lead well and take care of the Soldiers entrusted to them.

As always, thank you for the continued support we receive. You all make the difference in morale for our deployed Soldiers. Thank you!

Marne Air! Rock of the Marne!
Falcon 7



Spc. Monica K. Smith

Col. Don Galli (left) commander of TF Falcon, and Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley (right) pose for a photo with Medal of Honor recipients Alfred V. Rascon (center left) and Don J. Jenkins, April 12 at Bagram Airfield.

SIGHT & PICTURE



Spc. Monica K. Smith

Soldiers from HHC, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, load ammunition into magazines prior to conducting the range, April 26 at Bagram Airfield.



Sgt. Jason Gonzalez

Capt. Toby Alkire, C Co., 5-159th Cowboy DUSTOFF, TF Viper, conducts preflight inspections on a Black Hawk, April 13 at FOB Salerno.



Spc. Monica K. Smith

(Above) Soldiers from TF ODIN-A train for the Soldiers/NCO of the Deployment board, April 21 at Bagram Airfield.



Spc. Monica K. Smith

(Above) Spc. Jara Haas, HHC, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, swings at a piñata at a Cinco de Mayo party, May 5 at Bagram Airfield.



Warrant Officer Robert Renny



Sgt. Scott Tant

(Bottom left) Spc. Lindeys Clay and Pfc. Frantz Pierre, both with E Co., TF Knighthawk, reload a Hellfire on an Apache during FARP armament training, May 20 at Methar-Lam. (Bottom right) Soldiers from TF Brawler's ground combat platoon and the ANA 4th Kandak Company, carry a roll of carpet to a waiting Chinook April 22 at FOB Shank. The carpet was being delivered to a village in the Logar province for a mosque refurbishment project.



Spc. Monica K. Smith

Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr., (left) meets with Lt. Col. William Cristy, deputy commander of 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force Falcon to discuss the joint integration of Task Force ODIN-A (Observe, Detect, Identify, Neutralize-Afghanistan) and the U.S. Air Force Task Force Liberty, May 10 at Bagram Airfield.



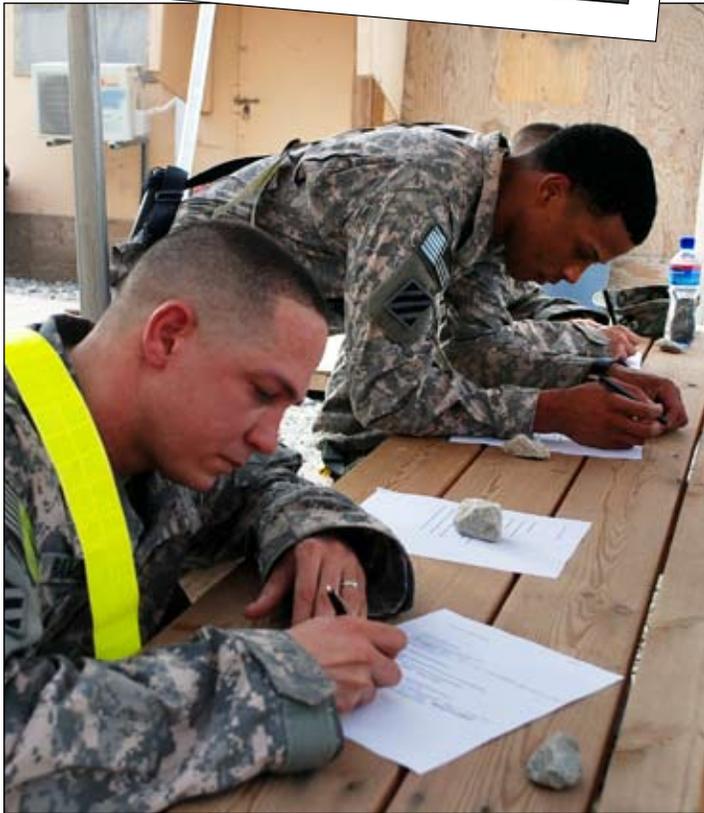
Spc. Monica K. Smith

Spc. Brett A. Foster, B Co., TF Dark Knight, receives the Purple Heart from the Combined Joint Task Force-82 Commander, Maj. Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, (left) and CJTF-82 Operations Sgt. Maj. Eric Johnson (left), May 14 at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Foster and his unit was attacked, May 13, near the Pakistan border. Foster suffered a gunshot wound to the right leg, without fracture and was listed in stable condition prior to surgery. "It's just something that happened to me," said Foster. "It's not something you expect to happen to you but it does. I don't want my guys to worry about me, I'm fine, I just want them to get the job done."

POWER PLAY

Task Force Falcon Soldiers compete in "Toughest Talons" competition

Story & photos by Spc. Monica K. Smith



The rain fell steadily as two Soldiers hovered over their casualty. As one Soldier turned, raised his weapon and pulled security, the other knelt down and asked, "Are you okay?"

Though this scenario could be applied to any remote battlefield, the two Soldiers were taking part in the Toughest Talons competition for the Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force Talon, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon.

"The goal of the Toughest Talons was to provide Talon Soldiers with a challenging and rewarding intra-company military skills competition, which would enhance leadership qualities, professional development, physical prowess, and military excellence in selected military skills," said Capt. Christopher Rogers, commander of the company.

The competition, which was held April 18, at Bagram Airfield, included 17 two-member teams, representing the various offices of TF Falcon's headquarters company. For one day Soldiers competed in various challenges including equipment inspections, a three-and-a-half mile buddy run in the Army Combat Uniform while carrying a weapon, and navigation through a medical lane. "The (medical) lane was the most challenging," said Sgt. Tory Clasen, who works in the automations helpdesk

Photos from top: 1. Sgt. Kevin Debold, clocks in CW2 Albert Chavez and Sgt. Tory Clasen, all with HHC, 3rd CAB, as Chavez and Clasen complete a three-and-a-half mile buddy run during the Toughest Talons competition, April 18 at Bagram Airfield. 2. Staff Sgt. Enrique Ramosmelendez (left) and Sgt. DeAndre Hubbard, both with HHC, 3rd CAB, take a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear test during the Toughest Talons competition, April 18 at Bagram Airfield. 3. Staff Sgt. Enrique Ramosmelendez (front left) performs push-ups while Sgt. Billy Winson (back left) performs sit-ups while Staff Sgt. Matthew Currey (front right) and Sgt. Aaron Durrett, (back right) act as graders during the Toughest Talons, a competition for Soldiers of HHC, 3rd CAB, April 18 at Bagram Airfield.



office of TF Falcon. "It was hard because Sgt. 1st Class (Shylonda) Wallace (brigade medic) made it stressful by adding real combat stress. We were thrown into a situation where we didn't know what was going on and we had to trust on our (combat lifesaver) training to get through."

Each of the teams had to complete the challenges together, making the scores on the three-and-a-half mile run based off the slowest runner and causing teammates to assess each other's strengths and weaknesses to maneuver through events.

"The Toughest Talons was a very challenging event that involved us as Soldiers to think critically and be physically fit in a combat environment," said Sgt. DeAndre Hubbard, who works in the personnel office of TF Falcon. "You couldn't just rely on yourself to get through. It was a team effort. I was really impressed on the competitiveness of each and every Soldier that stood before me. All in all the Toughest Talons was a great way to raise morale within the unit."

"I am extremely proud of all the Soldiers that participated in the Toughest Talons," said Rogers. "Each team performed marvelously and most importantly they all were challenged and had fun at the same time. I have received positive feedback from every team that entered and they look forward to the next iteration."

Clockwise from top left: 1. Spc. Travis Weeks, HHC, 3rd CAB, treats simulated wounds on Sgt. Kyle Horton, also with HHC, 3rd CAB, during the Toughest Talons competition, April 18 at Bagram Airfield. 2. Spc. Jamie Pedraza (left) and Sgt. DeAndre Hubbard, both with HHC, 3rd CAB, flip a tire across a basketball court during the Toughest Talons competition, April 18 at Bagram Airfield. 3. Spc. Joshua Holland and Master Sgt. Richard Samuels both with HHC, 3rd CAB, shoot down targets as part of the electronic simulator training portion of the Toughest Talons competition, April 18 at Bagram Airfield





Sgt. Jason Gonzalez, C Co., 5-159th Cowboy DUSTOFF, TF Viper, is lowered during a hoist training operation while the Cowboys fly the Wyoming flag, April 20 over Khowst Province.

Cowboy DUSTOFF's contribution to the war

Story by 1st Lt. Kaden Koba

Company C, 5th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, Cowboy DUSTOFF, is a Wyoming National Guard company attached to TF Viper, to provide medical evacuation capabilities for the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khowst, Afghanistan. Their mission is simple.

"We save lives. Period," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Morgan King, an active-duty medevac pilot from C Co., 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, attached to Cowboy DUSTOFF.

The pilots, crew chiefs and flight medics of Cowboy DUSTOFF are vocal about their motivation in their mission. Sergeant Wesley Morris, a flight medic in C Co., 5-159th Avn., TF Viper, who provides in-flight care to the wounded, described what was important to him about his job.

"It's about getting people back to a healthy state and to the people that care about them," said Morris.

Other Soldiers look at the big picture effects of their work.

"(Medical evacuation) plays a vital role in the overall success of the ground mission," said Cpt. Toby Alkire, a medevac pilot with C Co., 5-159th Avn.

To provide a wider range of coverage and faster response times the Soldiers of Cowboy DUSTOFF are stationed at Forward Operating Base Salerno and also at FOB Orgun East. This allows simultaneous coverage both within the Khowst Bowl and the Central Valley, even when weather closes the mountain passes surrounding Salerno.

The nature of the medevac mission is unique within the task force. Their missions are not planned. There are no scheduled take-off times. Some days medevac crews may not fly, but they are always ready to take off. The crews pull 24-hour shifts and are always ready to answer a call. Almost 200 of their missions have been urgent, requiring takeoff within mere minutes of receiving the call. Their missions are also varied. They respond to numerous medical emergencies, including injuries from direct engagements with the enemy, improvised explosive device injuries, heat injuries, accidents, animal bites and sickness.

They often have to land at the point of injury, landing zones that are unsecured, that haven't previously been cleared for helicopter landing zones. In the varying terrain of Afghanistan this is a significant challenge. Even when they can't land, the medevac



Sgt. Jason Gonzalez

teams go in and retrieve patients using a hoist system; a winch used to lower individuals from the aircraft and requires expert handling on the part of both pilots and crew members. Their only mission is saving lives and they constantly expose themselves to danger to accomplish that mission.

The medevac crews are not only essential to the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan because of the U.S. lives they save, but they also serve a larger purpose. They also evacuate Coalition forces, Afghan military and civilians and even enemy combatants. During their deployment, they have evacuated almost 500 patients, only about 40 percent of those U.S. forces.

"We go out and do our best every time to save lives, whether it is an Afghan national or an enemy prisoner of war," said Spc. Benjamin Postma, crew chief with C Co., 5-159th Avn, TF Viper. "Because of that I believe we play a big part in winning the hearts and minds of the people."

Their effect on Operation Enduring Freedom and the lasting legacy of American forces in Afghanistan is impossible to quantify, but the Cowboy DUSTOFF Soldiers say they are proud to contribute to the mission.

"Not only are we physically and tangibly saving lives of U.S. Soldiers and [Afghan National Security Forces] personnel, but we make crucial impacts on the [counterinsurgency] campaign, demonstrating to our Afghan allies that U.S. forces partnered with them are committed to their success and well-being, contributing directly to the overall success of OEF," said Maj. Matthias Greene, commander of Cowboy DUSTOFF and a medevac pilot.

"I am honored to work with such a highly skilled group of professionals," said Alkire. "I am proud to say I am part of Cowboy DUSTOFF."

(Top) Sgt. Kevin Thomas and Sgt. Michael Anderson, medics with C Co., 5-159th Cowboy DUSTOFF, TF Viper, leave for a medevac mission April 16 at FOB Salerno. (Right) Medevac crew chief, Sgt. Christopher Beck, C Co., 5-159th Cowboy DUSTOFF, TF Viper, operates the hoist during training, April 20 over FOB Salerno.



Sgt. Jason Gonzalez

THE GATHERING STORM

Story by Warrant Officer Robert Renny

Photos by Spc. Monica K. Smith

The Black Hawk crew chiefs worked against time to quickly post flight their aircraft before the rain fell May 4 at Bagram Airfield. As the crew chiefs finished their work and began to walk away from their aircraft they heard from across the flight line someone shout "STORM!"

To the casual observer, this may appear to be either a sardonic and deliberately annoying ruse or possibly an actual cautionary yell regarding the impending downpour. To an observer with a more discerning ear, however, and certainly to a member of Company A, Task Force Knighthawk, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, a particular sense of pride is detected within the primal howl.

Company A "Storm" is a command aviation and assault helicopter company and their sense of pride is nothing short of well earned. Since the unit's arrival in December, Storm has flown nearly 4,200 combat hours in support of Operation Enduring Freedom X. Such a staggering amount of flying is tremendously demanding for pilots, crew chiefs, and door gunners alike, not to mention the strain placed on a limited number of Black Hawks, resulting in a precarious balancing act of ensuring aircraft are maintained and ready to launch at a moment's notice.

"That number of hours is significantly higher than the [number of hours flown by the] company we replaced in the same period last year," said Capt. Kyle Petroskey, commander of A Co. "We push all of our aircraft to the limit on a daily basis. There's very little room for error. Our maintainers work long days and nights to ensure that we have the aircraft ready to accomplish our mission set. And the maintenance they're doing is on top of the hours they spent flying personnel and equipment all over the battlefield that very same day."

Distinguishing A Co., TF Knighthawk from its peers is its designation as a command aviation company. Several of the company's aircraft are equipped with specific radios, computers, and other electronic systems that are designed to allow ground force commanders to monitor and direct battlefield operations from an aerial platform. This specialized equipment is operated through the expertise of two military occupational specialties additionally represented in the company, signal support systems specialist and air traffic control operator.

"It's interesting to talk to and interact with high profile people on a regular basis," said Staff Sgt. Kevin Hubbard, a console operator with



From top: 1. Spc. James Harrison, A Co., TF Knighthawk, attaches an M240H machine gun to a Black Hawk, April 29 at Bagram Airfield. 2. Staff Sgt. Kevin Hubbard, A Co., TF Knighthawk, sets up a communication system in the back of a Black Hawk, April 29 at Bagram Airfield. 3. Sgt. Joshua Jamison, A Co., TF Knighthawk, organizes seat belts in the back of a Black Hawk with VIP seating, April 29 at Bagram Airfield. Opposite Page: Sgt. Dwight Horton, A Co., TF Knighthawk.

A Co., TF Knighthawk. "You get to hear a lot of interesting information. Perks aside, the equipment we operate is crucial to a lot of the missions. It enables commanders and their staff to maintain situational awareness while they're travelling. It also allows them to communicate with ground forces, whether they're in line of sight or over the horizon."

Storm aircraft have the capability to be outfitted for VIP mission support through enhanced seating configurations, providing a more comfortable and aesthetically appropriate interior for transporting VIPs. No strangers to this routine, aircrews are familiar with VIP specific procedures from mission support of the 3rd Infantry Division's command team while in garrison.

"It's important that we look and act professional," said Spc. Joshua Willoughby, crew chief, A Co., TF Knighthawk. "We represent the entire brigade to whatever VIP we're flying. Our appearance and behavior reflects on all of 3rd CAB, for good or bad. We take extra precautions, such as being earlier for pickup than usual, making sure the helicopter is clean, headsets are working and in the right spots, as well as rendering specific protocol when handling the VIPs. There's a lot of attention focused on us."

The company is indeed heavily scrutinized on particular missions not only because of the big names being flown, but also because Storm aircraft can occasionally be seen on television newscast dropping off or picking up high-profile passengers. Nevertheless, any Storm Soldier will be the first to tell you that they don't only fly prim and proper missions. While the Storm has flown passengers at the highest levels of government and military, other mission include quick reaction force, medical evacuations, battlefield circulation, and deliberate air assault operations. In fact, several operations supported by Storm have resulted in the capture and detention of enemy high value targets.

With less than half of the deployment complete and what will perhaps be the busiest months still ahead, Company A shows no signs of slowing down. Intent on accomplishing the mission and sustaining the challenging operational tempo, 1st Sgt. James Fife of A Co., TF Knighthawk, says that Storm looks to buckle down and press forward.

"The summer months are going to be the hardest yet," said Fife. "The warmer weather is more demanding on the aircraft. It's also when we've historically seen more enemy action. We'll likely be flying even more. This means we're going to have to fly smarter, manage our crew rest better, and continue to keep a tight lid on maintenance. It's no doubt going to be a challenge, but certainly not one that the Storm can't handle."





AROUND THE TASK FORCE



Staff Sgt. Jason Lassiter

1



Warrant Officer Robert Renny

2



Sgt. Candice Peppie

4



Spc. Monica K. Smith

3

(Clockwise from top left) 1. A Chinook from F Co., TF Lighthouse, sling loads a Kiowa Warrior from FOB Blessing to FOB Fenty, May 5. 2. Chaplain (Capt.) Chris Campbell (left), chaplain for TF Knighthawk, meets Deputy Minister of Education Mr. Sharafi (right) and his interpreter, May 10 at Camp Kiwi, Bamyan. 3. Spc. James Harrison, A Co., TF Knighthawk, conducts a preflight inspection of a Black Hawk, April 29 at Bagram Airfield. 4. Sgt. Britten Christians (left), C Troop, TF Lighthouse, shows Command Sgt. Maj. Mike Hall how to operate the mass mounted site on a Kiowa Warrior during his visit, April 14 to FOB Jalalabad.



Sgt. Scott Tanti

1



Sgt. Scott Tanti

2



Sgt. Scott Tanti

5



Sgt. Scott Tanti

3



Sgt. Scott Tanti

4

(Clockwise from top left) 1. American, Czech, Jordanian and Afghan Soldiers, disembark a TF Brawler Chinook, May 13 while participating in a village medical outreach program outside of FOB Shank. 2. While on patrol in the Sorkhab Valley, April 22, Capt. Andrew Alvord, ground combat platoon commander with E Co., TF Brawler, takes a moment to show an Afghan boy how to do the 'pound' handshake. 3. Capt. Louis Williams (right), company commander of the 1-169th Georgia National Guard Chinook unit, checks the results of his stress fire session on the target as TF Brawler Commander, Lt. Col. Robert Ault explains to him how physical and mental stress can affect one's ability to shoot during the Leadership Certification course on FOB Shank. 4. Spc. Harold Smiley performs a maintenance inspection on a Black Hawk, May 4 at FOB Shank. 5. Spc. Armando Abad, chaplain's assistant for TF Brawler, pulls security with a soldier of the 4th Kandak ANA, while TF Brawler's key leaders attend a meeting in the Sorkhab Valley, April 22.

FLYING IN THE SHADOW OF THE VALLEY OF DEATH

STORY BY SPC. MONICA K. SMITH
PHOTOS BY SPC. VICTOR EGOROV

The sound of rotor blades broke the silence of night as air crews descended on a combat outpost blanketed in darkness. Staring through their night vision goggles crew chiefs guided Black Hawks and Chinooks to their landing zones, ready to receive Soldiers and equipment as U.S. forces pulled out of the Korengal Valley of Afghanistan.

"Task Force Mountain Warrior had multiple bases in areas of low Afghan population," said Maj. Mike Reyburn, plans officer for the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade (Marne Air), TF Falcon. "Task Force Falcon worked in support of (Regional Command East) in relocating TF Mountain Warrior Soldiers as part of efforts to focus on areas of higher Afghan populace. We assisted by being the main transport element, moving equipment and personnel out of the various COPs swiftly and safely from the so-called 'valley of death.'"

The terrain conditions of the Korengal Valley are so treacherous that many of the locations can only be reached by air making TF Falcon's aviation assets crucial to the success of relocating personnel and equipment.

"I told the enlisted Chinook flight crews and door gunners two hours before a takeoff: Based off intelligence reports we expected the first night to be a fierce fight," said Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Lemke, of TF Lighthorse. "If I tell you what we face is insurmountable, it will only make us fear. If I tell you what we face is easily overcome, deceit may make us fail. But sometimes, this time, when you don't know what you're capable of, you find you can accomplish the most extraordinary things."

The operation, called Operation Mountain Descent II, resulted in moving more than 500 Soldiers and nearly half a million pounds of equipment. Task Force Lighthorse, a battalion-sized element within TF Falcon, led the charge and successfully completed 76 flights to support the operation without incident.

"Based on the intensity of the fighting and the loss of life associated with two previous retrograde operations at COP Bella and COP Keating, we suspected that we would be in for a tough fight," said Lt. Col. Thomas von Eschenbach, commander of TF Lighthorse. "Taking every measure possible our planners dedicated an enormous amount of time and work in planning and synchronizing an incredible array of assets to support the conduct of Operation Mountain Descent. Flying helicopters around the clock TF Lighthorse executed flawless aviation operations over a four-day period, ending with a single Chinook departing with the last load of Soldiers at 3 a.m. April 14."

The Korengal valley is 6-miles long with one way in and one way out and the enemy owns the high ground, said Col. Don Galli, commander of TF Falcon. The valley maintains a reputation of being one of the most dangerous locations in Afghanistan, and for aviators the conditions were made more perilous due to what is called, "red illume" conditions.

Red illume conditions occur when illumination is less than 25 percent. For aviators who operate with night vision goggles, this poses a problem because NVGs heighten ambient light such as starlight or moonlight enabling them to see. With a lack of light, air crews must strain to see the faint outlines of small landing zones and towering mountains making their missions increasingly hazardous.



"The infantry and the battle space owners got a lot of the recognition but our aviators held all the risk and performed as professionals," said Galli. "Not to take anything away from the infantry, they had a tough fight, but the aviators didn't have it easy. This was extremely dangerous and (the air crews) were incredibly vulnerable to enemy fire."

To deter the enemy from firing, attack and scout teams of Apaches and Kiowa Warriors flew missions around the lift assets prepared to defend the air and ground units as they withdrew.

"During the day we worked to deter movement and flooded the valley with attack assets making it incredibly difficult for the enemy to move around and set up for an ambush," said Maj. Daniel Rice, plans officer for TF Knighthawk, another subordinate battalion of TF Falcon. "We denied the enemy freedom of maneuver during the day and guarded our lift assets at night."

Task Force Knighthawk provided "extra muscle" to TF Lighthorse who led the overall missions from Forward Operating Base Jalalabad. Plans were synced each night ensuring the flight crews understood the intent of each mission. In addition to the primary flight roles, Soldiers from both TF Lighthorse and TF Knighthawk served in contingency roles such as the quick reaction force, the downed aircraft recovery team and stood ready in case of a mass casualty situation.

"I was up there every flight and saw firsthand what my crews did," said Galli. "Words cannot explain the skill and bravery of these guys. They knew the danger and I have never been more proud in my military career than to see what Lighthorse and Knighthawk did in the Korengal Valley. That's the spirit of Marine Air."

(Top) A Black Hawk with A Co., TF Knighthawk, lands at the Korengal outpost, April 8 during a visit by U.S. Army Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal. (Middle) Soldiers with F Co., TF Lethal Warrior, link cables to a TF Lighthorse Chinook in order to conduct an air lift out of the Korengal Outpost, April 9. (Bottom) U.S. Army General Stanley A. McChrystal, disembarks a Black Hawk with A Co., TF Knighthawk, to greet an ANA commander during his visit to the Korengal outpost as part of Operation Mountain Decent II, April 8. (Opposite page) A TF Lighthorse Chinook carries a cargo container from the Korengal outpost in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar province, April 9.



One for the Home Team

Task Force Brawler Soldier loses weight to reenlist
Story and Photos by Sgt. Scott Tant

Following a three-mile run on a brisk May morning, a smiling Task Force Brawler Soldier expressed how good it felt to run, instead of complaining about the altitude or the weather. A minute later, his team chief finished the same run, laughing as he described how a year ago, he would have finished well ahead of his Soldier.

Just two months after losing 55 pounds in order to reenlist, one Soldier is taking his weight loss journey and using it to help other Soldiers lose weight. Specialist

Jorge Garcia-Martinez, Company E, TF Brawler, is working with Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Shank to help them reach their weight loss goals.

"I think it's important for those who have gone through any issue, whether it's weight loss or taking a hard college class, to help those who are also struggling with it," said Garcia. "That's what I'm doing here, trying to help other Soldiers."

The culmination of 10 months of hard work came to a point on the afternoon of March 11 at FOB Shank.



(Above) Spc. Jorge Garcia-Martinez (right) takes the oath of re-enlistment from 1st Lt. Joyce Swinton, from atop a 210,000 gallon fuel bag at the forward arming and refueling point, March 11, at FOB Shank.



Garcia-Martinez raised his right hand and re-enlisted, a task that only came possible after he was able to lose 55 pounds and have his bar to re-enlist rescinded.

Garcia, affectionately called “GM” by his peers and coworkers, was barred from re-enlistment due to being overweight. Knowing if he did not lose enough weight to be within Army regulations, and soon, he would have to leave the military, Garcia mustered the self-discipline to shed the pounds and keep them off.

Garcia began his journey to weight loss, self-fulfilment, setting a good example and, most importantly, re-enlistment with the support and inspiration of his family. He said his biggest motivation for losing the weight came from his son when his son called Garcia his hero.

“It is important to show my son that anything is possible if you put your mind to it and being kicked out of the military isn’t setting a good example of that,” said Garcia.

Garcia said his wife and children were the continual motivation that kept him going. His wife helped with portion control when she cooked for him prior to deployment. He began measuring his food with a special set of measuring cups his wife bought him. She bought the cups when she realized that losing weight and staying in the military was something he really wanted to do. Garcia lowered his daily caloric intake to 1700-1900 calories while still eating the necessary nutrients to give him the energy to succeed.

“Everything was measured and I still felt full and satisfied with the amount of food I was eating,” said Garcia.

“When I first took over this company I specifically told GM, you are making a lifelong decision when you decide to be overweight, it will affect you,” said 1st Sgt. Gresham Collins, E Co., TF Brawler. “I sat down and had a talk with GM about caloric intake, the risks of a sedentary lifestyle, and how exercise would help those things out. I began a special PT program and GM was enrolled. I didn’t really tell him anything different than what I would

have told any other Soldier. When you are a Soldier in the Army you have to live the lifestyle and you have to be physically fit. Walk the walk.”

Garcia said one of the biggest obstacles he had to face was getting extra physical training. His training schedule included three workouts a day: One with the company in the morning, a second for remedial PT in the afternoon, and a third PT session during his personal time to make sure he was covering all the areas, physically, that he needed.

His noncommissioned officers, Sgt. Lester Easley and Sgt. Vivorina Frazier, both E Co., TF Brawler, pushed him forward daily helping him to achieve his goals. Garcia’s platoon leader, Lt. Joyce Swinton, E Co., TF Brawler, said she was as pleased with Garcia’s achievement as Garcia was.

“I am very proud,” said Swinton. “This is a positive example for Soldiers in the platoon and even Task Force Brawler who are struggling to lose weight. He is the quintessential example for the task force. I am very, very proud.”

Once Garcia lost the weight to meet the Army’s standard, TF Brawler’s retention officer, Staff Sgt. Adam Bartlett, drafted a new contract for him. Garcia said he was very nervous because this was his first re-enlistment.

“I just wanted everything to be perfect with everyone being there,” said Garcia. “It felt really good to know I had the support of my friends, comrades, peers, coworkers, and leadership.”

The re-enlistment ceremony took place on top of a 210 thousand gallon fuel bag at the forward arming and refuelling point, where he works maintaining fuel accountability and facilitating fuel reception. Garcia said he now looks forward to his next re-enlistment.

“[Garcia] is an example and inspiration to what other Soldiers can do on their own when they put their mind to it,” said Capt. Joseph Pruitt, commander of E Co., TF Brawler.

Besides being able to re-enlist, losing 55 pounds had physical and emotional

benefits for Garcia.

“I can run faster, a lot faster,” said Garcia. “I can do more push-ups and sit-ups. I started volunteering for road guard more often. Being a road guard, you have to be able to run with the group as well as rush to the front until everyone passes, you are always running.”

Garcia said an emotional benefit is his overwhelming pride in his achievement and that he feels stronger mentally and more confident.

“I know now my goals are attainable and I can always do better,” said Garcia. “I feel great about losing the weight and being able to re-enlist. This is what I always wanted. Now I can be a ‘lifer’, or a career Soldier, and retire.”

Since accomplishing his weight loss goals, other Soldiers have asked him how he lost the weight.

“The biggest thing is to stay motivated,” said Garcia. “Think of each step as a stepping stone, take one step at a time, grab life by the horns and just stay motivated.”

Garcia offered tips from his own success:

Break your calories down throughout your day.

BREAKFAST

Eat 400 calories for breakfast and have a 130-calorie snack between breakfast and lunch.

LUNCH

Eat a 500-600 calorie lunch and have another 130-calorie snack between lunch and dinner.

DINNER

Eat a dinner that is always less than 500 calories. If you need another snack after dinner, that is fine, make sure you do not eat too late in the day.

SNACKS

Snack healthy to keep from being hungry before the next meal. You have to stay motivated and know that with hard work, diet, and exercising you will be able to lose the weight.

UNSEEN FORCES

Task Force Workhorse Soldiers keep aviators in the air and in the fight.
Story by Task Force Workhorse



Courtesy Photo

An army marches on its stomach, but for a unit that spends its time flying, aircraft maintainers keep the aviation Soldiers in the air and in the fight. Soldiers of Company B, Task Force Workhorse, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, work 24 hours a day, seven days a week on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, to ensure aircraft are constantly available.

"We keep the war effort fighting," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Frank Bernard, a Black Hawk mechanic section sergeant, TF Workhorse, from Alfrida, Ariz. "We get aviators and crew chiefs back out in the air doing what they do. If they are not in the air we can't do any air convoys, we can't resupply, we can't conduct medevac missions by air. Everything would have to be done on the ground where the danger is heightened by IEDs."

The Soldiers in B Co., are responsible for more than 13 different specialty skill shops manned by Soldiers of various experience levels and 27 military occupational specialties. Together they conduct different aspects of maintenance including fixing aircraft when they break and conducting regular maintenance on TF Falcon's rotary wing aircraft in addition to conducting maintenance on equipment for the Air Force, Marines and other nonmilitary units. Because of the high operational tempo of the brigade, the aircraft fly a high number of hours resulting in regular maintenance being conducted more often.

"The Soldiers of B Co., TF Workhorse, have completed an excess of 4,000 work orders in support of aircraft maintenance," said Maj. Heather Weigner, commander of B Co., TF Workhorse. "We have performed extensive repairs on battle damaged aircraft and recovered aircraft that have had to perform precautionary landings in remote locations throughout Afghanistan. We have worked more than 700,000 man-hours since our arrival in country."

To help accomplish both quality work and work done at high quantities, B Co., is comprised of more than 250 Soldiers, making it the largest company in TF Falcon.

The operation of multiple shifts allows the company to maximize personnel and work hours resulting in maintainers working 24 hours a day to keep up with the operational tempo. The large amount of Soldiers working shifts all hours of the day enhances the safety concerns of leaders however the leadership of B Co., have worked to ensure their achievements in work are not diminished by safety faults.

"Since arriving in theater TF Workhorse has had zero safety re-

Soldiers from B Co., TF Workhorse hand an engine while conducting phase maintenance on a Chinook, Jan. 16 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.



lated incidents that pertain to our level of aviation maintenance," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Juan Aviles, battalion safety NCO, HSC, TF Workhorse, from Orlando, Fla. "To date, 13 Soldiers from B Co., TF Workhorse, have been recognized and awarded for their duties and responsibilities related to aircraft maintenance."

The maximum use of Soldiers and time, and doing it all while maintaining safety requirements has resulted in minimizing maintenance related incidents.

The numbers don't lie," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Todd Blake, executive officer and safety officer of B Co., TF Workhorse. "More than 200 Soldiers working [for more than] a 200-day span, 12 hour days, amassing greater than 700,000 man hours compared to only nine maintenance related accidents and incidents. That is an average of one incident per approximately 78,000 hours of aircraft maintenance conducted. A record to be proud of but a record the NCOs take personally and are constantly striving to improve."

"It's a good feeling to know that even though we don't really get the credit, what we're doing here allows the pilots and crew chiefs to do their job," said Bernard. "Without us they wouldn't have the aircraft to get the mission done. It's a good feeling."

(Above) Spec. Terry Cottrell, (left) and Staff Sgt. Din Sanderson, both B Co., TF Workhorse, install a tail rotor assembly on a Black Hawk, May 29, at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (Right) Spec. Jeremy Corley, B Co., TF Falcon, repairs a radar altimeter on a Chinook, May 29, at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

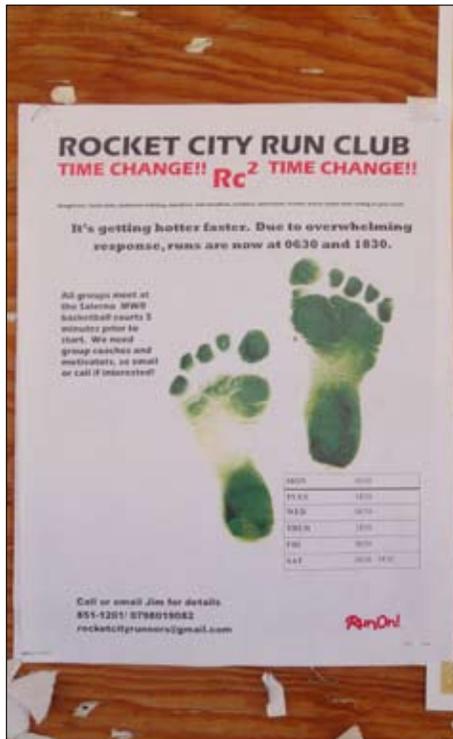




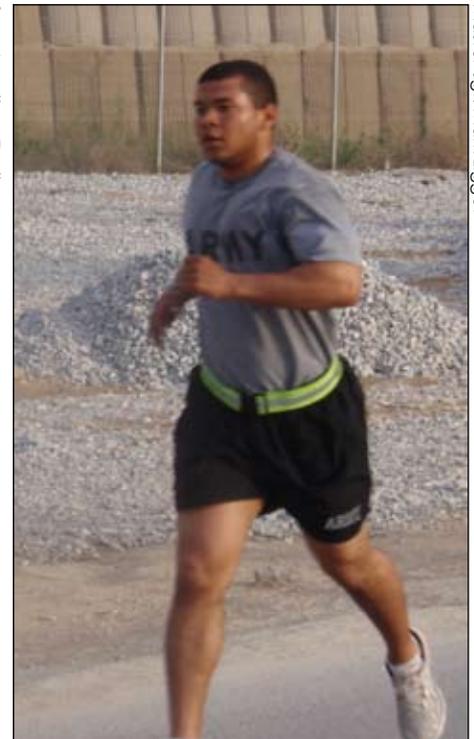
Spc. Jonathan T. Allen



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Spc. Jonathan T. Allen



Master Sgt. Mark Ligger

(Above) Staff Sgt. James Shelby (far left), of Company B, TF Dark Knight, meets with members of the run club for an evening run, April 10, at FOB Salerno. (Bottom from left) 1. Staff Sgt. James Shelby from B Co., TF Dark Knight, makes a Rocket City Run Club T-shirt for a club member, April 8, at FOB Salerno. 2. A Rocket City Run Club newsletter is posted outside of the Post Exchange, April 13, at FOB Salerno. 3.

A Soldier has started up a running club on a forward operating base in Afghanistan in defiance of almost-daily enemy rocket attacks. Staff Sergeant James Shelby, a counterintelligence agent with Company B, Task Force Dark Knight, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, formed the club at FOB Salerno, and naturally named it "The Rocket City Run Club."

"I would run outside on my own and see others out running who had bad form or looked like they were really struggling to keep themselves going," said Shelby. "I figured I could start up a club to help positively motivate people to get into better shape. There are always a lot of people out running, and I feel that there would be even more people out there if they just had a friendly group of people to run with."

After only a few weeks in existence, the Rocket City Run Club has taken off. Now there are more than 40 people participating in the different running groups offered by the club.

"I really enjoy running with the club," said Spc. Ely Cartagena, B Co., TF Dark Knight. "Half of the enjoyment comes from knowing that I'm getting in better shape; the other half is from the people [who] I run with."

The Rocket City Run Club is intended for participants of all running abilities. It does not matter if

ROCKET CITY RUN CLUB

Story by Spc. Jonathan T. Allen

a person can run 10 miles or if he can run one mile; or if the person is in the military or if he is a civilian contractor working on the base. Everyone is welcome to run and the club offers various meeting times and running groups to try and meet every participant's specific need.

"I want to get everyone in the club to be able to run at least a half marathon when they return home," said Shelby. "All that it takes is a little bit of time and effort every other day. After a few months, most people will have no problem with running a half marathon, which is a little (more than) 13 miles, or more."

In order to help spread the word about the run club as well as ensure continued support and motivation from current participants, Shelby created Rocket City Run Club T-shirt stencils to make homemade club shirts. The stencils have slogans such as "Running Under Fire-Rocket City Run Club." Also, the club logo, "RC2", can be found on various signs located throughout FOB Salerno.

"Running makes me fit to fight," said Staff Sgt. Harry McAllister, a supply sergeant from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, TF Dark Knight.

Shelby has plans to open a gym with his wife when he returns to his home in Euless, Texas after his deployment. He feels that the run club is a good way for him to practice organizing recreational activities so that he can do it better when he is back in the states and operating his own gym.

According to Shelby, the Rocket City Run Club is not going away when he returns home.

"There is already someone [who] plans on taking over the club when my deployment ends," said Shelby. "By the way it looks, this club is only going to get bigger and better as more people find out about it."

There is also a sister chapter of the club in the works to be opened in San Antonio, under the same name in order for people in the United States to help support those who are serving our country in Afghanistan.

"I support the Rocket City Run Club," said Damian Rodriguez, B Co., TF Dark Knight. "It's a great way to network and meet friends, and stay fit, too."



TASK FORCE ODIN-A CHANGES COMMAND

STORY BY STAFF SGT. FRANCISCO SALAS
PHOTOS BY SPC. MONICA K. SMITH

Rarely are battalion commanders changed during deployment. However, Task Force ODIN-A (Observe, Detect, Identify, Neutralize – Afghanistan), 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Falcon, changed commanders, May 3 at Bagram Airfield. Outgoing commander, Lt. Col. John Hinck, will be taking a position at the headquarters of U.S. Army Forces Command in Atlanta, Ga., and for the 30 days before the new commander arrives in country, Maj. Brian Wallace, the executive officer of TF ODIN-A, will take command.

"It's a little different with me taking command because unlike a new commander I've been here and I know the people," said Wallace. "I feel privileged and honored to take command of TF ODIN-A. I understand the importance of TF ODIN-A with this being the first TF ODIN in Afghanistan."

Change of command ceremonies while a unit is conducting a deployment are uncommon as most units arrive and depart as a whole. However three weeks ago, Hinck learned he would become the personal aid to Lt. Gen. James Thurman who is the

incoming commander of FORSCOM.

"Leaving the formation is bittersweet but I'm leaving the Soldiers in good hands with Command Sgt. Maj. (Terry) Sparks, and Maj. Wallace," said Hinck.

The ceremony included speeches from Hinck, Wallace in addition to Col. Don Galli, commander of the 3rd CAB, TF Falcon.

"Under (Hinck's) leadership, TF ODIN-A built a strong bench of quality officers," said Galli. "One of those officers is Maj. Brian Wallace. (Wallace) is an exceptional officer and aviator and the right choice for the job of leading ODIN-A for the next month."

At the end of May the new TF ODIN-A commander, Lt. Col. Kevin Diermeir, arrived signaling entrance of Soldiers to replace the current TF ODIN-A Soldiers. Elements of TF ODIN-A have been in Afghanistan since 2008, however the first iteration of TF ODIN-A Soldiers arrived in July 2009. The incoming Soldiers will mark the second iteration of Soldiers to create TF ODIN-A and will be deployed for a year.



(Above left) Incoming commander Maj. Brian Wallace (left), TF ODIN-A, returns a salute before the battalion colors during a change of command ceremony, May 3 at the MWR clamshell at Bagram Airfield. (Right) Col. Don Galli, (left) commander of the 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, passes the battalion colors to Maj. Brian Wallace, incoming commander of TF ODIN-A, during a change of command ceremony, May 3 at the MWR clamshell at Bagram Airfield. (Opposite page) Outgoing commander Lt. Col. John Hinck (left) and incoming commander Maj. Brian Wallace (right) of TF ODIN-A, stand before the battalion colors during a change of command ceremony, May 3 at the MWR clamshell at Bagram Airfield.



Task Force View



Staff Sgt. Jason Lassier



Warrant Officer Robert Renny



Sgt. Scott Tant

(Clockwise from top right) 1. Soldiers from A Co., 1-3, TF Lighthouse, conduct maintenance on an Apache, May 12 in FOB Jalalabad. 2. Capt. David Sutton and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Carl Porter, B Co., TF Knighthawk, fly over the mountainside, May 10. 3. TF Brawler Command Sgt. Maj. Stuart O'Black (center) listens as local Afghans voice their concerns during a village assessment, April 24 in the Logar province of Afghanistan. 4. Spc. Frankstevic Borja (bottom) and Spc. Shawn Williams assist members of the ANA, 4th Kandack Company, with the proper technique for firing their new M16A2, May 1 at FOB Shank. 5. Capt. Reno Simoni and a local Afghan man carry a tough box of medical supplies, May 3 in a village in the Logar province. 6. Key leaders with TF Brawler begin the Leadership Certification with an uphill run to raise their stress level, May 16 at FOB Shank.



Sgt. Scott Tant



Sgt. Scott Tant



Sgt. Scott Tant



Spc. Monica K. Smith



Warrant Officer Robert Renny



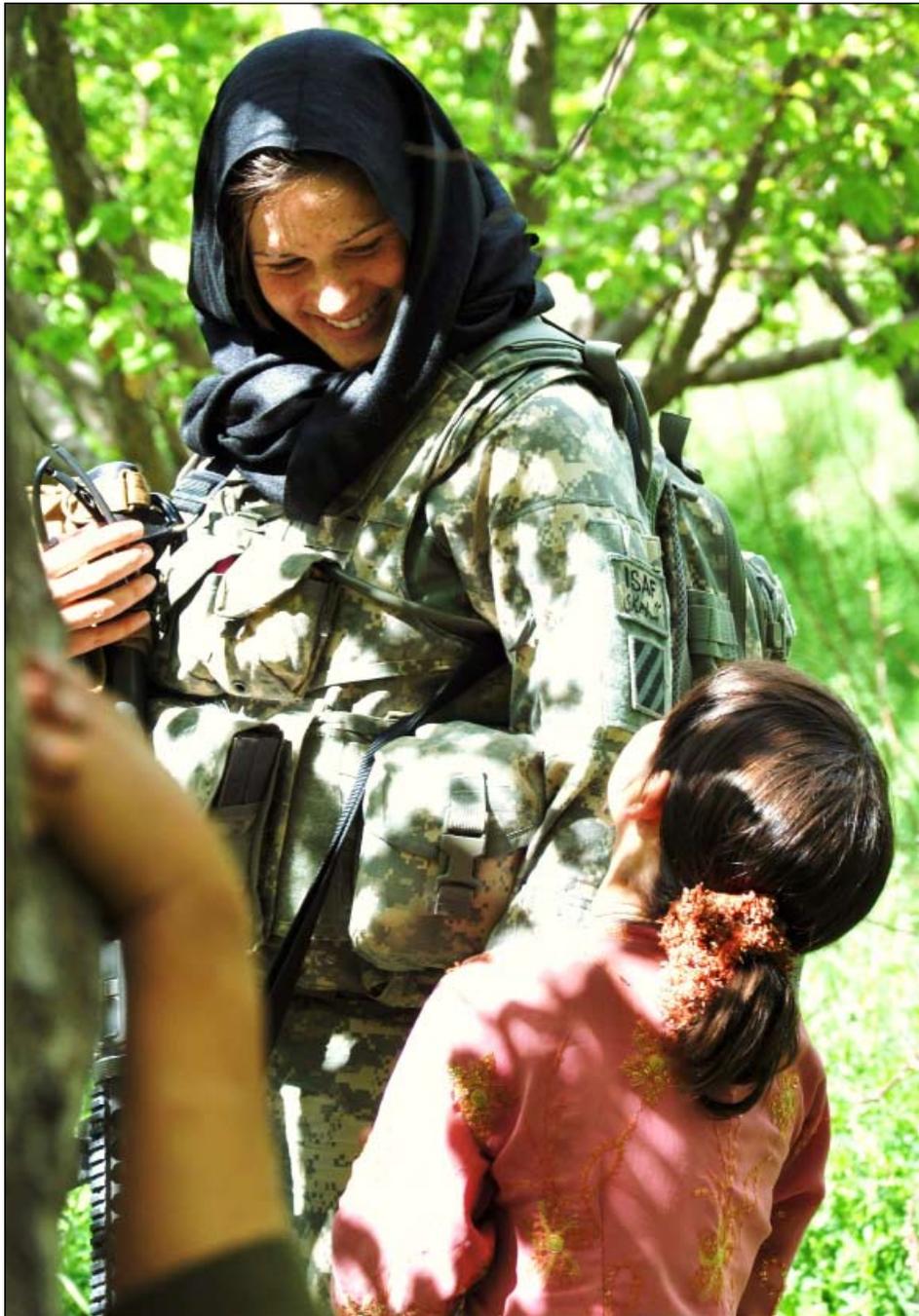
Master Sgt. Mark Liggett



Sgt. Candice Pepple

(Clockwise from top left) 1. Spc. Jeremy Wallace, HHC, 3rd CAB, TF Falcon, waits his turn to fire at the range, April 26 at Bagram Airfield. 2. Spc. Jamie Hendon, E Co., TF Knighthawk, reloads flares on an Apache, May 20 at FOB Methar-Lam during FARP armament training. 3. Soldiers of D Troop, TF Lighthorse, conduct maintenance on a Black Hawk in Jalalabad, May 20. 4. Captain Chris Bettinger, commander of B Co., TF Dark Knight, reminisces about leading Cpl. Christopher Coffland as Coffland's company commander at a remembrance ceremony April 14 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

Parting Shot



Sgt. Scott Tanti

Spc. Stephanie Desender, HHC, TF Brawler, spends time with a local Afghan girl during a key leader engagement with local village elders, April 23 near FOB Shank, Afghanistan.