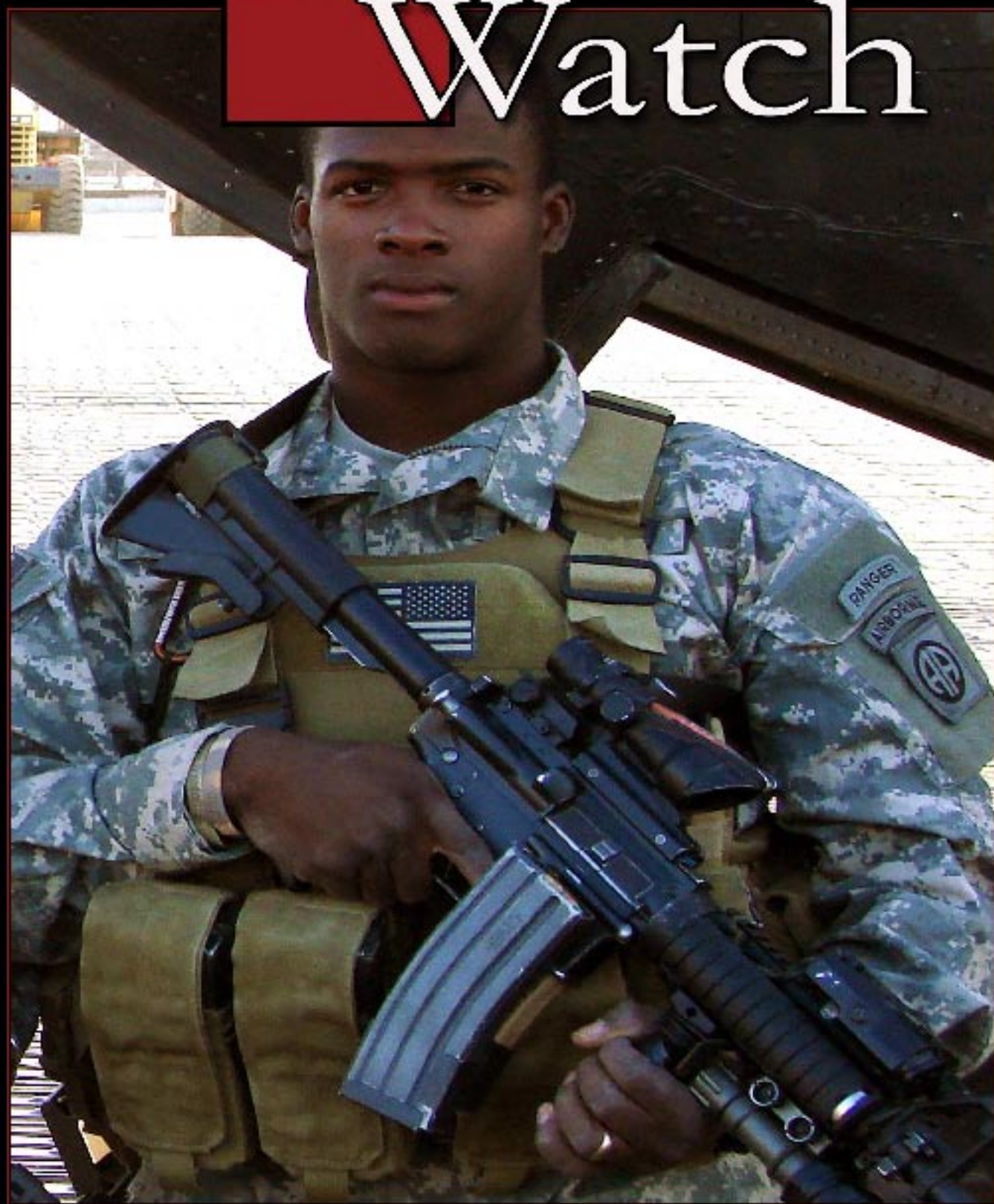


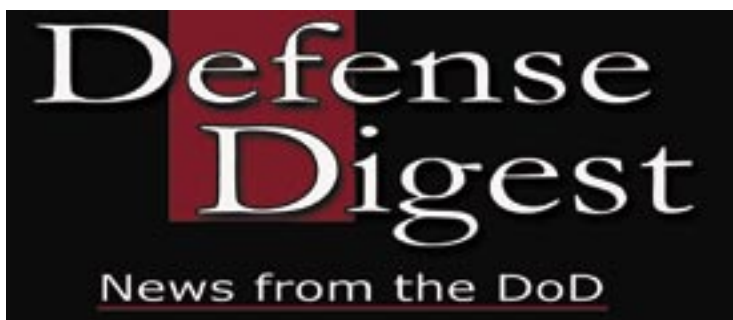
March 17, 2008

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN



Courage under fire ■ Jump ■ Reconstruction



Military saves: Sound finances equate to mission readiness

By Jamie Findlater

Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Troops with sound personal finances are better able to focus on mission accomplishment, a Department of Defense official said.

“While you are deployed in harm’s way, your focus has to be on the mission at hand, it shouldn’t be on the financial situation at home and whether or not it’s sound,” Navy Cmdr. Dave Julian, associate director of the department’s Office of Family Policy, Children and Youth, said in an America Supports You Live Blog Talk Radio segment.

The effort to educate servicemembers and ease the burden of financial worry was the focus of the DoD’s Feb. 24 - March 4, “Military Saves Week” observance, dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of individual financial readiness.

During the week, financial service managers put on financial fairs and contests to educate family members and help them come up with the best ways to prepare for the future and ease financial worry.

“The things that are affecting the greater society as a whole also affect our servicemembers,” Julian said. “The cost of gasoline drives everything up, (and there are) issues with subprime mortgage rates, but then for military members, there is the added stress of: ‘Will my family be financially fit while I am deployed?’” he said.

This year’s focus for the campaign, “Military Youth Saves,” educated military family members under age 18

about the importance of starting on a sound financial path early. Events ranged from essay contests with savings bonds for prizes to competitions to see who could save the most with coupons at the commissary.

But promoting financial awareness isn’t just a week-long effort, Julian stated. Programs are in place year-round to help servicemembers manage their money.

“We encourage members on an installation to go to their financial readiness specialist at the financial readiness center to get an assessment and find out where they are financially and what their level of financial literacy is,” Julian said. “The push is to encourage servicemembers to establish financial goals ranging from building wealth to recovering from debt and making a plan.”

Julian noted the Better Business Bureau has a program called “Military Line,” a resource cautioning servicemembers to avoid “too-good-to-be-true” offers.

“We had one case outside Charleston Air Force Base (in South Carolina) where the organization was set up outside as a military information center and, in fact, it was selling insurance,” he said. “Once you get through the paperwork and the fluff, it might be some sort of insurance or lending deal,” he cautioned.

The BBB isn’t the only outside organization participating in the DoD effort.

“DoD has also partnered with about 23 financially related non-profit organizations that all offer some sort of financial resource for military families to take advantage of,” Julian said.

The DoD’s Military Homefront Web site, www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil, is a good resource that links to all these partners providing official information about DoD policies and procedures, he said. He also encouraged servicemembers to use Military OneSource’s “Money Matters” feature, which has personal-finance calculators, DVDs, CDs and podcasts.

Financial readiness equates to mission readiness, and that couldn’t be truer than it is today, Julian noted. He explained that creating this awareness and connecting people to the resources available is an important part of the mission.



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COVER: Army Sgt. Jonas Jerome
Allen, a Paratrooper with the 82nd Air-
borne Division's Long Range Surveil-
lance, poses for a photo in front of a
CH-47 Chinook helicopter. During a
battle in Kapisa Province, Afghanistan,
Allen repaired a fellow gunner's MK-
19 grenade launcher while under fire.
(U.S. Army photo)

BACK COVER: Sgt. 1st Class Mi-
chael Loetz, Fusion Company, 2nd Bat-
talion, 503rd Infantry Regiment was
awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Val-
or for rescuing an Afghan truck driver
during an ambush in eastern Afghani-
stan. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class
Eric Hendrix)

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Sky Soldier receives Bronze Star

By Sgt. 1st Class Eric Hendrix
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FENTY, Afghanistan — Sgt. 1st Class Michael Loetz recently received a Bronze Star Medal for Valor for saving the life of an Afghan truck driver last year.

The story behind the rescue is both harrowing and heart-warming.

The Distribution Platoon of Fusion Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, had just taken over combat logistics patrol operations and were taking a load of ammunition to troops in the Korengal Valley on May 30, 2007.

“I took over a platoon with a lot of brand new privates with no experience,” said Loetz, a 37-year-old native of Charleston, S.C. “The roads hadn’t been improved at all. We were almost tearing the doors off the trucks because it was cliff on one side, rocks on the other.”

Distro Platoon’s mission is to take vital supplies to locations where supply helicopters can’t get to. It will often use the services of local Afghan drivers and their rugged vehicles nicknamed “jingle trucks”. Loetz’s platoon delivers ammunition, mail and everything in-between to the war fighters in these hard-to-reach locations. It’s a dangerous drive into the Korengal Valley.

“We got hit going up the road,” said Loetz. “It was just small-arms fire, but the jingle truck in front of me got hit.”

A firefight ensued and the Afghan driver of the truck in front of him got out and crawled underneath it for safety.

“We talked the driver out from under the vehicle [after suppressing enemy fire], got him back in the truck and continued on,” Loetz said.

At the top of the hill, where the load of ammunition was to be dropped, Loetz talked with the Afghan driver and told him as long as he stayed with the platoon on the way back down, he would make sure that the driver got to the bottom in one piece.

Then the worst happened.

“We got hit by an IED on the way back down,” said Loetz. “At least three RPG’s hit the side of the cliff below my truck and at least two hit the rock wall above it.”

The jingle truck in front of him took small-arms fire, tearing up it’s front end.

“At that point, we were separated from our lead element and we couldn’t drive around the jingle truck on that narrow road,” according to Loetz.

Loetz’s gunner was laying suppressive fire with a .50 caliber machine gun.

“I said, ‘the hell with it,’ and I got out of the truck and went

and grabbed the jingle truck driver,” explained Loetz. “He was hiding under the rear axle of his truck trying to avoid getting hit again.”

Despite the hail of gunfire, Loetz put his own life in jeopardy, snatching the Afghan driver and throwing him in the backseat of his truck.

“He had no way to protect himself and no way to defend himself,” Loetz said. “I had already promised him that we would take care of him. You just don’t go back on a word like that. I knew that if I didn’t get him, he would stay right there and die.”

The next step was to get the platoon back together and move down the hill.

“I was thinking that I needed to move the jingle truck just enough to get my vehicle around it,” Loetz said. “There was just no room. So, I pushed it off the cliff.”

Pushing the truck off the cliff with a Humvee was not feasible due to the possibility of damaging their ride out of the valley. Loetz pushed the truck so that it would roll off the side of the cliff. The jingle truck tumbled more than 100 feet to the valley bottom.

Army Lt. Col. William Ostlund, commander of 2nd Bn., 503rd Inf. Reg., talked about seeing the event unfold from the battalion operations center on Camp Blessing.

“I remember very well, watching the video feed and watching as the truck rolled over the cliff, thinking that it was one of our trucks and it took the breath

out of me,” said Ostlund.

On the road, Loetz was getting his convoy back together.

“We were still taking small-arms fire and I got back in my vehicle and we were assessing the situation,” said Loetz. “By that time, Able Company had moved into an over-watch position and locked-on the opposite side of the valley.”

The coordinated suppressing fire gave the Distro Platoon the chance to get out of the kill-zone and down the hill to safety.

Ostlund recounted getting the good news that Loetz’s convoy had gotten out of the valley safely.

“We got word that not only did we not lose any Soldiers from Fusion, but we didn’t lose any [Afghans] either,” Ostlund said.

“The local population is our center of gravity,” he said. “We need to maintain the love and affections of the population and protect them.”

“If we put them at risk and don’t do everything to protect them, we’re really not doing what we’re supposed to be doing here,” said Ostlund.

The lanky platoon sergeant from whom those brand-new privates learned a valuable lesson said only this to them, “It’s what you train for.”



Sgt. 1st Class Michael Loetz, Fusion Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment.

82nd Airborne medic prevails under fire

By Army Sgt. Jim Wilt
CJTF-82 Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – In a hail of bullets and rocket-propelled grenades, many Soldiers would be hesitant to expose themselves, despite advances in body armor and medicine.

Not every Soldier would risk his life to help a soldier from a different army, yet, throughout the history of war, men have risen to the occasion during battle to save the life of another.

Army Staff Sgt. Joesph “Doc” Peer, a combat medic attached to the 82nd Airborne Division’s Long Range Surveillance Detachment, is one of those men.

On Aug. 21, 2007, Peer and Paratroopers from the 82nd LRSD, along with soldiers from the Afghan National Army 2nd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps, were clearing the Askin Valley in Kapisa Province of Taliban fighters when they were attacked.

During the battle, two ANA soldiers were wounded approximately 200-400 meters away from Peer.

“Word came over the radio that there were wounded personnel among the dismounted Coalition forces,” said Army Sgt. Trevor Oppenborn, an infantryman with the LRSD. “Sergeant Peer immediately asked if they had a U.S. medic and did they need further assistance.”

“The .50 cal gunner [in the vehicle] was returning fire when the call came over the net that we had casualties,” said Peer, a native of Glendale, Ariz.

Peer said he was told over the radio they had someone treating the wounded soldiers but he continued to ask if his help was needed.

He received no response.

“Approximately two minutes later, the call came over the radio to dismount and aid the wounded,” Oppenborn, a native of Houston said.

Peer, accompanied by Oppenborn, moved to the casualties.

“I looked at the vehicle .50 cal. gun-

ner (Army Sgt. Matthew C. Hinerman) and told him to keep me alive since we were still under fire,” Peer said.

“We immediately dismounted and took off up the high ground to aid the ANA on the other side,” Oppenborn said. “About 400 meters later, we reached the wounded soldiers, both in bad shape, and only a [Navy] Corpsman for the two of them.”

Peer said every possible scenario he could face was going through his mind when he arrived at the casualties.

“I noticed a Navy Corpsman was on scene and he was treating one of the casualties,” Peer said. “I immediately went for the other one.”

Both of the ANA soldiers had gunshot wounds to their lower body. The Casualty Collection Point where they were located was receiving indirect fire.

When Peer got to the scene and saw what he had, he said he was focused on treatment and getting them to a higher echelon of care.

“Doc jumped to work on the worse of the two, pulling him behind a boulder and starting to patch him up,” Oppenborn said. “I went to the aid of the Corpsman; he looked like he needed it.”

Peer said the Afghan soldier he treated had a gunshot wound to his left leg, which he used a pressure bandage on. The men realized they needed to move the wounded to a safer location for an aerial medical evacuation, once the Corpsman and Oppenborn finished treating the other wounded soldier.

“With the CCP still taking indirect fire there was no way a MEDEVAC was going to land there,” Peer said.

Shortly after the wounded were loaded into two ANA trucks and driven to a helicopter landing zone, Peer re-evaluated them.

“When we got to the bottom of the hill, I unloaded my patient and performed a more extensive assessment,” Peer said. “Once the other patient had been moved off the truck, I began to assess him to discover his [wound] was

actually in his groin and was a little more serious than I had been originally told.”

Peer had been told earlier the second soldier was shot in the leg.

He continued to treat the wounded until the MEDEVAC helicopters arrived.

“When the birds arrived, I explained the patients and each injury,” Peer said. “When they were loaded on the bird, I grabbed my gear and headed back to my truck at the top of the hill.”

Peer said he would do it again if needed.

“Sergeant Peer’s actions show a man who didn’t care whether the soldiers were American or Afghan,” Oppenborn said. “He did what it took to save another human’s life.”

“His actions were in accordance with, at least three of the Army’s core values; Selfless Service, Duty and above all, Personal Courage,” Hinerman, an infantryman with the LRSD and the gunner on Peer’s vehicle said. “The fact that he risked his life for soldiers that aren’t a part of our military reinforces his commitment to his profession and to the War on Terror.”

What the fate of the wounded men would have been if Peer didn’t act is unknown. The Soldiers there with him that day believe it would not have been good.

“Where they were located, there would have been no way to retrieve them for several hours due to the volume of enemy fire,” Hinerman, a native of Kansas City, Mo., said. “In my opinion, they would have bled out long before the fight was over.”

“Sergeant Peer stepped up when he could and proved that he was willing to risk his life to save another person, regardless of nationality,” he said. “I’m not sure anyone could feel anything but the utmost respect for him.”

Both of the wounded survived their injuries. Peer, Oppenborn and Hinerman remained in Kapisa Province with the LSRD.

A bad time for Murphy's Law

By Army Sgt. Jim Wilt
CJTF-82 Public Affairs

It's a simple law stating: 'If it can go wrong, it will.' Murphy's Law is known and experienced by people everywhere. Sometimes the law is followed by the clause: "At the worst possible time." Paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division's Long Range Surveillance Detachment are no strangers to the law or the clause that often follows it.

During a fire fight Sept. 9, 2007, near the village of Qaleh Saleh, Tag Ab District, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, Army Sgt. Jonas Jerome Allen and Spc. Charles Villasenor had a run in with Murphy's Law.

Paratroopers from the LRSB, along with a Marine Corps Embedded Training Team and soldiers with the Afghan National Army's 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps, were on a mission to assess damage from an earlier engagement when the unit began taking enemy fire.

Fortunately for the two paratroopers and their fellow Soldiers, a second law came into effect. This time the law wasn't named after Murphy; it was named after Sir Isaac Newton.

'For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction,' is Newton's third law of motion.

Allen was manning a .50 caliber machine gun in one vehicle while Villasenor was behind a MK-19 grenade launcher in another when the fighting began.

"When we began taking fire, I started suppressive terrain denial bursts at a low wall about 130 meters to my front," Villasenor, a native of Santee, Calif., said.

Soon after the fighting began, Murphy's Law came into effect.

"I fired four to five bursts and had to reload, due to a break in the link," Villasenor said. "When I charged the weapon I noticed that the right side charging handle was still towards the back of the weapon."

"During his reloading there was a malfunction with the MK-19," said Spc. Christopher L. Baker, driver of the truck Villasenor was in. "When he couldn't fix the malfunction I called 'gun down' over the radio."

"When I heard over the radio that [Villasenor's] gun was down, I was still shooting my weapon and we were taking contact from a house and the rooftop," Allen said. "I glanced at [Villasenor's truck] and saw that the gunner was having trouble and I knew we needed to get the MK-19 going."

"I couldn't fix the gun right then because what I had was a major malfunction," Villasenor said. "It required the weapon to be almost completely disassembled in order to fix."

"The driver, Specialist Baker, made the radio call, 'gun down,' and I had him back away from our position," Villasenor said. "I yelled over to the Marine gunner to take

our position due to the downed gun."

"At this time, while taking small-arms and [rocket propelled grenade] fire ... Sergeant Allen waved for our vehicle to pull up beside his," Baker, a Newaygo, Mich. native said.

Enter Newton's Law.

"I jumped out and told the gunner (Villasenor) to get out and get into my turret," Allen said.

"At that time, we were still taking sporadic small-arms and RPG fire when we jumped out and switched trucks," Villasenor said.

Allen, who is Ranger qualified, has more experience operating the MK-19 than Villasenor. He also has additional training from his team leader on major malfunctions, Allen said.

Once the two gunners swapped trucks, Villasenor began to fire the .50 cal., while Allen began to work on the malfunctioning weapon.

"I jumped into the turret and saw that the charging handle was stuck behind the bolt and I knew the only way to fix it was to disassemble the weapon system," Allen said. "I knew I had to hurry because we were taking RPG's and small-arms fire and I'd rather fire at the enemy than to have the enemy fire at me."

Allen said he disassembled and reassembled the weapon as fast as he could.

"I just was thinking that if I hurry up and fix the MK-19, I could start engaging the enemy," he said.

Once he repaired it, he had the driver of the truck move him into a better position, then he put it to use.

"After checking the weapon, we both decided to stay where we were," Villasenor said. "He had more knowledge on the MK-19 and I am more proficient on the .50 cal."

"[I] fired the MK-19 into the house and the rooftop we were receiving contact from and after I unloaded an ammo can of 40 millimeter rounds, I reloaded it and kept engaging the enemy until we stopped taking contact," Allen said.

Both Soldiers feel the weapon was necessary in the fight.

"I can say that if I didn't fix the MK-19 the firefight could have lasted longer, because there is something about a loud boom that the enemy doesn't like and it usually gets quiet, meaning they've stopped firing or can't fire once the MK-19 starts firing and blowing things up," Allen said.

"There is no telling what would have happened," Villasenor said. "I do know that in a firefight each heavy weapon is essential."

During the battle, the two laws caught up with each other. Murphy's Law came into play when the weapon malfunctioned. Newton's law answered Murphy's with an opposing reaction from Allen.

Both of the Soldiers remained in Kapisa Province after the event and are scheduled to redeploy to Fort Bragg, N.C., before the end of April.

Afghanistan's elite fighting force neutralize Taliban insurgents

Courtesy of Combined Joint Task Force - 82 Public Affairs

As he approached the aircraft in the darkness, the rotor wash whipped dust and dirt across his face. However, amid the noise of the rotor, Afghan National Army Spc. Mohammed Ali said all he could hear were his responsibilities whirling in his head; 'Run from the aircraft towards the target, breach the door and clear my sector.'

Ali, an ANA Commando with the 201st Commando Kandak, was deployed to Helmand Province by the Afghan Ministry of Defense in response to the increasing attempts by the Taliban to terrorize Afghan citizens.

The mission of the commandos was to develop intelligence and conduct a surgical strike against key Taliban leadership and control in Helmand Province. In preparation for their mission, the troops conducted specialized training such as day and night live-fire maneuvers and multiple insertion techniques. Commando leaders

examined the most recent intelligence and targeted key individuals for capture.

The mission was ambitious: conduct a night air assault against multiple Taliban command-and-control centers in order to capture or kill Taliban leadership targets deep within the Kajaki region. The commandos named the operation, "Say'Laab," meaning "flood."

Buses containing nearly 100 ANA troops clad in black body armor and specialized weapons made their way from the 205th ANA camp to Kandahar Airfield, where numerous Coalition aircraft awaited with rotor blades churning.

As Ali boarded the aircraft, he said his pre-mission prayers while the high-pitched whine of the engines gave way to the formidable thumping of the rotor blades above. Moments later, a massive formation of transport and attack helicopters lifted off the runway together toward their targets.

As the strike force approached its objectives, Coalition helicopters



Afghan National Army 201st Commando Kandak members prepare to deploy on their first mission in Southern Afghanistan, Feb. 19. (U.S. Air Force photo)



Afghan National Army 201st Commando Kandak prepare to deploy on their first mission in Southern Afghanistan, Feb. 19. (U.S. Army photo)

dropped to just above ground level and increased their speed. Commandos pulled their night vision goggles over their eyes bringing the black ground to green life. In spite of the intense training and mission preparation, the Commandos understood the risks associated with this operation.

Pilots relayed their final checkpoints to the Commandos over radio communications, informed them to ready their weapons and remove their seatbelts. Seconds later, the helos touched down on multiple landing zones. The Commandos disembarked from their helicopters and quickly closed on their target compounds. As the roar of departing rotor blades filled the sky, Commandos assaulted and cleared four separate compounds in search of their elusive quarry.

see COMMANDOS page 12

Getting a Jump on training

82nd Airborne holds jumpmaster refresher course in-theater

**Story and photos by
Army Sgt. Jim Wilt
CJTF-82 Public Affairs**

Jumpmasters from the U.S. Army Advanced Airborne School are holding jumpmaster refresher classes for 82nd Airborne Division Soldiers here at Bagram, and throughout Afghanistan, until the end of March.

The class recertifies jumpmasters allowing them to perform the duties and responsibilities of a jumpmaster or safety. Jumpmasters are responsible for the safety of Soldiers during airborne operations.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Michael Spencer, the USAAS tower committee chief at Ft. Bragg, N.C. and an instructor at the course here, jumpmasters who successfully complete the course will be certified to perform duties for 180 days.

Students also need to perform one safety duty and one assistant jumpmaster duty upon return to Ft. Bragg before being able to act as a primary jumpmaster. If a jumpmaster has not completed a duty in more than 18 months, the jumpmaster will have to perform an additional safety duty, Spencer said.

By having the class here, instead of at Ft. Bragg, returning jumpmasters will not have to take their attention away from reintegration or their families to take the refresher class, Spencer added.

“The advantage [of taking the class here] is you have nothing but time,” said Chaplain (Maj.) Michael Klein, a student at the refresher course.

“Also, by having the course here, students don’t have to worry about studying for the class after work, instead it will allow more time for their families,” said Sgt. 1st Class Tony J. Quismundo, a communication platoon sergeant with A Co., 82nd Division Special Troops Battalion, and a student in the class.

The class covered various jumpmaster tasks including practical work in the aircraft and Jumpmaster Personnel Inspection.

With Army parachuting continually evolving, Klein said the refresher is needed.

“There is a lot of new equipment,” Klein said. “I am seeing a lot of stuff I have never seen before.”

Quismundo, who has been a jumpmaster for six years, jokingly said he forgets about half of what a jumpmaster needs to know.

“Fifteen months is kind of a long time to be away from this,” he added.

Students’ knowledge of parachuting equipment is tested during the JMPI portion of the class. The students have four and a half minutes to properly complete a safety check of two paratroopers’ equipment. A jumpmaster ensures a jumper is properly wearing his parachuting equipment and that the equipment has no deficiencies during JMPI. One of the troopers wears full combat equipment to include a rucksack and weapons case.

If a student is unable to perform the JMPIs correctly in the allotted time, he will not be recertified as a jumpmaster.

Approximately 90 percent of the students are expected to pass the refresher course, Spencer said.

“This is the honest truth,” Klein said. “If I am doing something so stupid it would endanger a paratrooper, I hope I fail.”

Throughout the month of March, the USAAS team will be visiting various forward operating bases in Afghanistan to teach the Jump Master Refresher Course.



Training



Sgt. 1st Class Tony J. Quismundo, a communication platoon sergeant with A Co., 82nd Division Special Troops Battalion and a student in the Jumpmaster Refresher Course, leans out of a mock aircraft door while reviewing actions in the aircraft at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, March 1. Jumpmasters from the U.S. Army Advanced Airborne School came to Afghanistan to administer the Jumpmaster Refresher Course to 82nd Airborne Division Jumpmasters preparing to return from a 15-month deployment.

Inset: Chaplain (Maj.) Michael Klein, a student at a Jumpmaster Refresher Course held at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, checks the elasticity of a pack opening spring band on a MIRPS soft loop center pull reserve parachute. Jumpmasters from the U.S. Army Advanced Airborne School came to Afghanistan to administer the Jumpmaster Refresher Course to 82nd Airborne Division Jumpmasters preparing to return from a 15-month deployment.

Right: A universal static line hangs from a mock anchor line cable during a Jumpmaster Refresher Course held for 82nd Airborne Division jumpmasters at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, March 4. A universal static line is the part of the parachute that opens the chute when a Paratrooper exits an aircraft.



Italian troops bring aid to villages in Surobi with the help of donkeys

Story and photos by Italian Army Capt. Mario Renna
Regional Command Capital - ISAF Public Affairs

Several years ago, the Italian Mountain Troops dismissed the mules that had been serving in the artillery corps for almost a century.

The mountainous terrain of Afghanistan has created a new cooperation between Italian soldiers and the cousin of these bold animals, the donkey.

The men of the Alpine Parachute Regiment and the 185th Parachute Artillery Regiment have established their base in Surobi, an eastern district of Kabul, in the area of operations of Regional Command-Capital, International Security Assistance Force.

Their mission is to provide security and assistance to local authorities and population, which sometimes, is easier said than done. The area is mountainous and harsh; many villages are away from the main axis of communication. The villager's primary source of food is agriculture and they herd livestock in a land where electric power, roads and water are luxury items. Many Afghan children do not go to school for the nearest is still too far, even on a donkey.

"On a donkey... why not?" was the first thought that came to the commanding officer of the APR. "We'll go to every place in the area bringing something tangible to the least accessible villages," he said. "We'll do it riding donkeys, like in the old times".

The major in charge of Italian Task-Force Surobi al-



A donkey being escorted by an Afghan conductor, carries medical supplies to a highland village in Surobi District, Kabul. A total of six donkeys were used to carry food and other supplies to the villagers.



A medic from the Italian Army 185th Parachute Artillery Regiment checks blood pressure and takes the pulse of an Afghan woman while village onlookers wait patiently for their turn.

"On a donkey... why not?"

-Alpine Parachute Regiment Commanding Officer

ready had the solution in mind. A few days earlier he met with a Malek (tribal leader or chieftain) who owns some donkeys. A few hundred Euros and a handshake later, six donkeys (and conductors) were rented for two days, loaded with 200,000 grams of rice.

On Jan. 1 at 6 a.m., the donkeys were loaded with medicines, blankets and other items for the villagers.

The column looked magnificent, and from a distance one would say it resembled an image from World War I.

The Afghan conductors knew the terrain, allowing faster travel time. Before entering the village, the soldiers asked for the Malek. The welcome was a warm one. Hospitality is sacred among the villagers. Tea and sweets were served at the Malek's residence while the Major explained the reason for the visit and that a medical team was available. The Malek himself called the elders of the 10 families living in the village to facilitate cooperation with the Italian soldiers. The donkeys were unloaded and the goods delivered evenly with the help of the elders.

The medical team began its work treating the elderly and children. Afghan women also accepted treatment: a sign of trust in ISAF soldiers.

The villagers showed genuine gratitude. The aid brought by the Italian Soldiers gave small, but significant relief for the winter months and they re-discovered an old, strong and reliable companion: the donkey.

New bridge increases commerce, improves quality of life

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Brian J. Lamar
CJTF - 82 Public Affairs

Until recently, a large obstacle stood in the way of the people in the villages of Tupak and Nalyar in Nurgaram District of Nuristan Province.

That obstacle was removed when the Nuristan Provincial Reconstruction Team funded an 82-foot-long, \$100,000 bridge across the Alingar River Feb. 18.

Residents once traveled into another province before doubling back on the opposite side of the river. This round-about trip involved an unnecessary two-hour car ride.

“The lack of easy access was directly affecting commerce and quality of life,” said Army 1st. Lt. Kenneth Vander Molen, a Civil Affairs officer with the Nuristan PRT. “This project allows easier farm-to-market transportation and enables villagers to commute to distant employment sites.”

The reinforced concrete bridge is strong enough to allow large trucks to



The new Nuristan bridge allows a direct path across the Alingar River, which saves Afghans a two-hour drive. During the construction of the bridge, more than 50 Afghan unskilled laborers were hired for six months resulting in a boost in the local economy (Courtesy photo)

cross and employed more than 50 unskilled workers for nearly six months.

“This bridge also increases public safety,” said Navy Lt. Stanley Lam, an engineer with the Nuristan PRT. “Villagers no longer have to risk dangerous river crossings. It also provides direct access by emergency medical vehicles

to several villages.”

Members of the PRT worked in coordination with district and village shuras to ensure that the bridge would meet the needs of the population.

The bridge also acts as a gateway for easier access to future reconstruction and development sites in the area.

EASTER SERVICES

Holy Thursday Cath Mass:	20 Mar 08	1515Z/1945L	Enduring Faith Chapel
Good Friday, Protestant:	21 Mar 08	1330Z/1800L	Enduring Faith Chapel
Good Friday Catholic Mass:	21 Mar 08	1515Z/1945L	Enduring Faith Chapel
Service of the Cross:	22 Mar 08	1515Z/1945L	Clamshell
Easter Sunrise Service:	23 Mar 08	0230Z/0700L	Enduring Faith Chapel
Easter Sunday Cath Mass:	23 Mar 08	0800Z/1230L	Clamshell
Easter Protestant Service:	23 Mar 08	1100Z/1530L	Clamshell
Easter Event: All Welcome	23 Mar 08	1430Z/1900L	Clamshell

Commandos: Afghans take the fight to insurgents

continued from page 7

Within minutes of insertion, the Commandos seized their intended targets and secured a foothold deep within the city. Despite the advantage of tactical surprise, a fierce battle ensued. The reports of multiple weapons rang out as insurgents put up a futile defense against the elite Afghan force. The Commandos quickly and accurately eliminated threats with small-arms and machine gun fire.



The speed, surprise and tenacity of the assault not only caught the enemy insurgents off guard, but also prevented the escape of a senior Taliban commander.

Throughout the operation, intense anti-aircraft fire filled the night sky. Attack helicopters swarmed over their targets, placing precision-guided munitions and

intense machine gun fire on enemy fighting positions. Coalition aircraft flew in support of the Afghan troops, aiding in the elimination of enemy caches and a drug processing facility.

At mission's end, multiple enemy fighters were eliminated. The Commandos quickly boarded their aircraft with 11 insurgents in custody. On the ground, six enemy vehicles, containing thousands of pounds of weapons and munitions, as well as nearly \$8 million in illegal narcotics were destroyed.

As the helicopter assault force lifted off toward Kandahar, Ali shook the hands of his brothers-in-arms with an undeniable certainty that the people of Afghanistan were safer this night

"The daring and complex operation highlighted the capacity of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to strategically deploy elite Commando forces across the country and conduct surgical strikes in support of their national objectives," said Army Capt. Vanessa R. Bowman, a Coalition spokesperson. "The success of Operation Say'Laab reinforced the esprit de corps and operational reach of the nation's most dedicated warriors. Commandos continue to ensure no safe haven exists for the enemies of freedom and prosperity, and that a brighter future lies ahead for the people of Afghanistan."

A poster for a radio broadcast titled "THE QUIET STORM" on Wednesdays. The background features a dark, stormy sky with lightning bolts striking over a mountainous landscape with buildings in the foreground. The text "THE QUIET STORM" is written in large, white, hand-drawn letters at the top. Below it, "WEDNESDAYS" is written in a similar style. On the right side, the words "SLOW JAMS", "REQUESTS", and "DEDICATIONS" are written in a stylized, white font. At the bottom left, the frequencies "91.5 FM MANAS 2000-2300" and "94.1 FM AFGHANISTAN 1830-2130" are listed. At the bottom right, there is a logo for "FREEDOM RADIO" with the tagline "his from the hellfront" below it.

Combined Joint Task Force - 82

Voting assistance

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

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

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

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

Mark these dates ...

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

Web Sites of Interest:

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

REFERENCES:

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

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

CJTF-82

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Photos From the Field



Airman 1st Class Erik Botzman, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron tactical aircraft maintenance crew chief, checks the tail hook on an F-15E before a combat sortie. Botzman's home unit is the 335th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)



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

freedomwatch@swa.army.mil



A brother and sister wait in line to receive donations at the Mahmood Raqi Orphanage, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan during Operation Care. Operation Care is the distribution of donations to the Afghan people by various units within theater. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Tyffani L. Davis)



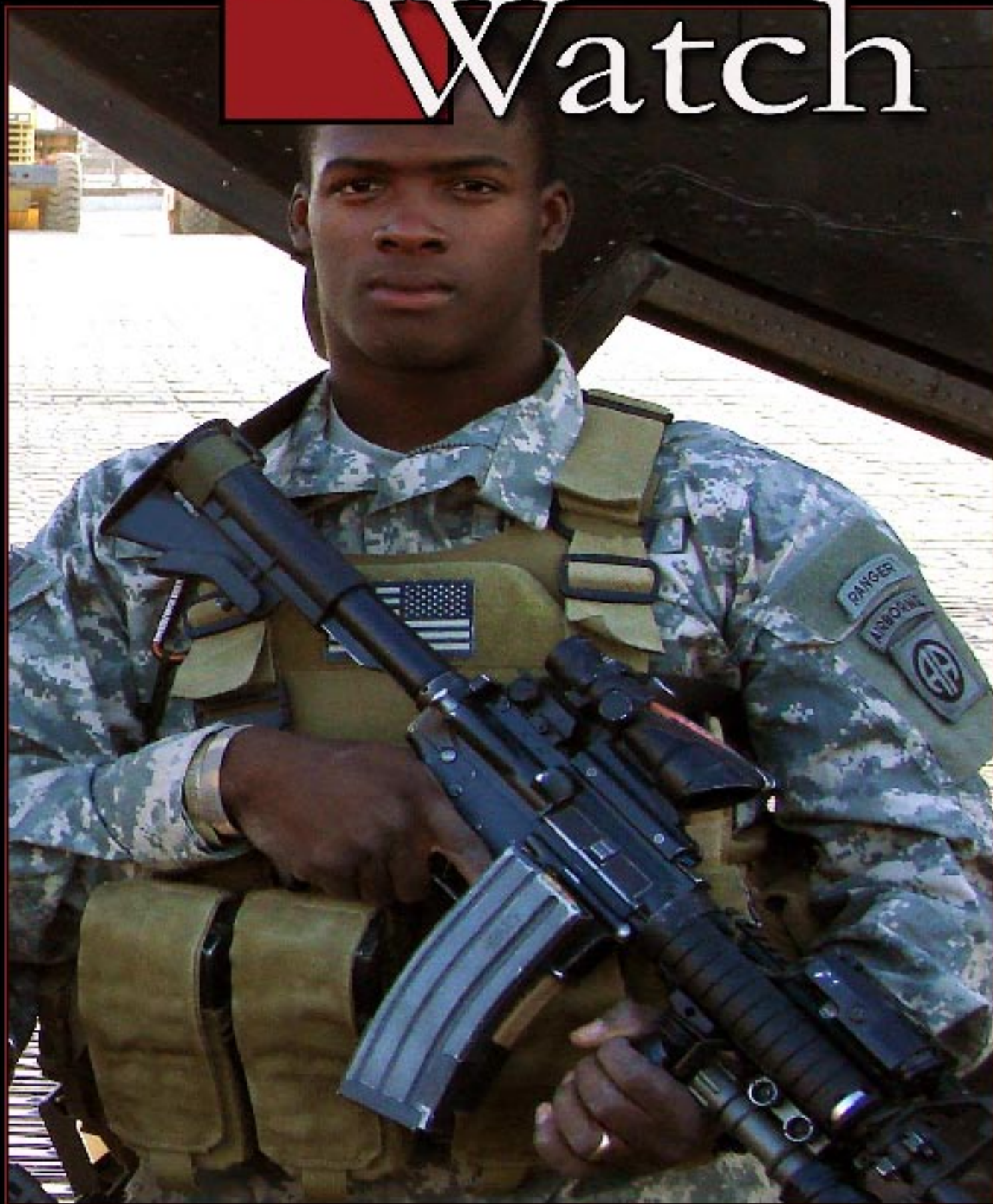
Soldiers from the 1st ABP, Embedded Training Team, Task Force Phoenix, conduct a live-fire training exercise for Afghan National Army soldiers in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. The exercise marked the graduation of this class of ANA soldiers. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Derek Niccolson)



March 17, 2008

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN



Courage under fire ■ Jump ■ Reconstruction