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# Bagram News Express



*Fighting Terror, Building Peace*

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## Be proud of past, present veteran heroes

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**By Lt. Gen. Gary North**  
9th Air Force and U.S. Air  
Forces Central commander

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**SOUTHWEST ASIA** -- Be proud of past, present veteran heroes By Lt. Gen. Gary North Commander, 9th Air Force and U.S. Air Forces Central

Each Nov. 11, the United States observes Veterans Day to pay tribute to those men and women who have served and continue to serve our nation through military service.

America's veterans are honored for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice on behalf of their nation. We celebrate the accomplishments of millions of brave Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and Coastguardsmen who served valiantly in wars and conflicts during the 232-year history of our country.

While we normally focus our attention to honor those veterans of past wars and bygone eras, it is important to remember at the 7-year point in our current and sustained combat operations, those men and women who are currently serving our nation in locations around the globe. The times and warfare tactics may have changed, but the veteran, regardless of his

or her place in time, is still a hero.

Currently, there are more than 26,000 Airmen deployed in support of operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility; additionally, 70 percent of all Airmen are participating in operations that support the CENTCOM AOR in one way or another.

One modern-day hero is Staff Sgt. Patrick Lape, a Joint Terminal Attack Controller assigned to Task Force Bayonet in Afghanistan. When his team came under sniper and rocket propelled grenade fire, the sergeant called in close air support to engage the attackers. As a result of the RPG attack, Sergeant Lape momentarily lost his sight and hearing, and received shrapnel and burns to his left shoulder, face, and eye. Yet, after regaining his orientation, Sergeant Lape disregarded his own wounds and helped a critically injured Soldier move to a covered location and administered life-saving first aid.

Another is Staff Sgt. Nestor Albalos, an aerospace medical technician assigned to the Zabul Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. Sergeant Albalos recently helped provide emergency dental care training to Afghan dentists. As a result of this training, Afghan dentists are

establishing free field clinics, complete with infection control standards in place, to offer emergency extractions and routine cleanings to their fellow countrymen.

Sergeants Albalos and Lape are just two examples of the thousands of veterans serving around the world today. Stories similar to theirs are common throughout our military. Servicemembers, such as Sergeants Albalos and Lape, have devoted their lives toward something greater than themselves — the United States of America, and those freedoms we have all sworn to support and defend. These veterans, like tens of millions of others before them, have chosen a path to protect and defend our nation and fledgling democracies throughout the world. Veterans Day is time for all Americans to honor those who currently serve and those who have gone before us — to let them know we honor, respect and appreciate their sacrifices, their courage and their call to duty.

The message is a simple one to all veterans today: America is proud of you — thank you for serving — and thanks to your families for allowing you to serve and for being strong alongside you while you served or currently serve our nation.

# Commentary: Why do you serve?

By Lt. Col. Dan Orcutt

391st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron commander

**BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan** -- It was the summer of 1997, the airlines were hiring and as a KC-10 Instructor Pilot, I had an airline transport pilot's license, a DC-10 type rating and 1,500 hours of world-wide flying experience. It seemed like everybody I knew was being hired by United, Delta, and Federal Express. They boasted of great pay, less time away from family and an end to the Air Force's never-ending "additional duties." The quality of life on the "outside" had to be much better, right?

Assuming you meet Air Force standards of performance, fitness, and personal conduct, you will someday face the dilemma of staying in or getting out. Months, years or decades from now, the day will still likely sneak up on you. When the time comes, multiple factors will influence your decision: your particular family situation, your goals in life, job satisfaction, peers and supervisors, and your next PCS to name only a few. Choosing to separate is not a mark of dishonor. All who have served honorably and met their commitments should be thanked for serving their nation and fully supported to excel in their next endeavor.

But whatever you decide, be certain your decision is objective and well-considered rather than impulsive and short sighted. Discuss your options with your family and other trusted advisors, and make sure you ground your choice first in facts (not "word of mouth"), keep an eye to your long-term future, and don't forget to factor in the intangibles.

When I faced my first "decision point," I was initially tempted by the lure of a more relaxed lifestyle, a more stable family life, and better pay. But for me, the decision to continue serving was simple and based upon two reasons—our people and our mission.

I don't share a cubicle with a coworker at Micron. I serve with some of the greatest people on the planet. I've served with those who were the first in their family to finish high school. I've flown with a guy who earned not one, but two Oxford degrees as a Rhodes Scholar. From Maine to California, Alaska to Florida, I've learned more about the fabric of America by standing watch with people from small towns like Nacodoches, Texas. Never before fully understanding why people from Texas are so overtly

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## Reenlisting with a bang



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse

*Capt. Joshua Tyler, 755th Air Expeditionary Group Explosive Ordnance Disposal Operation Location-Bravo commander, re-enlists Staff Sgt. Andrew Petrulis, EOD craftsman, at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan, Oct. 27. The EOD team took advantage of a continuation training opportunity creating a "fireball" detonation at a safe distance to make the re-enlistment more memorable. Sergeant Petrulis was one of the first to reap the benefits of the new re-enlistment bonuses giving EOD personnel greater incentive to stay in the Air Force saving lives every day. He is deployed from the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., and hails from Higganum, Conn.*

# Predators on patrol in Afghanistan

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By Staff Sgt. Rachel Martinez  
455th Air Expeditionary Wing  
Public Affairs

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**BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan** — As the demand for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance assets in Afghanistan increases, a small group of Airmen at a base in the southern region of the country are working to meet the demand.

The 62nd Electronic Reconnaissance Squadron maintains and operates the MQ-1 Predator, an unmanned aerial system whose primary mission is interdiction and conducting armed reconnaissance against critical, perishable targets.

“Our primary job here is to launch and recover Predators for



*Maj. Rick Wageman, 62nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron pilot, operates the virtual cockpit of an MQ-1 Predator at a base in southern Afghanistan, Oct. 25.*



*U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse*

*Three MQ-1 Predators sit ready for launch in a hangar at a base in southern Afghanistan, Oct. 25.*

the mission crew,” said Maj. Rick Wageman, a pilot deployed from Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. “Anything else we do on top of that is gravy because we have the ability to support local stuff.”

Local stuff refers to any troops in contact calls the aircrew might receive where they can operate a line of sight mission.

“Troops on the ground will report a contact and we will get our eyes there as quick as possible,” Major Wageman said. The Predator is equipped with a day variable-aperture TV camera and a variable-aperture infrared camera that provides the pilot with full-motion video allowing them to track and target insurgents.

Major Wageman is a prior F-16 pilot with more than 1,000 flight hours, 250 of which are combat hours. After switching over to the Predator less than a year ago, he already has more than 300 Predator hours, 250 of which are combat

support hours.

As a pilot, Major Wageman works closely with, and relies on, his sensor operator for each mission. Airman 1st Class Julian King, deployed from Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., fills that role.

“I’m backing up the pilot and serving as his second set of eyes and ears,” said Airman King.

“He controls the sensor,” explained Major Wageman. “Once we take off and are on a mission, 99 percent is based on the sensor. If there is a moving target, he is responsible for tracking that target. It is totally dependant on teamwork to build as much situational awareness of you can.”

The two operators started Predator training on the same day 11 months ago where they learned how to operate the UAS. Before deploying they attended a three

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week course designed specifically for training on launching and recovering the aircraft.

While deployed, the pilot and sensor operator are responsible for performing pre-flight checks and launching the aircraft. After launching, the crew will usually hand over the controls to a mission crew operating out of Creech Air Force Base, Nev. This remotely located mission crew operates the Predator for the majority of the mission, and then passes control back to deployed aircrews like Major Wageman and Airman King who will land and recover the aircraft.

“I’ve learned so much more doing launch and recovery about the aircraft than I would have done back home,” said Airman King. “Out here we are 100 percent more in touch with the airplane than we are at home station. I’m going to go back home and be more excited about the mission now that I know more about it”

“I think everyone should have to do this within their first year operating the Predator,” added Major Wageman. “We go out and do our walk around and work with the crew chief - everything you would normally do with an aircraft.”

The deployed crew chiefs play a vital role in ensuring the operability of the Predator. The UAS must be maintained just like any other aircraft. In addition to helping launch and recover the aircraft, crew chiefs are responsible for all the general aircraft maintenance. They perform regularly scheduled



*The Predator aircraft carries a Multi-spectral Targeting System integrating electro-optical, infrared, laser designator and laser illuminator into a single sensor package.*



*U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse*

*Airman 1st Class Justin Cole, 62nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron crew chief, removes the chalks of an MQ-1 Predator at a base in southern Afghanistan, Oct. 25.*

maintenance every 60 hours of flight, and periodically change out the engine. The crew chiefs are also responsible for repairing any other problem that may arise.

“Everything that we have is pretty scheduled, except for some days when the planes come back for things,” said Airman 1st Class Justin Cole, deployed from Creech AFB. “And that’s the only tough part. Once they come back then we have to trouble shoot them for problems and figure it out from there. We’re pretty much our own go to guys. We don’t have to look to the back shop for too many things except sheet metal. We’re it.”

Despite any mechanical problems there may be, many of the crew chiefs agree the Predator is easier to maintain than other aircraft.

“We have a plethora of guys from all other airframes and they all say this is way slower pace and a lot easier to work on,” said Airman Cole, who went to school for A-10 maintenance. “It’s tiny and there are no hydraulic systems to it, it is all electronic.”

Just because the maintenance is easier, doesn’t mean there is any less stress to the job.

“They’re flying more so they expect us to get the maintenance done,” said Airman Cole, a native of Orange Park, Fla. “They tell us not to feel pressured, but we know there is a deadline there, so we have to uphold it just for our pride’s sake. So that’s kind of demanding.

“It’s different, everybody wants the Predator,” he added. “It’s the new thing and it’s not going anywhere.”

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proud, I spent months flying in the Middle East with him, listening to why a dust bowl town of less than a thousand is “God’s country.” What I really learned is that true patriotism binds us together in the service of something greater than ourselves. Think about the high quality people you forged life-long friendships with on the flightline, in school, or on an AEF and you get the idea. Do you ever wonder if folks at IBM show up unannounced on their employee’s doorstep with a free hot meal when they need it most? Would your average company coworker drop everything to help you in a moment of grief? Recently our squadron literally put everything on hold to help a fellow airman

and the outpouring of support reminded me yet again of the quality of folks I am fortunate to work with.

So what about the mission? I don’t punch a clock on the factory floor. I, much like you, wanted to serve to be a part of something bigger than myself or my hometown. I wanted to give back in some small part all that I had been fortunate enough to have growing up. That sense of service and the Air Force’s roles and missions have always been clear to most of us, but they became crystal clear to the nation on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. I was amazed at the number of friends who separated to fly for United, Delta and Fed Ex that literally pleaded with the Air Force to let them back on active duty so they

could serve their country.

Today, many of us are fortunate to serve in Operation Enduring Freedom where there is no higher honor than saving U.S., Coalition and Afghan lives on a daily basis. As the saying goes, “The mission is an 18-year old with a rifle; all else is support.” Rest assured, we can think of no more fulfilling mission than providing Close Air Support to the young warriors who go outside the wire daily in pursuit of freedom. We will succeed in our joint mission because of the quality of the people like you who serve. You answered a calling and your sacrifices represent a Latin phrase that is etched in stone above the U.S. Naval Academy Chapel Doors: “Non Sibi, Sed Patriae”—Not for Self, but for Country.

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## News Briefs

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### **A.C.E. MEETINGS**

Airmen Committed To Excellence meets Fridays at 1700L/1230Z in front of Town Hall. Meetings are open to all Airmen in the rank of E-1 to E-4.

### **ATTENTION ALL JUNIOR NCOS**

The Bagram AF Route 5/6 meets Thursdays at 1800L/1330Z at Camp Cunningham’s Town Hall. The meetings are open to all staff sergeant selects, staff sergeants and tech sergeants.

### **AFSA MEETINGS**

Air Force Sergeants Association Expeditary Chapter 1657 is holding meetings bi-weekly on Saturdays, with alternating times. The next meeting is Nov. 8 at 0800, followed by the next meeting Nov. 22 at 1700.

### **NEWCOMERS INPROCESSING**

All Air Force members are required to inprocess with PERSCO. The inprocessing will start your combat pay entitlements. If you have been in the AOR for at least 30 days and you are not receiving com-

bat pay, please stop by Finance located in the tower on Camp Cunningham. If you know for a fact that you did not inprocess with PERSCO, then please visit PERSCO located in the Pax terminal. Please call PERSCO 431-2070 with any questions.

### **IMMUNIZATIONS**

Are your immunizations up to date? Active duty members are required to stay current on all immunizations during their deployment. Most frequently due vaccines are Hepatitis B, Influenza, Anthrax, Smallpox and Typhoid. Report to your nearest medical treatment facility. Check your status and get vaccinated! For questions, contact TF Med Public Health.

### **COMBAT O**

Combat Orientation is Thursday at 0930Z/1400L at the Enduring Freedom Chapel. This is a mandatory briefing for all Air Force personnel assigned to Bagram Air Field. Newcomers must attend the briefing within two week of their arrival. Accountability is tracked and will be forwarded to the 1st Sergeants.