AFGHANISTAN
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82nd unit wins award  Rebuilding  FOB Kutschbach
FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. - Cold drizzle and hot metal rained upon the ground here as a group of 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) soldiers honed their mortar and howitzer targeting skills in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan in April.

Forward observer Army Spc. Daniel L. Howes wiped raindrops from his eyes by the second-story window of a wooden training structure as he watched 81 mm and 120 mm mortar shells and 105 mm howitzer rounds explode hundreds of yards away. The St. Paul, Minn., native quickly radioed adjusting-fire instructions to colleagues manning the mortars.

Howes is among about 3,800 4th Brigade Combat Team soldiers from Fort Campbell preparing to deploy to eastern Afghanistan this spring.

“I’m here to protect my country and that is what I will do,” said Howes, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company soldier, who sports a combat patch from a previous duty tour in Iraq.

The 4th Brigade Combat Team, part of the 506th Infantry Regiment, can trace its lineage to the World War II unit that helped lift the German siege of Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge, said Army Maj. Patrick R. Seiber, public affairs officer for 4th BCT.

An HBO miniseries, titled “Band of Brothers,” highlights the World War II exploits of several members of the 101st Division, from the landings at Normandy to the capture of Adolph Hitler’s Berchtesgaden vacation home.

The 101st Division is nicknamed the “Screaming Eagles.” Its headquarters also will deploy to Afghanistan to relieve the 82nd Airborne Division’s command element, Seiber said.

The division’s 1st, 2nd and 3rd brigade combat teams currently are deployed in Iraq.

“We look forward to doing a good job in Afghanistan,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Troy D. Albert, an automated fire-support specialist with 4th Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, as he deftly channeled range-related message traffic.
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ANA, ANP bring security to Oruzgan province

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Afghan National Army’s 1st Company, 201st Kandak and Afghan National Police, advised by Coalition forces, conducted a security patrol in the Shahidi Hasas District of Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan.

During the multi-day operation, Afghan National Security Forces visited the villages of Pasaw and Doane, conducted shuras with village elders and met with residents of the southern Afghan villages in the Sakar River Valley. [The Afghan shura serves as a forum for women in the community to discuss their concerns and issues].

“This is one of many operations the ANA and ANP conducted in the district to bring peace to an area that was a former insurgent stronghold,” a Coalition soldier said.

Prior to recent operations, insurgents controlled the area and drove families from their homes. Afghan National Security Forces increased security operations in the area in December and January to remove insurgents from their safe havens and return the district to government control. As a result, villagers and businesses are moving back into the area and more than 25 new shops have opened in the district’s bazaar.

“The insurgents forced us from our homes so they could fight from our village,” a village elder explained. “We are happy that we can move back into our homes. The village is now a safe place for our families.”

Village elders welcomed friendly forces into their homes and conducted a shura. During the meeting, the elders expressed their gratitude to the coalition forces for removing insurgents from their homes before winter.

ANSF and Coalition soldiers also provided medical check-ups for many of the residents and gave jackets, gloves and other winter clothing items for the more than 150 children.

“We are extremely grateful for the help you have given us,” one of the elders said.

Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army soldiers told the elders they will continue to provide security and conduct operations in the area throughout the winter. They also assured villagers the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is committed to their safety and to meeting the needs of all Afghan people.

An Afghan National Police officer hands out gloves to children during a visit to the Shahidi Hasas District of Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan, Jan. 21. ANP, along with Afghan National Army and Coalition forces, conducted a security patrol to bring peace to an area that was a former insurgent stronghold. (U.S. Army photo)
Second unit in 82nd history wins coveted award

By Spc. Micah E. Clare
4th Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO, Afghanistan - The dedication and commitment to excellence shown by one deployed unit paid off this year when they became the second 82nd Airborne Division artillery battery to win the Knox Award, given yearly to the Army’s best battery.

The award, named after Revolutionary War hero Maj. Gen. Henry Knox, the first Chief of Artillery for the U.S. Army, was awarded to Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 321st Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, last month in acknowledgment of their accomplishments leading up to, and during, their current deployment in southeastern Afghanistan.

“From everything we’ve been through since our crunched, pre-deployment training timeline, to our results out here in the battlefield, we’ve been doing a lot of artillery functions a lot of batteries don’t get to do,” said Army 1st Lt. Christian Throckmorton, platoon leader for 4th Platoon.

“We’re actually doing the missions we’ve trained for, air assaults, calling for fire side-by-side with the infantry and conducting many forward combat operations,”

In the year prior to their deployment, Btry. B participated in three major training events: one in Florida with Joint Special Operations Command, cadet training at West Point Military Academy in New York and a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., explained Army Capt. Mike Garry, the battery commander.

Shortly before deployment, they were asked to reorganize and change certification from the 105mm, M119 howitzers to the larger 155mm, M198 system in anticipation for a changing mission in Afghanistan. When they arrived, however, they were required to reorganize and recertify back to the M119s, Garry said.

So far, while occupying an area of over 1,000 miles and encompassing four different Afghan provinces, the battery has provided fire support to four major operations for 4th BCT’s maneuver units: the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment. During these operations, Btry. B artillerymen fired over 3,000 105mm rounds and were responsible for a combined battle damage of over 100 enemy fighters.

“We’ve had to establish a lot of trust with the line companies,” said Army Staff Sgt. Gregory Funk, a 4th Platoon section chief. “They’ve really gotten used to how we operate and even fought for us to come with them at one point when they found out that an (unfamiliar artillery unit) would be supporting them.”

Providing reliable and consistent artillery support to maneuvering units wasn’t the only factor that went into the award nomination process, said Garry.

“Not only have these guys done their jobs and what was asked of them, but they always exceed the standards set for them,” he explained.

Five members have been recommended for the Bronze Star and all members for the Combat Action Badge, he stated.

“When standards are established, we’re required to go above that,” said Funk. “That attitude leaks over into everything we do. You can’t be lazy when you’re in the business of shooting rounds in close support of troops. Sometimes it’s tedious, but to be as accurate as we need to be, attention to detail is absolutely necessary.”

Even though the battery was stood up less than a year before deploying, winning the award shows what motivated paratroopers can accomplish. “They will be a model to all other 82nd artillerymen,” said Garry.

“Despite how new they are…Battery B has exemplified the terms agile, lethal and accurate,” said Garry. “We’re looking forward to providing the most timely and lethal fire support anywhere in Afghanistan throughout the rest of our time here.”
ANP, Coalition soldiers bring smiles to children in Kandahar

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force - 82 Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Afghan National Police and Coalition forces visited dozens of children and distributed more than 500 lbs. of humanitarian items to the village of Sarposh, Khakrez District, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

During the visit to the small, remote village in the northwest portion of the province, police and Soldiers handed out winter jackets, shoes, beans, flour and rice.

ANP officers and Soldiers spent time talking with the children, and exchanged a few words in Pashto and English. The 13-year-old son of the village elder explained that most of the village adults were working in the fields planting wheat.

“This is an excellent opportunity to show the children that we are concerned for their health, welfare and well being,” said an ANP officer. “They spoke with us extensively about their thoughts on education, change in the district and what they would like to see in their future.”

“These children are very intelligent and articulate,” explained an ANP officer. “Many attend school three days a week to learn math, chemistry and Pashto.”

“ANSF missions such as this greatly improve the health and welfare of villagers who live in remote locations. It also allows them to build stronger relationships with the villagers,” explained a Coalition Soldier. “Actions like today build confidence with villagers that the ANSF and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will provide for their needs.”

America Supports You: Award Recognizes Troops’ Morale, Efforts

By Samantha L. Quigley
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – People in uniform, who go out of their way to boost the morale of fellow troops, could be rewarded for their positive attitude and hard work, thanks to a group dedicated to keeping members of the armed forces connected and entertained.

“The SemperComm Award is designed to recognize and honor those servicemembers who are making personal contributions to boost the morale of their fellow men and women,” organization officials said in a recent news release.

Up to three awardees will be chosen from all nominations received by Feb. 29. Any servicemember, including those serving in the Coast Guard, combatant commands and field commands, can nominate someone.

The judges, four retired military officers, will base their decisions on actions the nominees took to boost the morale of fellow servicemembers, the remoteness and size of the base where the nominee is stationed, and their desire to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Winners will be honored at the SemperComm Foundation’s annual gala May 22 in Arlington, Va.

SemperComm is dedicated to supplying morale-boosting communications and entertainment equipment, software and services to small, remote U.S. military bases overseas.

It’s also a supporter of America Supports You, a Defense Department program connecting citizens and companies with servicemembers and their families serving at home and abroad.

For more information on the SemperComm Award, contact Alix Anne Hornig at 703-923-7610 or at ahornig@sempercomm.org.
ANDAR DISTRICT, Afghanistan - One 82nd Airborne Division company could have decided to take things easy after an extremely busy 12 months. After all, they only had three more months until redeploying to Fort Bragg, N.C.

Instead, Paratroopers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team are making sure that all accomplishments during the past year in Ghazni Province’s Andar District won’t go to waste.

Since their arrival last January, Andar has been transformed. Once it was an area of dirt paths controlled by various Taliban shadow governments and riddled with improvised explosive devices. Now Andar is a safe, growing district with paved roads regularly patrolled by the Afghan National Police, said Army Capt. Matt Hagerman, effects coordinator for 2-508.

“IEDs, indirect and direct fire attacks are at an all-time low,” Hagerman said.

“Jingle truck [cargo trucks used by Afghan nationals] drivers no longer have to worry about being hijacked, and (district council meeting) attendance is up. Overall, the entire area of operations is becoming more developed. New roads are being paved, the flow of commerce is booming and more medical and educational facilities are available to all.”

Most importantly, the ANP and the local government have gained the people’s trust.

“The enemy no longer has freedom of maneuver here,” said Army 1st Lt. Aaron Childers, a platoon leader from Co. A, operating out of Four Corners Outpost in central Andar. “It’s to the point now where villagers are calling the ANP commander whenever the enemy comes to their village.”

The police stationed in the three towns of Sini, Mirti and Sadar Kala now have a reputation of being ethical, tactical and professional, Childers explained.

“They’ve finally received the right combination of leadership, training and equipment here that’s transformed them into what they are now,” said Childers.

While each branch of the Afghan National Security Forces has an important role to play in Afghanistan’s security, the main players for sustained local security are the ANP, Childers stated. They have an involved and intimate knowledge of the people, the area, the enemy, and are the ones passing that knowledge to their partner Coalition units.

But the 2-508’s responsibility as caretaker for Andar’s forces is changing hands in spring, a potentially difficult time to pass over a district known for being an ideal insurgent haven.

“Andar’s improvements have been some of the best in the country,” Hagerman said. “Just because there’s a new unit coming in, the improvements aren’t going to change, they’ll continue.”

In an effort to provide a seamless transition to the 101st Airborne Division unit, members of company A took it upon themselves to create a two-month course of specialized training for the Andar’s police force.

“We want to hand-off a police force who knows what they’re doing and also knows what will be expected of them,” said Childers, who wrote the training schedule. “Last year, we were handed a police force who didn’t know what to do and we spent months trying to figure out how to get them going. We don’t want all that work going to waste; the 101st shouldn’t have to start over from scratch.”

Company A squad and platoon leaders will conduct daily training sessions covering standardized marksmanship, radio communications, small and large group tactics, escalation of force procedures and first aid, Childers stated.

“Everything they need for the training is provided by us, including ammo, fuel and food,” he said. “All they have to do is show up.”

While all ANSF forces are initially trained by Coalition Embedded Training Teams at special training centers like the one in nearby Gardez, training doesn’t just stop when they leave the ETTs’ care.

“It’s then the responsibility of the units to work with, continually train and evaluate (the ANSF), just like we train our own guys in garrison,” Childers said. “We’re trying to take the foundation the embedded training teams instilled and improve on it in the field.”

Childers hopes the training will help the Andar ANP and the 101st Airborne Division to hit the enemy hard in the spring.

“We want them to be unified, on the same page and fighting as a team,” said Childers. “In spring, there’s no reason for the police force to be merely reacting to the enemy. Instead, they’ll be trained and ready to proactively pursue the enemy, which will provide continued security for Andar.”
FORWARD OPERATING BASE SHARANA, Afghanistan - Army engineers from Task Force Pacemaker conducted a skill labor workshop late January, teaching basic construction skills, aiding Afghan workers in becoming more marketable in the constantly expanding Afghan construction industry.

The skill labor workshop was led by 1st Lt. Grayson Pranin and Sgt. 1st Class Clay Wait, Support Platoon, 585th Engineer Company, from Fort Lewis, Wash. The workshop increased the construction knowledge of 50 unskilled and partially-skilled Afghans nominated by local provincial government and Afghan contractors.

The seven-day course consisted of lectures in job safety, tools and their proper uses and basic carpentry. The event culminated with the students being divided into groups of 10 and each group building a tool shed. The groups competed against each other as they constructed their sheds. At the end of the course, the students received the tools they used during their classes and a certificate of training.

Asadullah, 18, a student at the skill labor workshop said that he has some experience in carpentry and mixing concrete. He said the class taught him American standards of mixing concrete and placing rebar on a cement pad. Asadullah was recognized as an excellent student in his group and was rewarded by keeping the tool shed his group built. He plans to make the tool shed a carpenter shop for his local community.

Qassem, 22, was another student at the skill labor workshop.

“I think that this skill labor workshop is important for the development of Afghanistan,” said Qassem. “It was amazing to build the tool shed, especially the trusses on the roof.”

This is the second skill labor workshop held by the task force this year. The purpose of the workshops are to teach Afghan contractors and their laborers construction skills, specifically carpentry and masonry, financed through the U.S. Commander's Emergency Response Program Funds.
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The workshop course includes meals, tools and materials financed through the U.S. Commander’s Emergency Response Program Funds.
Nangarhar Province JPCC blazes trail in emergency services

By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Jacob Caldwell
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Every week Nangarhar law enforcement representatives and Task Force Raptor Soldiers meet at the Joint Provincial Coordination Center in Jalalabad, to exchange information and discuss how they can better serve the citizens of the province.

The JPCC is a model in eastern Afghanistan for synchronizing the efforts of the U.S. forces, Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police, Afghan National Army and emergency responders.

While the successes of the JPCC are numerous, the highest profile program so far has been the implementation of a 9-1-1 type emergency number. The 1-0-0 number in Jalalabad has virtually the same services, offering quick access to emergency responders 24-hours a day.

“They dial three numbers and they can talk to the ANP,” said Army 1st Lt. Jeff Reed, JPCC officer in charge, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 173rd Special Troops Battalion.

“If they need to talk to anyone or if there is anything going on, from this center they can dispatch fire trucks, ambulances, police patrols or they can ask questions,” said Reed.

The JPCC averages 25 to 50 calls on the 1-0-0 number per day. Some days that number surpasses 100. For now, the majority of the calls are to check and see if the number actually works.

The program is yet another step forward in the progress of Afghanistan, according to Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey Milhorn, 173rd Special Troops Battalion and TF Raptor commander.

“The people are now securing themselves,” said Milhorn. “They now have a communications network established that they can tie back to the JPCC immediately and get a relatively rapid response.”

As with any new program, there were obstacles to overcome, according to Army Staff Sgt. Michael Roth, JPCC noncommissioned officer-in-charge.

“The initial problems were dealing with the different phone carriers, Roshan, AWCC, etc. Now there’s a line for everybody regardless of the phone carrier that’s being used,” said Roth, assigned to HHC, 173rd STB.

ANP Maj. Abdul Gadim said he’s impressed with the success of the program.

“It’s great. If there’s a problem we can jump on it and help the people,” he said.
Soldiers assigned to Forward Operating Base Kutschbach stand in formation during a base dedication ceremony. FOB Pathfinder was renamed FOB Kutschbach in honor of Staff Sgt. Patrick Kutschbach, the first Servicemember assigned to the base to be killed in action. Kutschbach is survived by his wife and son.

The sun was nearly down.

During the ceremony to rename FOB Kutschbach, several of his team members related memories of their friend.

“There is no way that anybody didn’t get along with Pat,” said one of his teammates. “He was a straight-up kind of guy. He didn’t sugar-coat anything. If you were going to get into it with somebody, you wanted him there.”

According to his friends, Kutschbach’s laugh was one of a kind, he had a knack for cracking jokes, and the only thing he loved more than soldiering was his wife and son.

“Pat was one of those special people who could take control of just about any situation with a few words and his signature laugh,” said one of his friends.

This was Kutschbach’s first long deployment and according to his friends it was evident he missed his family.

“While playing catch one day in Afghanistan I asked Pat about his plans after the Army and after Afghanistan,” said one of his teammates. “I asked him if he was ready to live back in the states again. He said, ‘Bo, I am so ready to live back in the states. All I want to do is drive my son to baseball practice and maybe stick around and coach him too.’”

“The one thing that helps bring solace to (our team) is that he passed away doing what he truly loved and believed in,” said the sergeant’s team leader.

Kutschbach didn’t give his life in vain.

“We are making slow progress here in Tag Ab,” said one of his friends. “Things are going well it’s just going to take awhile.”

The name of FOB Pathfinder may have changed, but its mission is still counterinsurgency and training Afghan National Security Forces. Kutschbach was on a counterinsurgency mission when he was killed.

“Counterinsurgency is the main mission of us here,” said Leary. “We find and defeat the insurgency while helping the Afghan people and supporting Afghanistan’s democratic government.”

When Kutschbach was killed in November 2007, FOB Pathfinder was a barebones installation without electricity or a kitchen. FOB Kutschbach is slowly growing and now has both electricity and a place for Soldiers to get a hot meal.

“I am sure that each and every one of (Pat’s) family will smile knowing that Pat will continue to live in the hearts and minds of family and friends,” said one of his teammates.

“I am going to miss Pat’s wild grin and the one of a kind laugh,” said one of his friends, holding back tears. “I will never forget you brother.”
POPE AIR FORCE BASE, N.C. (AFPN) - A Pope Air Force Base Airman made an impact on working relationships with key leaders in Afghanistan almost a year into his tour with a provincial reconstruction team.


His team has helped five districts of Laghman Province using information operations, development and reconstruction projects.

“(Colonel Ricci) is in one of the toughest command billets in Afghanistan,” said Col. Michael Thornton, the 43rd Operations Group commander.

“The experience of participating in a multiservice, interagency team has been simply phenomenal,” Colonel Ricci said. “This is the venture of a lifetime in which I’ve experienced the terror of being attacked (including one of my Soldiers dying from an improvised explosive device) as well as the pure satisfaction of helping people in dire need.”

The PRT has achieved benchmarks which set Laghman on the path to an independent and secure province; 28,800 newspapers distributed, installation of the first four anti-IED billboards and a media-based anti-IED campaign that resulted in 75 percent of all IEDs turned in or discovered by locals.

There are two events that will remain with him and define what his team has accomplished.

First is the U.S. PRT interagency strategy developed in June 2007. The strategy is detailed to the point of defining specific tasks to PRT components with regard to security, governance, reconstruction and information operations.

Second is the subnational counsel activities in August 2007 for the Provincial Development Plan. The plan defines activities and projects in a prioritized manner and established a long-term vision for governance and reconstruction.

During the past year, Colonel Ricci led more than 280 ground assault convoys reducing the risks for his team in the most IED intensive province in Afghanistan.

He planned missions, prepared battle drills and ordered mitigation measures such as road clearing packages, electronic warfare burns and surveillance along the routes they traveled.

The PRT spearheaded a shura at Qal’eh Najil engaging more than 200 village elders from three major valleys known for anti-government support. The colonel said this was key to winning the hearts and minds of local Afghan leaders and citizens.
In for the long haul.

Freedom Watch Television News

Weekdays on The Pentagon Channel
Soldiers operating at Forward Operating Base Kalagush, in eastern Afghanistan, enjoy a scenic view in Nuristan Province. (Photo by U.S. Army Captain McDonald Roberts)
Children smile for the camera at the Kapisa Orphanage. (U.S. Army photo by Cpt. Elizabeth A. Casebeer)

Marine Maj. John Jay Antonelli helps spread good will to children in Greshk, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. (photo courtesy of Romanian photographer Florin Ghioca)