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# Bagram News Express



*Fighting Terror, Building Peace*

Vol. 1, Issue 38, Nov. 28, 2008

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## What I'm thankful for this holiday season

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**By Col. Dave Blanks**

455th Expeditionary Maintenance Group commander

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**BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** -- As we begin another holiday season, like many of you, I'm going to miss being with my family. But I have to tell you, short of spending the season with them, there is no other group I'd rather spend Thanksgiving and the holidays with than you – the members of our deployed Air Force family.

This time of year, I make a special effort to reflect on the things I'm thankful for, and thought I'd share those with you all.

First, I'm thankful and proud to be serving in a nation not afraid to stand up to terrorism and tyranny – or anything which threatens the freedom we treasure. And as a result, also give the good people of Afghanistan a chance to know peace and freedom, something many have not experienced in their lifetime.

I'm thankful for the strength of our families – parents, children, spouses – many of whom are doing double duty and more at home. They're often overlooked as they bear the burden of being both mothers and fathers in the

absence of one parent, while holding down jobs and doing whatever it takes to keep things going at home while we're here taking care of our nation's business.

And, I'm very thankful to be from a nation where the vast majority of the people recognize and appreciate the contribution and sacrifices made by military members and their families. We don't have to look back very far in our nation's history to find a very different situation.

Finally, I'm thankful for the dedication and professionalism of the young men and women we're deployed with here at Bagram. They amaze me every day, as they make the mission happen, no matter the circumstances. I met one such Airman on the flight line in Sept. during one of his first nights deployed. Despite the fact he told me he was 'okay', I could tell something was wrong. Seems he had his wisdom teeth removed shortly before he left home to clear himself to be able to deploy, and there were some painful complications afterwards. He could have used this as a viable reason not to deploy. Instead, he chose not to mention it to anyone for fear they would take him off of the deployment. That kind of dedication is inspirational, and I

know there are countless similar examples across the base.

I signed up 23 years ago to serve, but it's 'the people' who are the reason I'm still around. I believe messages from two stories based on real events capture the thought very well. Lt. Col. Hal Moore near the end of "We Were Soldiers" says, "In the end, we fought for each other." And, a similar message is heard in some of the final words spoken at the end of "Black Hawk Down" when the Delta soldier explains why he does what he does; "It's about the man next to you, that's all that it is."

So, although I'll miss my family, I'm extremely thankful this season to have a meaningful profession that brings with it the opportunity to work beside the finest men and women our nation has to offer. In closing, I'd ask you to do two things. First, take a few moments to reflect on the things you're thankful for. And, commit to making this season special for those around you...whether it's with a smile, a handshake, a kind word, or a special deed.

*To read about what some Bagram Airmen are thankful for this season, see page 4*

# Mentors help build ANA medical capability

By Staff Sgt. Rachel Martinez

455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

**KANDAHAR, Afghanistan** — With the help of U.S. Forces, the Afghan National Army opened a new hospital at Camp Hero in Kandahar Province, nearly one year ago. A small group of Airmen have helped transform a once empty building into a fully functional hospital staffed by ANA personnel and capable of caring for fellow ANA soldiers, Afghan National Police members, and their families.

The Kandahar Regional Military Hospital is a \$10 million facility featuring 50-beds, two operating rooms and an intensive care unit. In addition, there is ongoing construction for a 50-bed expansion. Since opening its doors in January 2008, the hospital staff has treated more than 12,000 outpatients and 600 inpatients.

“This hospital is probably the most successful of the ANA hospitals,” said Lt. Col. Edward Fieg, 205th Afghan Regional Security Integration Command mentor.

Much of that success is helped by the medical embedded training team. Air Force doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists, pharmacists, administrators, radiologists, medics, technicians and logisticians mentor their Afghan counterparts and teach the skills required to successfully treat and care for fellow Afghans.

The medical mentoring team is focusing on three main goals - to produce smarter Afghan healthcare workers, procure better equipment, and to improve healthcare planning and execution.

Lt. Col. Susan Bassett, a registered nurse, is responsible for mentoring the hospital’s chief nurse and his team of 30 nurses. She spends a lot of time focusing on basic nursing care, such as cleanliness and sterilization.

“We’ve given them a lot of high-tech equipment, now we need to show them how to use it,” she said. “They see new things and they know about them, but they don’t have the basic education to do it.”

According to Colonel Bassett, nurses in Afghanistan attend a nine-month training program, but they learn more about tasks the doctor might ask



*Photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse*

*Lt. Col. Susan Bassett, a registered nurse in the 205th Afghan Regional Security Integration Command embedded training team, watches as Afghan National Army nurses dress a patient’s wounds at the Kandahar Regional Military Hospital Oct. 27, 2008. Colonel Bassett, a native of Belle Fourche, S.D., is serving a one-year deployment training ANA nurses in an effort to improve Afghanistan’s healthcare.*

them to do than they do about the body and disease. This is where nurses and mentors play a big role.

“My 30 years of nursing have prepared me for this,” said Colonel Bassett. “I can give what they so badly need - we are helping a whole nation come up in care.”

One medical area the Afghans are quickly advancing in is anesthesiology. When he first arrived almost a year ago, Maj. Elvin Cruz, anesthesiologist mentor, guessed the Afghans were about 30 years behind in the practice. Beginning with the basics of anatomy and physiology, he was worked to bring them up to speed.

“During the time I have been here, they have been able to do their first arterial line to monitor blood pressure invasively, they did some central lines, and they did their first nerve block on their own hands,” he said. “They are very good with their hands, so they can do most the procedures. And they are getting good at being vigilant and monitoring.

“I am trying to get them to the point where they will be able to safely perform anesthesia and get the patient safely to the recovery area - and they are very close,” he added. “I really think that by the time I leave here they will be self-sufficient.”

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## MENTOR, from Page 2

Major Cruz does a lot of hands-on training, but also holds lectures every other day. His lectures are presented in both English and Dari. Additionally, he has built a Web site that features a variety of anesthesiology information.

“They are very happy with the Web site. It’s a completely new technology for them - using the internet as a learning tool,” he said. “Right now, there is only anesthesia information, but there is the capability to put any information from any of the mentors. So not only will we be able to have an impact on this hospital, but we are passing information to the other hospitals in Afghanistan.”

One area outside of patient care the medical mentors are working to improve is supply and logistics. Getting supplies and maintaining



*Maj. Jeff Atkisson, a medical logistics mentor for 205th Afghan Regional Security Integration Command embedded training team, reviews inventory with Maj. Gafar, an Afghan National Army office, in the warehouse at the Kandahar Regional Military Hospital on Camp Hero, Oct. 27, 2008.*



*Photos by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse*

*Maj. Elvin Cruz (left), an anesthesiologist with the 205th Afghan Regional Security Integration Command embedded training team, helps Afghan National Army nurse anesthetists prepare a patient for surgery at the Kandahar Regional Military Hospital Oct. 27, 2008. Major Cruz is deployed from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and a native of Arecibo, Puerto Rico.*

a stock of needed supplies has historically been a challenge. Supplies would be pushed out to regional hospitals once a year, and whatever they received was what they had to work with for the year. Medical logistics mentors are trying to turn what was a once a year push system, to a quarterly pull system based on needs.

“We want them to be more aware of what’s available to them and improve the supply chain,” said Maj. Jeff Atkisson, the medical logistics mentor. “Some of our goals would be to have a full inventory at the warehouse - an automated inventory. Right now everything is on paper or in their head. We want to have a system where we know exactly what’s in the warehouse at all times - and the customer also needs to know.”

Although Major Atkisson just recently arrived in country, he

said he has found the Afghans easy to work with and eager to learn. The other mentors have experienced the same thing.

“They really look up to the mentors,” said Major Cruz. “They want information and they want to learn these skills.”

The eagerness to learn and the progress the Afghans are making have helped make the year-long deployment rewarding for Major Cruz. For others, the reward is getting the chance to work with Afghans and learn from them.

“The Afghan people are absolutely wonderful,” said Colonel Bassett. “They are the most gracious people. They cannot start to work until they shake your hand and ask about your family. I need to remember that when I go home.

“Not many people would say a 365-day deployment is a blessing, but I would,” she added. “I’ve very much loved this past year.”

# Airmen give thanks, continue mission



Photos by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse

Above -- Airman 1st Class Joshua Toth, 455th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron heavy equipment operator, smoothes wet concrete on Thanksgiving, Nov. 27, at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan. Airman Toth is from Clayton, N.J. and is thankful for being in Afghanistan, serving his country.

Right -- 1st Lt. Nick Biggs, C-130H Hercules copilot, spreads butter on a roll during the Thanksgiving dinner at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, Nov. 27. Lieutenant Biggs is from Peoria, Ill., and is thankful for his family and friends, supporting him during his deployment.

Right -- Senior Airman Dustin Porter and Tech. Sgt. Edward Swartz, material handling equipment mechanics, check electrical connections on a k-loader on Thanksgiving, Nov. 27, at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan. Airman Porter is from Danbury, Conn., and Sergeant Swartz is from Georgetown, Ohio. Both are thankful for the love and support they get from their families.



## News Briefs

### 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 Expeditionary Chapter 1657 is holding meetings bi-weekly on Saturdays, with alternating times. The next meeting is Dec.

6 at 0800, followed by the next meeting Dec. 20 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 combat 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 PUSH

Combat Push times are Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Camp Cunningham Rec Tent from 0900L/0430Z to 1000L/0530Z. Services, Comm and PERSCO will be available to sign outprocessing checklists. Personnel must complete your Post Deployment Health Questionnaire on-line and pick up your medical records at Flight Medicine/Public Health before coming to Combat Push. For more information call 431-4409.