



BAGRAM NEWS EXPRESS

Start Right, Finish Strong

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Panjshir PRT bids final farewell to teammates



Air Force/Staff Sgt. Jason Lake

Master Sgt. Roderick Israel, a member of the Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team, kisses Lt. Col. Mark Stratton's dog tags during a memorial ceremony May 31. Colonel Stratton, the reconstruction team's commander, was killed along with three team members when their convoy vehicle was struck by a suicide car bomber May 26. The memorial honored Army Master Sgt. Blue Rowe, civil affairs NCO, Air Force Senior Airman Ashton Goodman, vehicle operator, and Abdul Samad, the unit's Afghan legal advisor.

By Staff Sgt. Jason Lake
455th Air Expeditionary Wing

The dining facility at Forward Operating Base Lion where Airmen and Soldiers typically exchanged stories and laughter was instead filled with reminiscing and tears

as the Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team honored four of its fallen comrades May 31.

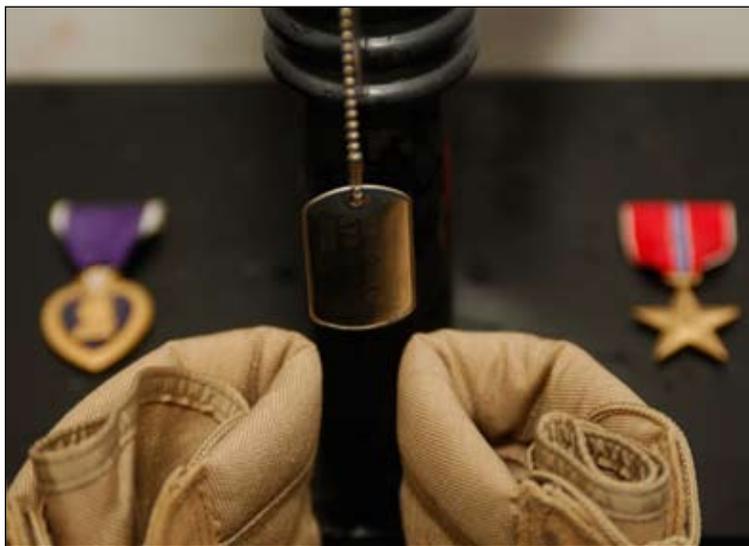
On May 26, Air Force Lt. Col. Mark Stratton, the team's commander, along with Army Master Sgt. Blue Rowe, Air Force Senior Airman Ashton

Goodman and Abdul Samad were killed when a suicide car bomber detonated alongside their convoy vehicle in Kapisa Province north of Bagram Air Field.

More than 75 teammates and local Afghan leaders, including Panjshir's Governor

Haji Bahlol, gathered at the small forward operating base to share stories and remember the sacrifice of their friends who worked to improve life for Afghans in their neighboring communities.

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Members of the team set up a memorial display using a helmet, combat boots, M-16 rifle, dog tags and their decorations that were awarded posthumously.

TRIBUTE

“The Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team is a small, close team,” said Tom Kelsey, the PRT’s director and U.S. Department of State representative, of the unit located in the Hindu Kush mountain range roughly 40 miles north of Bagram. “We all knew these heroes in different ways.”

Colonel Stratton, who received his commission in 1992 through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Texas A&M University, volunteered to deploy for the PRT mission from a plans and programs position on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon.

“He believed in his mission of helping the Afghan people,” explained Mr. Kelsey who spoke on his behalf. “He often told me and others that this was the best, most rewarding job of his Air Force career.”

Mr. Kelsey recounted how the Foley, Ala.-native,

strongly believed that the team’s centerpiece project to construct a \$28 million, 40-mile road through Panjshir to the neighboring northern province of Badakhshan would dramatically improve life for the Afghans.

“He loved talking to the

people of Panjshir about the PRT’s mission so much that I sometimes worried our interpreters would collapse from exhaustion,” Mr. Kelsey said lightheartedly. “[He firmly believed] ‘Where the road goes, development will follow’... especially on the ‘Road to Badakhshan.’”

While Colonel Stratton guided the team’s strategic mission, Army Master Sgt. Blue Rowe focused on the human relations aspect of bonding Soldiers and Airmen together for an atypical mission. Before arriving at FOB Lion, Sergeant Rowe served temporarily as the unit’s first sergeant during three months of integration training at Fort Bragg, N.C.

“We were short a first sergeant and he stepped up and started to integrate the team [of Airmen and Soldiers],” explained Army

Lt. Col. Steve Lancaster, who previously served as the team’s civil military operations center chief before becoming the new commander. “He did everything possible to develop his subordinates to be everything they were capable of. After we arrived here, he turned in his diamond and assumed a support position without question or complaint. He was a consummate non-commissioned officer.”

The colonel said the Army Reservist and civil affairs NCO deployed from the 426th Civil Affairs Battalion in Upland, Calif., became infamous just days before his death for his ability to devour a cherry pie in six minutes during a pie-eating contest. The Whittier, Calif.-native was also well known for his devotion to physical fitness and conditioning the team for the rigors of working in the mountains.



Air Force/Staff Sgt. Jason Lake

Patrick Kolesiak, Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team chief engineer, greets Soldiers and Airmen from Bagram Air Field as they arrive at Forward Operating Base Lion in Panjshir Province, May 31 to attend the memorial ceremony. More than 75 teammates and Afghan leaders attended the ceremony.

“He was loved and respected by everyone who knew him; he was funny and a likeable person,” Colonel Lancaster recalled of the 15-year veteran. “When one of his young sergeants was doing pushups to the point of exhaustion, Blue told him ‘I’m only making you do this because I love you and you need the training.’ No one doubted him.”

No one doubted Ashton Goodman’s passion either. Just a few days after gathering all the senior airman’s belongings to send home to her family, Capt. Stacie Shafran, the team’s public affairs officer, reflected on the 21-year-old’s can-do spirit.

“She had such a sense of urgency to do it all right now that’s common in people of her young age,” the captain said of the team’s vehicle operator deployed from the 43rd Logistics Readiness Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C. “On May 18, she led a tremendous undertaking to deliver much-needed food and supplies to more than 100 poor women in Shutol district. I’ll never forget how proud she was. As she drove us up the narrow, steep, winding road to the village, she beamed with excitement over the chance to personally help these women.”

Senior Airman Carl Savoy, also deployed from the 43rd LRS, said he shared a special



Air Force/Staff Sgt. Jason Lake

Soldiers and Airmen from Bagram Air Field board an Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter before heading back home after the ceremony.

bond with the Indianapolis-native after the two completed a deployment in 2007 as vehicle operators delivering supplies on dangerous roads throughout Iraq.

“Master Sgt. Limwesh Wright (the PRT’s chief of vehicle maintenance) labeled the maintenance section like a family,” Airman Savoy explained. “Where’s your sister?” as he would commonly refer to her ... and though at first I didn’t like that label, Ashton was really like a sister to me. We could bug each other about anything. My ‘little sister’ was just shy of her 22nd birthday. Even before this attack, I knew I

could never forget Ashton Goodman.”

Looking back at their time spent with the team’s Afghan legal advisor, Airmen and Soldiers alike remembered Abdul Samad as a man who fought bravely to defend his homeland simply using the power of words. The team said he believed in the spirit of a free Afghanistan and gave his life defending that dream. Mr. Kelsey also commented on his quest to personally contact President Barack Obama.

“Samad was always cheerful and full of good ideas about how to enhance our mission in Afghanistan,” Mr. Kelsey said of the former Panjshir judge. “In fact, I understand he even tried to start an e-mail dialogue with President Obama in order to share his ideas. While I don’t think the president ever found time in his schedule to write back, he probably would

have benefited from Samad’s insights as an unofficial presidential advisor.”

Mr. Kelsey said all four members contributed in their own way to the rest of the team working together to build schools, medical clinics, roads and other projects to bring peace, security and stability to the people of Panjshir and the rest of Afghanistan.

“Our task now is to honor Mark Stratton, Blue Rowe, Ashton Goodman and Abdul Samad by continuing the work they gave their lives for,” he said before the emotional crowd. “They would want us to and we owe them that. The greatest and most enduring memorial to our heroes is the work they have left behind for the benefit of the people in this valley. We will finish the work that our fallen heroes came here to do because there is no higher honor we can bestow upon them.”

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Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Schloesser recently thanked 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Airmen for their contributions during his 13-month tenure by presenting 10 Airmen with his unit coin. The two-star general relinquished command of Regional Command-East to Maj. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, 82nd Airborne Division commander, during a transfer of authority ceremony June. 3. Combined Joint Task Force-82 replaces CJTF-101.

82nd Airborne assumes command of Bagram, Regional Command-East

Fifteen months after transferring authority of Regional Command - East, the 82nd Airborne Division is back and officially assumed command of RC-East from the 101st Airborne Division during a ceremony at Bagram Airfield today.

The ceremony marks the official transition from Combined Joint Task Force - 101 to Combined Joint Task Force - 82, with the new unit assuming responsibility for 14 provinces in eastern Afghanistan along the Pakistan border.

During the ceremony, Maj. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division and CJTF-82, praised the 101st Airborne for their 15 months of service working to enhance the lives of the Afghan people.

“The leadership of the 101st forged an exceptional team that has proven an unparalleled understanding of, and performance in this complex environment,” Scaparrotti said. “In partnership with the people of Afghanistan, they have taken the fight to our common enemy and improved the lives of thousands of Afghan citizens.”

Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Schloesser, commander of the 101st Airborne Division and CJTF-101 reflected on the accomplishments made by the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, civilians and coalition partners in his task force during past 15 months while also looking to the future with CJTF-82.

“You can hold your head high at what you were able to accomplish. History will record your accomplishments here fighting those who would terrorize the world,” Schloesser said. “While we say farewell to Afghanistan, another great

task force returns to take our place. The 82nd Airborne Division - no strangers to Afghanistan - led by Major General Scaparrotti will continue to assist the government, the Afghan national security forces, and the people of Afghanistan increasing security, improving governance and developing Afghanistan.”

RC-East’s mission is to bring development, governance and security to Afghanistan, and ultimately deny terrorists safe haven to launch attacks against the U.S. and its allies. CJTF-82 will work directly with the International Security Assistance Force, U.S. Forces - Afghanistan, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to maintain security and development for the region.

The 82nd Airborne Division, deployed here from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, will maintain control of RC-East for approximately one year.

– Story courtesy of ISAF Public Affairs

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, call PERSCO 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.

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, 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 Bldg. 700 near the passenger terminal. Call 431-2070/4409 for more information.

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 Hotline at 1-888-231-4058.

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

'Dirt Boys' level playing field

Tech. Sgt. Darryl Guppy, 455th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, looks through an automatic level device while Airman 1st Class Sheldon Mellott, 455th ECES, pours dirt for an A-10 aircraft hangar extension project. Thirteen civil engineer "Dirt Boys" have worked on the project that costs approximately \$156,000.