



# BAGRAM NEWS EXPRESS

*Start Right, Finish Strong*

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## Safety experts spearhead efforts to minimize bird strikes

Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Jason Lake  
*455th Air Expeditionary Wing*

Americans witnessed first hand the severity of bird strikes when U.S. Airways Flight 1549 crash landed in the Hudson River in New York City after hitting a flock of birds in January.

Lt. Col. Charles Wallace and his team of seven safety experts with the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing safety office, do their part to ensure a similar disaster doesn't happen at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, through an aggressive Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard program.

Historically, aircraft operating out of Bagram hit more birds than any other airfield in the U.S. Air Forces Central area of responsibility.

"During the first quarter of this fiscal year, Bagram bird strikes accounted for one-third of all strikes in Iraq and Afghanistan," explained Colonel Wallace, who is deployed here from Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. "We've had twice as many bird strikes as the next airfield in the AOR."

Tech. Sgt. Shane Sweeney, the wing's weapons safety



**Tech. Sgt. Shane Sweeney, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing weapons safety, holds out a falcon trained by a local Afghan falconer to catch much larger black kite birds that have infested areas near Bagram Air Field's flightline.**

manager deployed from Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom, said Bagram was also approaching the peak season for bird strikes.

"Based on historical data, the highest threat occurs during migratory seasons which are early April through June and late August through October," he explained.

Tech. Sgt. Jason Stiyer, the flight safety non-commissioned officer deployed here from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, said the first quarter of 2009 was

shaping up to be the worst year yet for bird strikes as totals were double the five year average for the same time period.

"In the last week of February we had six bird strikes in nine days," Sergeant Stiyer said indicating that spring migration had started.

But the statistics here are making a drastic turnaround and the safety experts attribute this to a new comprehensive strategy of persistent depredation and habitat denial techniques in

addition to hiring three local falconers.

The team's new strategy has been so successful over the past month, that it is now being studied at various bases throughout the AOR.

After employing aggressive depredation efforts and incorporating suggestions made by U.S. Department of Agriculture experts that visited the base in February, the team had cut the first quarter bird strikes in half.

**See BASH, next page**



**Tech. Sgt. Shane Sweeney, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing weapons safety, fires off pyrotechnic “screamers” to ward off birds nesting in an area near the flightline as Lt. Col. Charles Wallace, 455th AEW chief of safety, watches. The seven-member team of safety experts here patrol hot spots around the airfield’s flightline to minimize the threat of bird strikes on the various aircraft taking off and landing.**

## BASH

The unit hired three local falconers to see what kind of impact it would have on the thousands of birds that were lining areas near the flightline.

“We hired the team from the local area for a three month evaluation,” Colonel Wallace said about the unit’s effort to hire professional help. “This approach gave us access to local expertise so we are supporting the local economy at the same time. It’s a win-win situation.”

The lieutenant colonel said the falconer team, using three falcons and handmade traps at hot spots around the airfield, caught or killed more than 50 birds on their first day.

By the end of their first week in mid-March, the falconers had caught or killed more than 250 birds. More importantly, the birds that were not killed or captured quickly noticed the new predators in their neighborhood and began to disappear from the targeted areas.

“It was a pretty dramatic change after about 10 days,” explained Sergeant Stiyer who regularly scouted areas with a shotgun and pyrotechnics to scare off

birds near the air traffic control tower. “It used to be so bad that we didn’t have enough ammo to scare off the thousands of birds here, now look, there are hardly any birds at all.”

The safety team also attributed their dramatic turnaround to several other factors including the team increasing their inventory of shotguns, ammunition and pyrotechnics for “harassing” birds; monitoring peak hours of bird migratory patterns; and implementing aggressive habitat denial techniques.

“The collective lethal, non-lethal and habitat denial efforts of the BASH program have proven highly effective and will likely become a benchmark program for other bases/forward operating bases in Afghanistan,” said a recent report forwarded to senior leadership within Afghanistan.

The safety officers have also taken some of their program ideas “on the road.”

Sergeant Stiyer rapidly deployed to FOB Salerno March 8-11 to help develop a BASH program after a series of serious bird strikes at the airfield in eastern Afghanistan. The unit provided airfield management

at Salerno with two shotguns, 1,000 shells and a draft BASH operating instruction for implementing bird watch conditions and active depredation on the flightline to minimize the threat of bird strikes.

FOB Salerno didn’t have a plan in place because bird strikes have not been a problem for the Army’s rotary wing aircraft, explained Colonel Wallace.

“The problem is that the Air Force C-130s that provides supplies to the FOB are more vulnerable to bird strikes, so we had to develop a program to minimize the emerging threat.” explained Colonel Wallace, who is deployed here from Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. “Now that we helped set up a BASH program here at one of the largest FOBs in the theater, they are taking off and running with it.”

The safety office also recently shared their program details with safety experts throughout the AOR.

Capt. Matt Strohmeyer, chief of flight safety deployed here from RAF Lakenheath, presented the unit’s results during a recent International Security Assistance Force Flight Safety Conference in Kabul.

Some of the units at the conference have expressed interest in starting similar programs.

The safety office hopes their program will pay off over the long term and keep aircraft focused on their primary mission - supporting U.S. and coalition troops fighting insurgents on the ground.

“Sustaining the joint fight is what we’re all about,” said Captain Strohmeyer.



**An Afghan falconer holds out a kite bird that one of his falcons caught near Bagram’s burn pit area March 29.**



ISAF/Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis Ramirez

**Capt. Robert Scott, 755th Air Expeditionary Group Explosive Ordnance Disposal Operational Location Bravo officer in charge, renders his final salute at the memorial service for fallen team leader Staff Sergeant Phillip Myers at the Kandahar Air Field base chapel April 6.**

## Memorial honors fallen EOD Airman

Service members and civilians deployed to International Security Assistance Force Regional Command-South gathered in the base chapel of Kandahar Air Field April 6 to pay final respects to fallen Air Force Staff Sgt. Phillip Myers.

Sergeant Myers was killed April 4 by an improvised explosive device while conducting military operations with the 755th Air Expeditionary Group Explosive Ordnance Disposal Operational Location Bravo near Musa Qal'eh in the Helmand Province of southern Afghanistan.

Those gathered at the service remembered Sergeant Myers for his humility as a leader. Capt. Robert

Scott, 755th AEG/EOD OL-B officer in charge, reflected on the former EOD team leader describing him as a “shining example of selfless leadership and heroism.”

“He was a man who took great care to educate team members,” he said. “The impression he left people with was awe and he personified excellence and took great pride in his team’s successes.”

Sergeant Myers was deployed from the 48th EOD Flight at Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United

Kingdom. He was the recipient of the 2008 U.S. Air Force Lupia Civil Engineering NCO of the Year award.



Air Force/Roland Balik

**An Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center carry team transfers the remains of Sergeant Myers home April 5. The family of the Hopewell, Va., native was the first to allow media to cover the dignified transfer under new Department of Defense policy that lifted an 18 year ban.**



**Capt. Susan McCormick, 455th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight, gives medicine to Airman 1st Class Brent Noah, 376th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron in flight to Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, March 26. Captain McCormick is responsible for the amount of medication given to each patient. Airman Noah dislocated his hip at Manas Air Base, Kyrgyzstan.**

## **Flight nurse provides care in the air**

**Story and photos by  
Senior Airman Erik Cardenas  
455th Air Expeditionary Wing**

While troops on the ground are risking their lives fighting terrorism, Capt. Susan McCormick feels it's her mission to provide the best emergency care to those troops so they can return to their families back home.

"I couldn't picture myself doing anything but this, giving someone the chance to survive when they risk their lives everyday for us," said the captain from the 455th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Flight.

The 33-year-old captain enlisted

as a reserve medical technician in the aeromedical evacuation career field in 1994. As a technical sergeant in 2003, she received her commission to become a licensed flight nurse.

With two deployments under her belt and the third one in Bagram, Afghanistan, her six years as a nurse in the operating and emergency rooms at St. Vincent's Hospital, Worcester, Mass., are coming full circle.

"Each deployment has helped me better myself and my training," said Captain McCormick from the 439th AEF, Westover, Air Reserve Base, Mass. "The skills we use in flight need to be practiced daily. My experience in the OR and ER, has helped me become a better nurse."

Members of the 455th EAEF are on call 24-hours-per-day, seven-day-per-week, covering Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. The unit has three types of missions: an alpha alert with an hour response time for critically injured;

bravo alert, with a two hour response time, for patients who do not need immediate evacuation; and a scheduled flight twice a week for patients who need care or treatment that cannot be provided at their deployed location.

Each alert, depending on the situation, requires a different amount of personnel. On an alpha alert there is a three person crew, consisting of one nurse and two medical technicians that allow the team to quickly respond and get airborne. A bravo alert crew has either a three or five person medical crew depending on the number of patients and their acuity. On a scheduled flight, there is a five person crew on board, with two nurses and three medical technicians.

Before each mission, Captain McCormick has to physically prepare for each flight by arranging equipment and configuring the aircraft for the medical mission, but also mentally prepares by visualizing what the patient's condition is and how it could progress in-flight.



## Top Reservist visits Bagram

Lt. Gen. Charles Stenner Jr., Chief of Air Reserve Headquarters, U.S. Air Force Reserve in Washington, speaks to Capt. Leisa Hough, 455th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, April 7. The general visited bases throughout the theater to speak with Airmen.

Air Force/Senior Airman Erik Cardenas

## NURSE

She relies on the report given by the ground medical team at the forward operating bases, and the training she received at flight school regarding the stresses of flight and how it could affect the patient's condition at altitude.

"I try to think about the worst, but really we have no idea what the patient will look like when they arrive," said Captain McCormick. "With all the years I have been doing this, nothing can really prepare you to see a child who has devastating blast injuries."

In flight, patient conditions are subject to change, the altitude, cabin pressure, and weather are concerns of the crew. The crew's assessment skills are diminished by the lack of light and a noisy environment.

Sometimes at forward operating bases, the medical staff's limited access to medical equipment leads to the



patient not being diagnosed accurately or completely, she said.

"My crew had one patient who was status post-IED explosion and was stable until they took off," said Captain McCormick. "At altitude, the patient's oxygen level decreased drastically and with the diagnoses given to us by the FOB, they didn't understand what was happening with the patient. They treated the condition and kept the patient stable

until he was re-evaluated at Bagram and diagnosed with a hemo-pneumothorax that wasn't found at the FOB."

The captain has treated 40 patients in the three months she has been deployed

here. As each day gets warmer, Captain McCormick expects to treat more patients as insurgent activity traditionally rises during the spring and summer. But the seasoned nurse said she's more than ready to go when she gets the call.

"I'll fly anywhere on any plane in order to evacuate our men and women who are sick or injured and make sure they get the care they need," she said.

# NEWS BRIEFS

**NATO MEDALS:** The NATO Medal typically takes approx. 90 days upon arrival for approval and distribution back to PERSCO. PERSCO has a spreadsheet posted to the SIPR public drive which you can view to see the status of your medal. If you notice any errors, please contact the following POCs: Staff Sgts. Melinda Rowe, Lauren Taylor or Master Sgt. Carey Lambert at 431-2070/4409 or email 445EMSG.PERSCO@afghan.swa.army.mil

**GOING TDY:** All Air Force members are required to in and out-process through PERSCO for TDYs, Emergency Leave or R&R Leave/Pass. The PAX terminal will not manifest you until they have documentation stamped from PERSCO. All personnel assigned to the 455th are required to complete the AOR Travel Authorization Memo for any type of TDY. Please direct questions to PERSCO, 431-4409/2070.

**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. Accountability is tracked and will be forwarded to the first sergeants.

**COMBAT PUSH:** Combat Push hours are Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Camp Cunningham Recreation Tent from 0900L-1000L and from 2230L-2330L. Services and PERSCO will be available to sign outprocessing checklists. Personnel must complete their out-processing checklist entirely, complete their Post Deployment Health Questionnaire online and pick up their medical records at Flight Medicine/Public Health

before coming to Combat Push. For more information contact PERSCO at 431-4409.

**NEWCOMERS IN PROCESSING:** 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, visit Finance in the crow's nest tower on Camp Cunningham. If you know for a fact that you did not inprocess with PERSCO, please visit PERSCO located in the passenger terminal. Call PERSCO 431-2070/4409 with any questions.

**MEO CONTACT INFO:** The Camp Cunningham Military Equal Opportunity Office at Bldg. 726 can be reached by calling 481-6226 or call the Air Force Discrimination/Sexual Harrassment Hotline at 1-866-229-7074.

**EAGLE CASH:** All deployed personnel (military, civilian and contractors) utilizing Air Force finance office services within the USCENTCOM AOR are required to have an EagleCash Stored Value Card and highly encouraged to use it. Additionally, the Bagram

Finance Office has set-up a full-service EagleCash Card Center at the Friday Bagram Bazaar for your use. Sign-up for your EagleCash Card today.

**IMMUNIZATIONS:** Are your immunizations up to date? Active duty members are required to stay current on all immunizations during their deployment. Report to your nearest medical treatment facility to check your status and get vaccinated. For questions, contact Task Force Medical Public Health.



Air Force/Senior Airman Erik Cardenas

**New combat unit added to Bagram's groups**  
Lt. Gen. Gary North, 9th Air Force and U.S. Air Forces Central commander, hands 504th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Group guidon to Col. James Thomas as he assumes command of the new group March 30. The commmander leads more than 125 air liaison officers, tactical air controllers and combat weather Airmen assigned to three squadrons throughout Afghanistan.