

## Wing promotes, recognizes, winners

Members of the 455<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing gathered in the A-10 clamshell May 31 to recognize promotes and monthly award winners.

**Promoted to:**

**Airman first class:**

Christopher Felix, Ryan Gordon, Ryan Martinez, John Morrow

**Senior airman:**

Shawn Fradet, David Lanskey, Patrick O'Hanlon, Michael McCord, Jeremy Page, Danny Skelton and Zachary Stine

**Staff sergeant:**

Keneisha Brooks, Corey Parrien and Dartanion Pittrell

**Technical sergeant:**

Pamera Edwards, Efren Perez Jr. and James Toombs

**Master sergeant:**

Charles Sheffield

**Captain:** Jonathan Patterson

**Lieutenant colonel:** James Mazerall

**Wing award winners for May were:**

**Airman of the Month:** Senior Airman Jeffrey Hamilton, 451<sup>st</sup> Air Expeditionary Group

**NCO of the month:** Tech. Sgt. Corey Miller, 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Mission Support Group

**Senior NCO of the Month:** Master Sgt. Jonathan Tucker, 755<sup>th</sup> EMSG

**Company Grade Officer of the Month:** Capt. Paul Zwilling, 755<sup>th</sup> EMSG

**Outstanding contributors:** Staff Sgt. John Ross and AM3 Michael Doiel



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

## INSIDE:

*C-130 maintainers keep 'em flying*



*Team helps build new school in Parwan Province*



## Remembering past warriors

Members of the 455<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing participate in a Memorial Day ceremony held on the flightline May 28. For more photos, see Page 10.



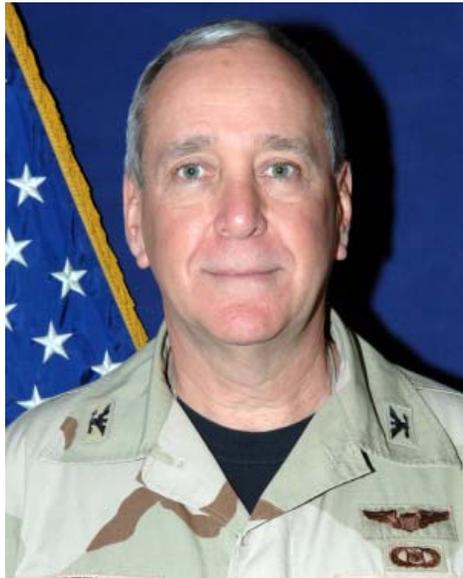
# Snapshot of an expeditionary support group

by **Col. Gary Costello**  
455th Expeditionary Mission Support  
Group Commander

In the overall 455<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing structure, the missions of the expeditionary operations and expeditionary maintenance groups are fairly obvious. The operations guys (a.k.a pilots) fly the aircraft while maintainers fix aircraft and load ordnance for the pilots to drop.

The remaining wing subordinate command is the 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Mission Support Group, which — because of its functional diversity — is a bit harder to describe. Mission support is a hybrid organization tailored to meet the needs of the wing, but it doesn't mirror a normal stateside support group.

The 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron's main function is to perform daily spall repair on the runway. This process keeps our rather fragile runway operational by sawing out crumbling sections and replacing them with a quick-setting polymer resin. A note to pilots: if you ever experience a relatively smooth take-off roll thank a CE troop, and if you don't, thank one anyway because potholes are not as deep as they were. Because of the 24/7 flying operation the team is only allowed onto the runway for three hours each day as selected missions continue to be launched during repair. CE



U.S. Air Force official photo

**Col. Gary Costello**

troops are also capable of building or fixing just about anything for anyone who asks (within reason).

They do not control power generation or distribution, so contrary to popular belief, when the power goes off, CE doesn't have the capability to restore the air-conditioning at Camp Cunningham. The CE control center coordinates with the power provider to get that done.

In a traditional mission support group, the communications and services squad-

rons are stand-alone organizations. However, at Bagram they are aligned under the mission support squadron because they both have smaller-than-standard footprints. As most of us already know, computer connectivity and expandability are locally contentious issues, and since the Army owns the network we don't have the capability to access and fix many problems independently. The communications folks perform yeoman's work in both explaining our needs and enhancing our relationship with our green brethren in order to meet wing mission requirements. Consequently, when your computers are all up and operating smoothly tip your hat to a Comm. person, and when the system goes to hell, blame the Army .... that's my story and I'm stick'in to it.

The services section employs, in my biased opinion, the hardest-working personnel in the wing. These six folks sling over 1,200 bags of personal laundry per week in addition to bedding linens, so when you're looking sharp and smelling good be sure to stop and thank a services troop. Please remember that they don't wash our clothes personally, so when we mess up the laundry forms it's the contractor who returns our laundry in the same condition that we

**"EMSG," continued on Page 3**

## Commander welcomes AEF airmen to the fight



By **Lt. Gen. Gary L. North**  
9th Air Force and  
USCENTAF commander

As our CENTAF Air Expeditionary Force rotation completes its transition, I want to welcome the Airmen of AEF 1/2. Whether this is your first deployment, second, third or beyond, the combined leadership and the CENTAF team look forward to your contributions to the long war against terrorism.

Your predecessors in AEF

9/10, and before them, have done an outstanding job during their rotation(s) and have set the conditions for your successes during your deployment. I know each of you have come prepared and trained for the mission and we look forward to the professionalism, dedication and innovation that you bring to the fight. Thank you for the preparation that has gotten you to the AOR, and thanks for putting service above self as you go about your duties in the AOR.

Much has been accom-

plished in the last three years. There is still much more to do. Each of you, and our Coalition partners, are having and will have a significant impact in bringing hope to people in need of our help. You are integral to bringing about peace and stability in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. The peoples of these countries and regions are counting on us to stay the course.

**"North," continued on Page 3**

**Bagram Bulletin**  
Editorial Staff, Disclaimer

- Brig. Gen. Christopher D. Miller..... Commander, 455th AEW
- Maj. Dave Kurlle ..... Chief, Public Affairs
- Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr. ....Editor, NCOIC



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**“ You all are making great sacrifices to help millions of people you will never know, but you should know your selfless commitment is changing the lives of people and nations forever—for the better. ”**

**-- “North” continued from Page 2**

As Muri al-Maliki, Iraq’s Prime Minister, said recently, “Just as we did away with the tyrant and the days of oppression and despotism, we will do away with terrorism and sabotage and the factors of backwardness, poverty and ignorance.”

You all are making great sacrifices to help millions of people you will never know, but you should know your selfless commitment is changing the lives of people and nations forever—for the better. But this struggle not only impacts the future of Iraq, Afghanistan and the countries in the Horn of Africa, but also the future safety of our families at home. Together, we’ll succeed. There is no acceptable alternative.

As you become immersed in the culture and work in the AOR, my challenge to you is to keep a clear focus on three things: the mission, mastering technology and self improvement.

Our priority is the mission, and Airmen today get the mission. You understand it. You’re doing it 24/7 and nobody does it better. It takes professional airmen to make the mission happen ... day in and day out.

The combat zone is just that, a combat zone. I need you to have your “game face”

on around the clock. Discipline and understanding and complying with the rules and the rules of engagement will support two key venues ... getting the mission done right and providing the basis for keeping you “in your lanes” as we go about the very dangerous business of performing our mission sets in the AOR.

We are constantly leveraging new ways to increase our capability, efficiency and effectiveness. We are leveraging technology to accomplish our mission more effectively. We have seen some incredible advances in how to do the job better and I’m confident there is still more innovation possible. Approach your tasks with this in mind. We need your “tip of the spear” look at our processes and procedures to continue to adapt and achieve the successes we need to win. The anti-Coalition forces change their tactics, techniques and procedures quickly ... we will, and must stay ahead of them.

Finally, set a few personal goals for yourself during your deployment. Learn about the culture of the Middle East, learn something about someone else’s job, meet and get to know our Coalition partners and sister services, take an online class, keep working on getting in better shape. You will be a better Airman by the next rotation.



U.S. Air Force photo courtesy CENTAF-FWD/PA

**Lt. Gen. Gary L. North, 9th Air Force and USCENTAF commander, addresses Coalition troops recently during an award presentation at a forward-deployed location.**

Deployments, especially combat deployments, are never easy. Remember the support back home for you and your families is widespread and sincere.

America is proud of you. Your CENTAF leadership team is proud to be serving alongside each of you in these very important times for our nation.

Thank you for your dedication and service and for making our Air Force the finest Air Force in the world today!

**-- “EMSG” continued from Page 2**

sent it. Services also asked me to thank those of you who have taken the time to help them unload clean laundry into the proper bins when you stopped to pick up your laundry. This small section also runs many of the MWR events, the snack bar and ensures an endless supply of bottled water in the gyms.

The 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron does just what its name entails; provides security for our high-priority aircraft assets and also keeps us secure on Camp Cunningham. The ESFS is made up of a tight-knit group of highly trained and motivated troops (on six-month rotations) that stand more than ready to fill the space between us and the bad guys. They also travel on fly-away missions with our C-130 crews and work

closely with Office of Special Investigations agents to make sure we have the latest threat assessments.

The 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Mission Support Squadron fulfills critical mission requirements while working unnoticed for the most part. The manpower section ensures that the deployed requirements manning document is accurate and works to manage changes in mission requirements (creates the spaces), while the PERSCO team rolls in and sources the personnel to fill manning requirements (adds the faces). Together they work to make sure commanders have the right people in the right places in order to achieve mission objectives. In addition, the EMSS works closely with unit commanders, the Red Cross and the expeditionary logistics readiness squadron in the timely processing of emergency leave

requests, and, if necessary, sources backfills for departing personnel. In addition, as of May 30, if you have a pay question stop by and talk to the new finance representative who works in the EMSS tent.

The final organization in the EMSG is the ELRS. The dedicated members of this organization move us and our stuff from point A to point B regardless of the mode of transportation, while keeping us readily supplied with the tools and equipment we need to effectively accomplish our mission. Motor pool personnel keep us mobile in both our general purpose and specialty vehicles, as long as we remember to check and keep oil in them. They also fix them when they break. The supply section has a selection of boots, belts, printer

**“EMSG,” continued on Page 5**



U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

## From ashes, rubble rose a school



U.S. Air Force photos by Capt. Mark Gibson



U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

**(Top) Afghanistan school boys enjoy the sunshine outside their new school. (Bottom left) Class is held in the rubble that was once a school. (Bottom right) Behind the bombed-out school stands the new Noman High School.**

**By Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.**  
455<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Most of the students don't speak English, but their smiles said it all.

Happiness is hard to find in this country at war. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and in 1980 Noman High School became a casualty of war after it was bombed.

The school, located in the Parwan Province near here, had a proud past.

It was built in 1921, and through the years some of the country's top doctors, engineers and government officials walked through its doors.

When the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, the Taliban took over until 2001, when America waged war against terrorism and ousted the extremists. Still, the school remained in tatters.

In 2005, behind the rubble, rose a new school.

Bagram's Provincial Reconstruction Team worked with the local school district

and government to champion the project of re-building a new school. The team helped find funding and worked with a local contractor to build the school.

The Bagram PRT is a blend of Air Force, Army and Republic of Korea forces who work with the local government to construct schools, roads and bridges. The team's mission is to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security and promote reconstruction.

Meanwhile, despite having no roof or walls to speak of, teachers and students continued to attend classes in the crumbled, blown-apart building that was once a school. A swath of canvas overhead kept the rain off the students. Chalk marks on shrapnel-pitted walls are proof of recent classes.

On May 26, the Parwan governor officially cut the ribbon to the new school, which will teach students from seventh to 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The school now has 20 classrooms, administrative offices and a library.

"You can judge by the smiles of our children how important it was to open this new school," said Jabar Taqwa, the gover-

nor of the Parwan Province. "Although the old school had a rich tradition, this new school will be good for our future and I hope all our students study hard."

Lt. Col. Donald Koehler, PRT commander, said the ruins were a testament to the determination of the people of the village of Charikar and the province.

"The dream that was Noman school refused to fade," Colonel Koehler said. "It's a school that will once again take its rightful place among the finest in Afghanistan and will once again provide the nation of Afghanistan with its future leaders."

Toward the end of the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a boys' choir sang a song they wrote. The chorus line included, "PRT we thank you, America we thank you."

Through the assistance of volunteers and the PRT, the governor announced his new Academic Excellence Achievement Award for the province by awarding mountain bikes to top students.

Before the winners tore off on their bikes at the end of the ceremony, the last thing the audience saw were the large grins on their faces.



# Deployments offer TSP/SDP opportunities for troops

Many don't think of starting a Thrift Savings Plan or Savings Deposit Program account while deployed, but special benefits available to those serving in a combat zone make it well worth the consideration.

"Whether you are a brand-new Airman, a mid-level NCO, or nearing the end of your career, these are great programs for us to take advantage of," said Lt. Gen. Gary North, 9th Air Force and U.S. Central Command Air Forces commander. "I encourage everyone who recently arrived in theater to visit their deployed finance center to learn about the programs."

According to the Air Force Personnel Center, those serving in a tax-free combat zone are allowed to contribute up to \$44,000 annually.

Besides the advantages of contributing while deployed, the program has also recently undergone some other changes that make this a very advantageous time to open an account.

Beginning this year, the limits previously set on civilian and military employees no longer apply. They may now contribute the full amount allowed by the Internal Revenue Service annual elective deferral limit, which is \$15,000 for 2006.

"TSP is a long-term retirement savings plan, which everyone should consider," said Janet Thomas, a human resources specialist at the Air Force Personnel Center located at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. "It's a great supplement to military and civilian retirement plans."

Investing in TSP is not limited to stocks. People can choose safer government securi-

ties or invest in the new Lifecycle Funds.

Open seasons were eliminated July 1, 2005, so employees may start, change, stop or resume their TSP contributions at any time (except those in the 6-month non-contribution period following a financial hardship in-service withdrawal).

TSP offers investors the chance for lower taxes each year they contribute while not having to pay taxes on earnings until they reach retirement.

The five individual TSP funds are: the Government Securities Investment (G) Fund; the Common Stock Index Investment (C) Fund; the Fixed Income Index Investment (F) Fund; the Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund; and the International Stock Index Investment (I) Fund. Or participants may choose to invest in the new Lifecycle (L) Funds.

In addition to TSP, deployed servicemembers can also take advantage of the SDP.

The SDP is a government savings program that earns 10 percent annual interest, compounded quarterly, on amounts up to \$10,000.

Airmen on orders over 30 days supporting OIF can deposit upon their arrival to the AOR. Those assigned to Afghanistan or Kyrgyzstan must be on station for 30 days before making a deposit. Interest on the deposit continues to accrue for 90 days after members leave the theater.

For more information, visit [www.TSP.org](http://www.TSP.org), or contact the finance office.

## Brief Bullets

### Elective surgery approval

All active-duty Airmen need to get commander and the local medical treatment facility commander's permission before getting elective surgery, according to legal officials.

Getting permission first ensures commanders have information regarding personnel availability to perform the mission and for future deployments. It also allows medics to plan for post-operative complications.

As for the Reserve and Guard, this reporting procedure only applies during active-duty periods.

For more information, call the legal office at 231-3251.

### AAFES photo contest

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service is sponsoring a photo contest highlighting Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

Two first-place winners will earn \$1,000 gift cards; two second place finishers, \$750 gift cards; two third-place finishers, \$500 gift cards; and six fourth-place finishers, \$50.

The contest is open to authorized exchange customers and no purchase is necessary. Contest submissions should depict the essence of activities in OEF and OIF, or highlight activities in support of deployed troops, such as scenes of service members returning home. The contest deadline is Aug. 15. Contest winners will be notified Aug. 31.

Contestants may submit digital images or mail in photos. E-mail photos to [aafespog@harperhouse.com](mailto:aafespog@harperhouse.com) and include AAFES Pog Contest in the subject line. Mail entries to:

AAFES

Attn: MK-MS (AAFES Pog Contest)

3911 S. Walton Walker Blvd.

Dallas, TX 75236-1598

For more contest information, log on to [AAFES.com](http://AAFES.com)

### Services events

All events begin at 1900L, unless otherwise noted.

**Today**

Bingo

**Saturday**

Texas Hold'em

**Sunday**

Movie and pizza night

**Monday**

Horseshoes, 1800L

**Tuesday**

Spades

**Wednesday**

Texas Hold'em

**Thursday**

Darts

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cartridges, load-bearing equipment, snow shovels, miscellaneous parts and any and everything we need to perform our daily operations, and they smile while they are giving us stuff, which is nice. They also track and maintain the accountability of specialized equipment accounts, which is critical for mission effectiveness. The Air Transportation Operations Center cargo handling and passenger terminal folks do a great and often thankless job at moving personnel, baggage and equipment in an environment of constantly changing airlift and movement priorities. Please remember that they are just as disappointed as you are when your flight

is canceled because they are in the business of moving, not babysitting you. I also promise that by the time that our AEF departs in September the bathrooms will work in the new PAX terminal.

In closing, I'd like to compare the EMSG to the BASF television commercial that says something to the effect that, *we don't make the product, we make it better.*

Well, we in the EMSG don't fly the planes, and we don't fix or load them, but we do our best to make the jobs of those of you that perform those functions easier, because we do EVERYTHING else for you. As stated previously, that's my story.



U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

**(Top)** Col. Mike Wilson looks over the mud wall of Kala-I Janghi near Mazar-I-Sharif, Afghanistan. The ancient fortress was the site of a bloody Taliban uprising in 2001. Colonel Wilson is deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan. **(Left)** An Afghan child sits on the mud wall of Kala-I Janghi.



## Fortress site of Taliban's last deadly siege in 2001

by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
455th Expeditionary Wing Public Affair

**MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan (AFP)** — Just a few minutes' drive from where an Air Force embedded training team is mentoring Afghan National Army soldiers is the site of the Taliban's last deadly siege.

It is also the location where the first American died in the war against terrorism following Sept. 11, 2001; where John Walker Lindh — known as the American Taliban — was captured; and where only memorial plaques and horrible memories remain.

The ancient mud-brick fortress called Kala-I Janghi was built in 1889. In 2001, Uzbek Northern Alliance leader, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, was the king of the castle. He made an agreement with Mullah Faizal, a Taliban commander, to allow Afghan Taliban fighters safe passage after surrender, but the foreign, fanatical fighters in Faizal's group would be handed over to the general.

The general decided to use his castle as a prison camp. On Nov. 24, 2001, the foreign fighters surrendered and were taken to the fortress. Somehow, two vehicles laden with weapons were allowed through the castle gates. Many of the Taliban also carried hidden weapons into the compound.

On the morning of Nov. 25, Johnny Micheal Spann, a former Marine who became a CIA agent, interrogated prisoners, including Lindh. Two hours after interrogating Lindh, while trying to get information from another member of the Taliban, the terrorists revolted, killing Agent Spann.

Agent Spann was the first American killed in combat after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

The armed foreign extremists, 800 in all, overpowered the 20 guards, killing them, too. After raiding the army, the prisoners were armed to the teeth.

Within hours, United States and British special forces arrived in an effort to retake

the fort. According to Afghan National Army soldiers who listened to witnesses later, confusion reigned because many of the U.S. and British forces were dressed in civilian clothes. The prisoners were a mix of Arabs, Pakistanis and Chechens. The soldiers said it was difficult to tell who was who during the firefight that ensued.

Then the gunships and U.S. airplanes began air strikes. After two days, the uprising was pretty much put down and the Taliban, including Lindh, took cover in an underground tunnel. They stayed there for 10 days, despite no food and repeated attempts to force them out. Coalition troops started fires in the tunnel and even tried gas, but to no avail. They finally rooted the extremists out by forcing water down the hole and filling it up.

In the end, 500 people were dead. The U.S. air strikes resulted in the first U.S. combat injuries when a bomb went astray on Nov. 26, killing six Northern Alliance fighters and seriously injuring five U.S. Special Forces Soldiers.

The Army camp here shares the name with America's first casualty in its war on terrorism. It's called Camp Micheal Spann.





A look back at Bagram history

# Keeping Operation Enduring Freedom supplied and on track

*Editor's Note: This is one of the first stories written about Bagram. It was printed in Airman Magazine in 2002.*

by Master Sgt. Louis A. Arana-Barradas

The song was a familiar one. And though there were people talking and a steady squawk of radio chatter in the mobile air reporting center, the words were clear.

It was a catchy tune. Stephen Stills' rendition of "For What It's Worth."

*There's somethin' happening here, What it is ain't exactly clear*

The airmen in the tanker airlift control element's mobile air reporting center listened as they helped direct a C-17 Globemaster III into Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. But an Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter was in its parking spot.

"Roger tower, we copy — the Chinook is broke. But we need the Army to tow it — fast," Master Sgt. Todd Kuzia said into his microphone. "A plane's landing and needs the space."

Kuzia was the noncommissioned officer in charge of operations for the 821st Air Mobility Squadron's element. It arrived from McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., in December 2001. Its job: establish and manage the initial airflow into the base, and then bug out.

*There's a man with a gun over there Tellin' me I gotta beware*

Kuzia cursed under his breath. He knew the helicopter wasn't moving. So as the huge cargo plane circled overhead, he found another spot on the ramp to park it.

"Just another day in Bagram — never a dull moment," he said.

The plane's silhouette dragged a shadow over the snow-capped peaks of the Hindu Kush just across the flight line. Then it dropped in fast and landed. Just as fast, squadron air transportation troops on 10-ton forklifts rushed to meet the plane and unload its precious cargo.

*I think it's time we stop,  
Hey, what's that sound,  
Everybody look what's going down,*



photos by Master Sgt. Keith Reed

**At Bagram, the terminal operations center was the headquarters and hangout for 821st Air Mobility Squadron "porters." Hot and smelly, the tent was where the air transportation troops got their work assignments.**

Stills and The Buffalo Springfield took the song to the top of the music charts in 1969. The song is a capsule of the turbulent 1960s. Some of the Airmen in the small trailer tapped their muddy desert boots or nodded their heads to the beat, oblivious to the song's anti-war message.

Which was ironic. Because before them the transport stopped. Its ramp door was already open. And in minutes it began to disgorge its cargo — the tools of war.

"This is the end of the line, baby," Kuzia said. "Where the rubber meets the road."

The mighty aircraft flew into Bagram from Karshi Khanabad, Uzbekistan, about an hour's flight away. It was a short hop by Air Force standards. But it was the key last leg of a strategic airlift that stretched all the way from stateside bases.

It's a long haul, one that started with C-5 Galaxy and Boeing 747 long-range transports hauling cargo to air hubs in Europe and the Middle East. That's the strategic leg of the airlift. From the hubs, short-hop specialists like the C-17 and C-130 Hercules deliver it "down range" to the front lines of the war on terrorism. That's

the tactical leg.

All together, it adds up to a giant undertaking, a mission the Air Force directs from Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, and the tanker airlift control center at Scott Air Force Base, Ill. The air bridge keeps Operation Enduring Freedom supplied and on track. It's a well-planned and proven system that flies in troops, supplies, equipment, fuel, ammunition, food and water — everything needed to sustain the huge multinational effort.

"This is global reach in its purest form," Lt. Col. Peter Hirneise said. "A classic hub-and-spoke operation. Without this airlift, there wouldn't be an Operation Enduring Freedom."

Hirneise commands the 17th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany. It's the main air hub on the northern supply route into Afghanistan. The unit deployed from Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. His squadron along with the base's 726th Expeditionary Air Mobility Squadron make up the 437th Air Expeditionary Group.

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It's the first time "big plane" squadrons deployed as a unit. Before, C-5 and C-17 units only deployed the essential people to operate from other bases. But it's a technique C-130 units have been using "forever," Maj. Ed Joslin said. A C-17 pilot, he's the group's chief of current operations.

"We have our own pilots and support people," he said. "With the Rhein-Main maintenance and aerial port operations, we're operating like we were back home."

The C-5 and C-17 sections have a support structure to ensure the success of the airlift, manage the flight crews involved and provide command oversight to the Rhein-Main flying operation.

So — with its mainly Charleston crew — the unit, with more than a dozen C-17s, is the "largest group flying into the theater," Hirneise said.

It's not alone.

## The air hubs

There are C-17s flying from other air hubs. These are at Ramstein Air Base, Germany; Incirlik Air Base, Turkey; and bases in Qatar and Oman. From there, aircraft fly to several locations in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

The hubs are busy places. Air transportation troops, or porters, have a big job there. They receive and unload cargo from the big transports. Then they verify the cargo load and put the pallets and vehicles on C-17s for the next leg of the airlift.

"We've sure seen a lot of cargo," Senior Airman Justin Hartman said. A porter with Rhein-Main's 726th, he said the pace was nonstop for a while. "When the job goes hot and heavy all day, it wears on you. That's when you have to suck it up and adjust to the flow."

Moving the cargo takes a lot of people. Apart from the active-duty Airmen who pull 30- to 45-day tours, there are hundreds of Guard and Reserve troops doing their duty, too. Some have two-week tours. Others are back on active duty.

"It would be impossible to do this mission without the Guard and Reserve," said Col. Dave Estep, the Rhein-Main deployed group commander. He's the deputy operations group commander of the C-5-flying 436th Airlift Wing, Dover Air Force Base, Del.

Once on a C-17, the cargo is on the last leg to its destination. But getting there isn't easy. Aircrews said the down range run is

stressful — and potentially dangerous.

The danger is what's both challenging and exhilarating, 1st Lt. Katie Joynt said. A C-17 pilot from Charleston's 14th Airlift Squadron, she flew out of Incirlik. From there, each mission — sometimes more than 24 hours when flown from Germany — is still at least a 16-hour day. After some 60 missions into the area, nearly half into Afghanistan, she had logged some 150 combat hours. "You must be precise each mission because you're doing everything tactical," she said. But she added, "It's an adrenaline rush knowing we're doing our part in this war."

"Going tactical" is a given when flying into Afghanistan. Crews follow a constantly changing tactical procedures checklist when heading into the strictly controlled airspace. The huge transports still face threats from small-arms fire and surface-to-air missiles.

That's not all. Aircrews also must deal with unfamiliar airfields, weather that changes in minutes, the lack of key navigation aids for air traffic control, meeting tanker and landing times, and night operations. But pilots can't complain they're not getting enough flying time.

"We'll fly them hard on a mission, turn them quick, and fly them hard again," Estep said. Then the crew will get 33 to 36 hours to rest.

Estep said all airmen get an orientation course and fly a mission with an experienced crew before their first flight into Afghanistan. The bottom line: fly high to avoid threats, land fast and get out fast. And before each flight, airmen get what's known as an "operational risk management assessment." They do this to identify and lessen potential risks during the mission.

"Sometimes we have to hold back some of our folks," Estep said. "They're working so hard — want to help so much — we must make sure they're not cutting corners just because they want to get that plane loaded and in the air on time."

Over Afghanistan, everything goes dark. Night operations are the norm. Aircraft turn off their lights, and unloading, with engines running, is done with night-vision goggles. At Bagram, the porters mastered the art of night offloads. They could offload a C-17 in less than a half hour.

"After a while, working in the dark becomes second nature," Staff Sgt. Scott Mueller said. He was one of the 821st's 13 porters who loaded and unloaded aircraft at Bagram. "Working in the dark, you learn your limitations real fast."

Staff Sgt. Joel Klasen, a C-17 loadmaster working out of Incirlik, said the porters at Bagram are second to none. "We let them take over because they really know their business."

That's fine with the guys at the front of the aircraft, too. With less than an hour to spend on the ground, the pilots warm the seats as the engines run and let the loadmasters work.

"But we don't try to rush them," C-17 pilot Capt. Jeff Nelson said. Flying out of Rhein-Main, he said the missions are stressful enough. "We don't say 'hurry up,' because they might miss a step. We leave only when they're done."

## Motivation

The Airmen serving in Operation Enduring Freedom are working around the clock. Each of their jobs is key to keeping the airlift going. And the long hours and stress add up. But each has a reason for wanting to do the best job, said Maj. Jay Milkey, a reserve C-5 pilot at Rhein-Main.

"Thinking of what happened Sept. 11 — that's pretty good motivation," he said.

There are more visible reasons.

Bagram was the main staging base for Operation Anaconda in March. For a few days before it kicked off, planes full of troops and ammunition landed at the base day and night.

The morning fighting started against al Qaeda and Taliban forces near Gardez. A soldier only wanting to be identified as Mike — with the Screaming Eagle patch of the Army's 101st Airborne Division on his sleeve — waited to get into the fight. He and other soldiers waited near the flight line all day. They ate, slept and triple-checked their weapons.

They saw a lot of C-17s land.

"As long as those cargo planes keep landing, we know we'll have all the stuff we need," he said. "And when we're done, I want to catch a ride back home on a C-17. They're sweet."

Back in his trailer, Kuzia continued to direct cargo planes. After more than 65 days at Bagram, it was old hat. Fifty yards from his trailer window, he could see the soldiers taking naps with their heads against their heavy backpacks, waiting their turn to join the fighting.

"As long as those guys out there need us," Kuzia said, as he pointed to the troops, "we'll be here to support them. No matter how long it takes."

# Memorial Day 06



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.



U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Dave Kurle

Members of the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing participated in a May 28 Memorial Day ceremony held on the flightline here.



U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Dave Kurle



U.S. Air Force photos by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

**Tech. Sgt. Michael Miles, Tennessee Air National Guard 118th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron C-130 maintainer, washes a C-130 Hercules window.**

## Remote airstrips are hell on wheels

by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

C-130 maintainers in this combat zone are in a Herculean battle against enemies that have been around since the dawn of time: dirt, rocks and dust.

While C-130 Hercules perform the tactical portion of the airlift mission by bringing in troops and supplies to remote locations, called forward operating bases, they have to land on rough dirt or gravel airstrips.

"The dirt strips with gravel are hard on the tires," said Senior Master Sgt. Harold Wood, a C-130 maintenance superintendent in the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron.

Every time a C-130 returns from a mission, maintainers inspect all the tires like crime scene investigators.

The airstrips are small, too small for bigger, heavier aircraft to land. They're even small by C-130 standards, forcing pilots to stand on the brakes so they don't roll off the end of the runways. Thus, worn brakes.

And it isn't just the brakes that are affected. To stop in time, pilots also put their engines into "max reverse," changing the pitch of the propellers so their thrust is forward, which slows the plane.

"That throws up a dust cloud in front of the plane that gets sucked into the engines, the air conditioning, every where," said Sergeant Wood, deployed from the 176th Wing at Kulis Air National Guard Base, Alaska.

"These aircraft make some hard landings," said Tech. Sgt. Dale Durham, a C-130 crew chief. "We end up replacing a lot of antennas and lights (damaged by) the gravel and rocks that get kicked up."

Sergeant Durham, a member of the Texas Air National Guard's 136th Airlift Wing at Fort Worth, said they inspect every plane, front to back, every three days.

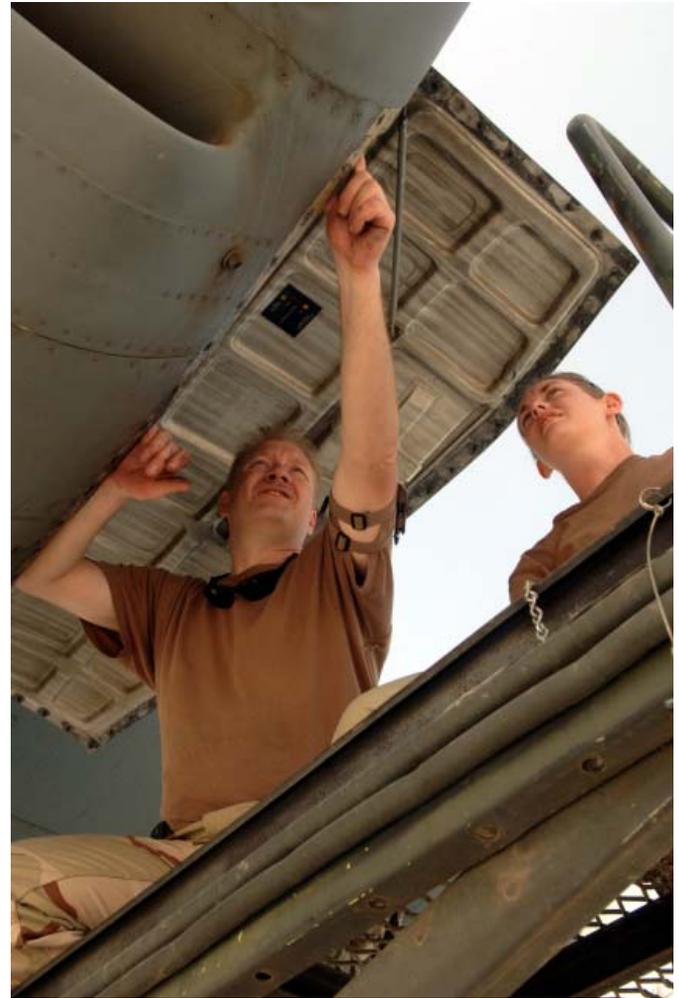
"The dust is brutal," Sergeant Durham said. "It gets into everything. So we cover everything we can with tape or a sealant, and we blow out dust from air filters once a week."

Airmen from squadrons at four state-side bases constitute the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron.

In addition to the Alaska and Texas National Guard, they include the Tennessee Air National Guard's 118th Airlift Wing in Nashville and the Delaware Air National Guard's 166th Airlift Wing in Newcastle.

The C-130 Hercules is the tie that binds them all together. Although a C-130 from Alaska is no different than one from Texas, the squadron tries to keep crew chiefs with "their" C-130s.

"We keep the crew chiefs on their planes because they know their planes. The spe-



**Tech. Sgt. Scott Hopkins and Senior Airman Kayla Domlinson inspect a C-130 Hercules engine, which has to be done every 72 hours because of the dust. Both C-130 mechanics are from the Alaska Air National Guard 176th Wing at Kulis ANG Base, Alaska.**

cialists work on all the aircraft and everybody pitches in when there's a problem" said Maj. Michael Griesbaum, commander of the C-130 maintainers here.

Getting all the troops to work together as one isn't a problem for the 455th C-130 community.

"There is always a challenge with different squadron personalities, but everyone is getting along pretty well," the major said. "In fact, several of our (home) units have deployed together before, so it's kind of like a reunion."

Despite the short runways, the difficult landings, the rocks and the dust, the major said he enjoys telling the commander, "Sir, we've had a good day in maintenance."

That's because the maintainers work so terribly hard," the major said. "Dedication doesn't even half describe what they do."