Bagram News Express
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Commander, chaplain talk about holiday stress

By Tech. Sgt. John Jung
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- The holiday season is almost upon us and while many deployed Airmen are busy trying to find creative ways to brighten the season while away from loved ones, some Airmen may find themselves wrestling with a combination of stressors during the 40 or so days between Thanksgiving and the New Year.

Many Airmen can find themselves overwhelmed with feelings of sadness or depression, because they miss friends and family back home and are struggling with personal relationships; or are dealing with financial problems that are difficult and weigh on them heavily.

Whatever the case, all Airmen are strongly encouraged to seek out and help their fellow Airmen with holiday stress.

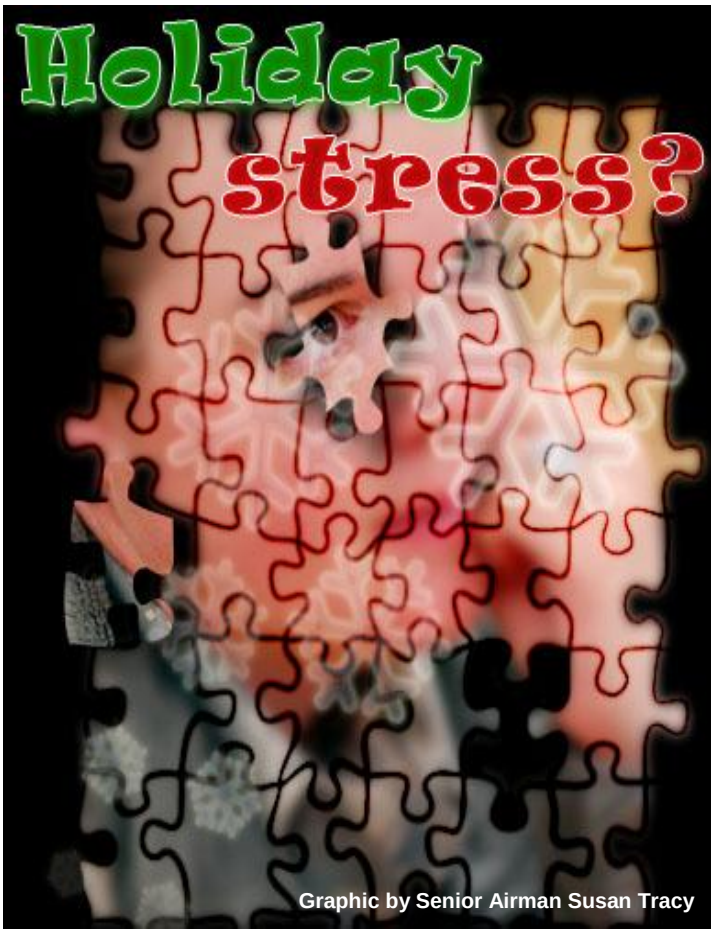
"Our job during the days between Thanksgiving and the new year is to pay attention to one another, Airman to Airman," said Brig. Gen. Steven Kwast, commander of the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing.

Supervisors and wingmen should look out for signs of stress, and reach out to each other if things become even a little overwhelming.

"Make sure you're looking each other in the eye. If somebody is struggling, make sure that you're there and talking with them about it," said General Kwast.

Signs of stress may vary from person to person and situation to situation. Some significant signs of stress may include:

- Behavioral changes such as social isolation, deterioration in an Airman's appearance or work performance
- Cognitive changes such as slow or poor decision-making, decreased memory or concentration
- Mood changes such as being constantly angry, sad or irritable, and frequent mood fluctuations
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.



Graphic by Senior Airman Susan Tracy

The key to stress management is early recognition. If you begin to feel "stretched thin" emotionally or physically, don't wait until you reach the point of helplessness or hopelessness. Seek help from a supervisor, friend or loved one. You can enhance your ability to manage stress by eating healthy, exercising regularly, getting adequate rest, and remaining within your financial means.

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STRESS

"We've got organizations on base to help us with stress – mental help professionals and chaplains – but there is nothing more important or powerful to solving this problem than one friend to another," said General Kwast.

"A friend who notices something isn't quite right and is there to listen and find assistance during tough times is what being a good Airman is all about. Be a good wingman and pay attention to your brothers and sisters, especially during this holiday season," he concluded.

People may not believe it, but even Chaplains can feel down with the onset of the holidays.

"I feel those same feelings of loneliness and wishing I were home with my family like anyone else," said Lt. Col. Randall Kitchens, 455th AEW chaplain. "I have a 19-year old daughter and a 21-year old son. And I'm looking into the eyes of many of our Airmen here who are about that same age… in their eyes I see my son and daughter and in that moment I think to myself that if they were here I hope someone is going to be here for them," he continued.

"That thought redirects me, instead of me being down on myself, I turn around and think how can I help someone else. And generally when I go to help someone else I feel better. It lifts my spirits because that is part of who I am as a person," said the chaplain.

An ounce (or less) of prevention…

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Master Sgt. Maria Langston (right), the emergency room non-commissioned officer in charge from the 455th Expeditionary Medical Operations Squadron, administers the Influenza A 2009 (H1N1) monovalent vaccine to Brig. Gen. Steven Kwast (left), 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander, Nov. 16, 2009. Sergeant Langston, a San Antonio native, is deployed from Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)

Exercise prepares Airmen for Afghan marketplace attack

By Capt. David Faggard
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Airmen and Soldiers at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital tend to a simulated "victim" during a mass-casualty exercise here. The exercise was useful as just days later an insurgent rocket attack on a civilian marketplace in the Tagab Valley wounded many civilians. (U.S. Air Force photo/Capt. James McDaniel)

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- A deadly insurgent rocket attack on a civilian marketplace in Afghanistan's Kapisa Province resulted in wounded Afghans being medically evacuated to nearby hospitals, including the Craig Joint Theater Hospital here that took in 13 civilians, many who appeared to be elderly men and young children, Nov. 16.

Underneath the whipping Blackhawk rotors, Airmen and Soldiers methodically carried litter-after-litter to awaiting medical personnel who fortunately were ready for this mass casualty event after just finishing an exercise with a similar scenario just days prior, according to Capt. James McDaniel, the hospital medical readiness officer.

"All the processes between the exercise and the [Tagab] marketplace attack were the same," said Captain McDaniel, a Brooking, Ore. native. "The events were similar scenarios with terrible traumas. The exercise was designed to stretch the capabilities of the Airmen and the hospital and fortunately the exercise training paid off as we brought in the wounded from the marketplace."

The exercise scenario focused on many Airmen who were injured in a rocket attack and was designed to "flood the hospital with victims all at once in order for doctors to make decisions fast," said the captain who is deployed from Dover Air Force Base, Del. "We found creative ways to do our work, from medical assistance, to finding bed space."

Airmen and Soldiers worked in unison with hand-signals and shouts as the marketplace wounded were ferried from the medical helicopters to the hospital's operating rooms.

"Who's in charge?" a soldier shouted over the loud Blackhawk's rotors. "We need two gurneys there--and two there," he said pointing to two different UH-60 helicopters as Airmen in ABU-patterned scrubs ran to care for the wounded in the helicopters. As soon as the helicopters were unloaded they immediately took off, covering the awaiting medical staff with a fine Afghan dust from the rotor wash, back on their way to the Tagab Valley.

According to Coalition officials in Kabul, "initial reports indicate four Afghans have been killed [in the marketplace] and more than 40 were injured in the attack. Insurgents continue to harm the Afghan people with their actions. They are doing everything they can to stop the incredible progress the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and international forces have achieved in working together," said Capt. Jane Campbell, a spokesperson with the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command.

No Coalition servicemembers were injured in this attack.

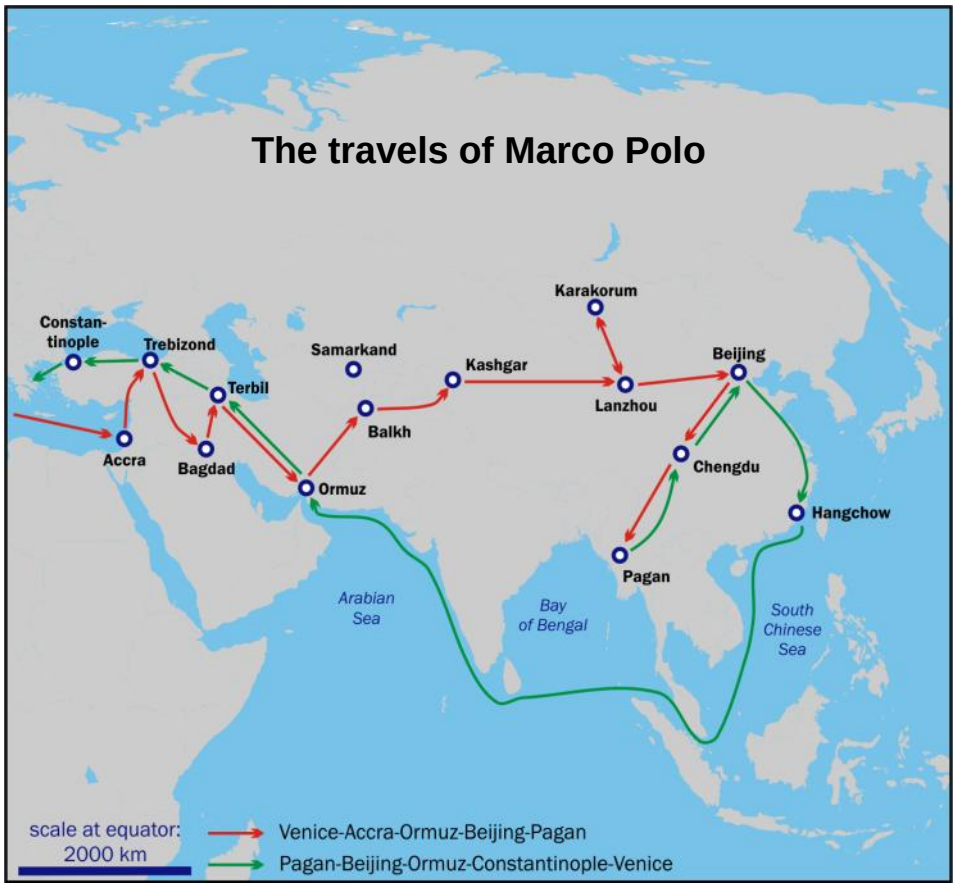
Air transportation scenes from the flightline

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Tech. Sgt. Gordon Criswell, an air transportation specialist from the 455th Expeditionary Aerial Port Squadron, stands next to a MRAP All Terrain Vehicle making sure it doesn't move while the K- loader lowers it to the ground. Sergeant Criswell is deployed from McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., and hails from Ocala, Fla. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Troops disembark from a C-17 Globemaster III in the early morning sunshine. C-17s can carry a maximum of 170,900 pounds and can land on runways as short as 3,500 feet. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Susan Tracy)

Christopher Columbus and Afghanistan

By Doug Beckstead
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Historian



BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- When Alexander the Great came through Afghanistan he thought he had reached the end of the world. In fact, according to his European knowledge he had reached the end of the world. His army made a short foray into western fringes of China and dipped into the northwestern part of India (now Pakistan). His world consisted of the lands bounded on the west by Europe and the east by the Hindu Kush Mountains. The southern regions included what we now call north Africa. Beyond that world were impassable mountains and uncrossable deserts with names like "the Land of Death" or "the Land of Irrevocable Death." The name "Hindu Kush" means "Hindu Killer."

Alexander had no idea vast new worlds and civilizations existed just beyond.
On the other side of the Hindu Kush Mountains the Chinese had been developing for thousands of years totally unaware of what lie to the west in Persia and Europe.

Mankind has always had people with a kind of wanderlust to their personality. These people are always pushing the boundaries to see what is on the other side of the mountain so to speak, just beyond the horizon. Such people, long forgotten to history, explored outward from Afghanistan and Persia (modern Iraq and Iran), westward from China and eastward from Europe. If they survived and returned to their homelands, they brought back stories of new people and most importantly new materials and new exotic goods.

From those explorers moving back and forth between cultures, trade routes developed initially in Mesopotamia (Persia) eventually branching to the east and the west allowing commerce to flow from one land to another.

The main route over which this trade took place came to be called the "Silk Road." It did not exist solely for trading silk, however. It was only one of many items traded back and forth. Almost 2,000 years ago, gold and other precious metals, ivory, precious stones and glass went east toward china while spices, furs, ceramics, gun powder, jade, bronze objects, lacquer and iron went west to Europe.

Caravans ranging from 100 to 3,000 camels came from China, through the Hindu Kush Mountains, down the Panjshir Valley, through Bagram and west to Persia and on to Europe. Some took a more northerly route through the lands of the Kushan people going through Balkh (near Mazar-e Sharif) and Herat in western Afghanistan. Carrying loads of 500 pounds or more per camel, these caravans were the freight trains of the day bringing goods back and forth to the markets on either end. Explorers continued traveling this route bringing goods, ideas and exotic tales back to Europe. Marco Polo came through Afghanistan on his way to China in approximately 1280.

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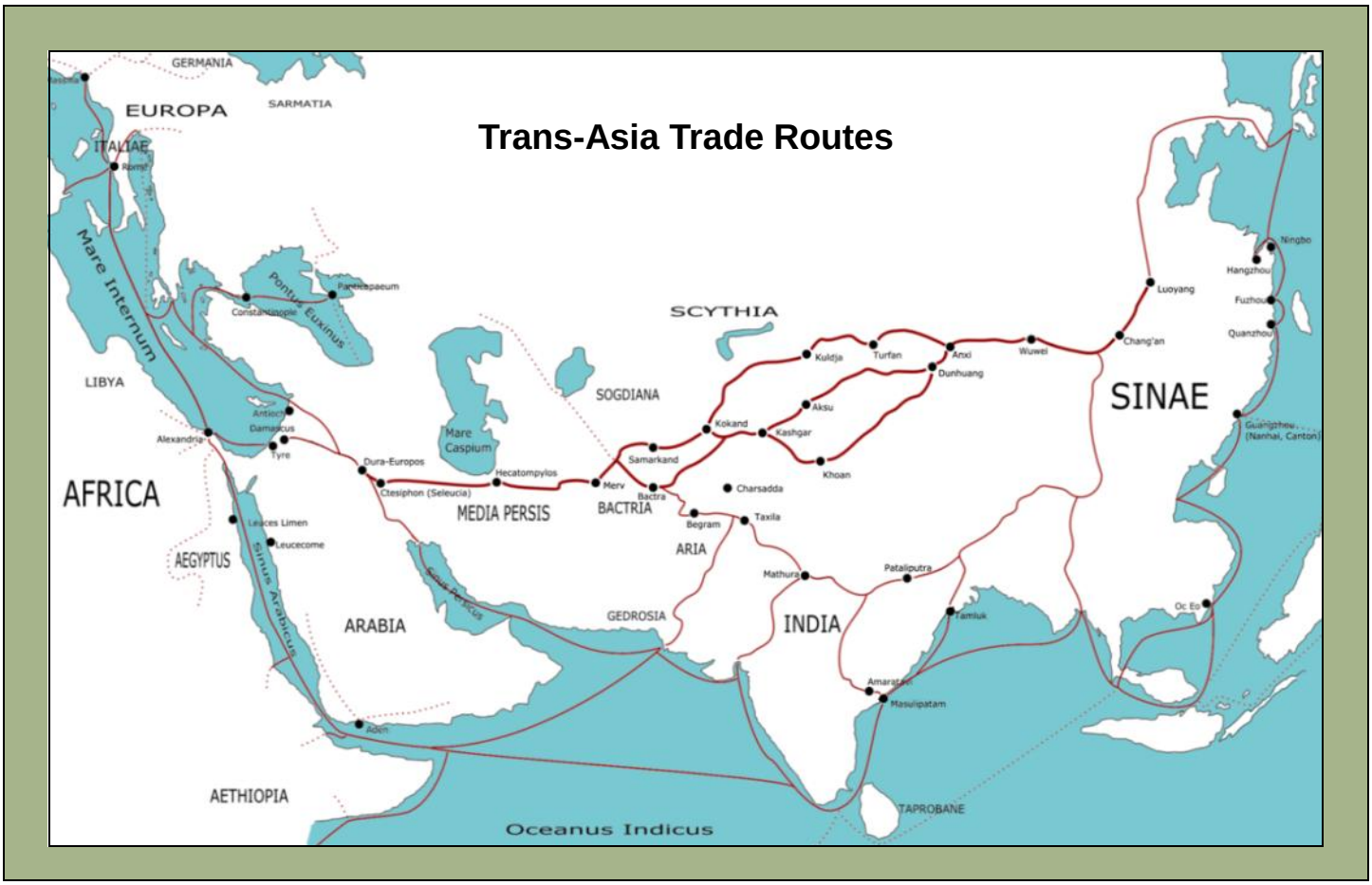
COLUMBUS



When the caravans moved from Asia to Persia to Europe, Afghanistan served as a central hub of the world's major trade routes. Because of its location, Afghanistan was poised to reap the benefits of not only commerce but knowledge as well. Imagine the technological advances that traveled over the Silk Road. They may be primitive by today's standards but look at the impact things like gun powder and the printing press had on world history.

At this point you are probably wondering just what Christopher Columbus has to do with all of this.

Well, in 1492 when Columbus set sail, he went and turned the world's thinking upside down. For thousands of years Europeans believed that if you went west you would fall off the end of the world and be lost forever. By sailing west, Columbus, like those early explorers who ventured from one valley, over the mountains or across the desert to see what lay beyond, he found that new lands lay beyond the sunset. He did not fall off the edge of the map.

Other explorers followed and found that they could sail around what we now call South America, or they could go south around Africa. Suddenly men found that they could sail west or south eventually reaching Asian markets. These routes were cheaper, faster and much safer. As a result, trade via the sea routes became more economical than overland.

As a result, trade along the Silk Road declined rapidly eventually coming to a complete halt altogether.

So, what does Christopher Columbus have to do with Afghanistan?

To a flat world, Afghanistan was essentially the center of the universe. It stood at the hub of the great civilizations of the old world -- Persian, Indian, Chinese and Greco-Roman. It was the center of the greatest trade and commerce route that mankind had ever known. The world's great civilizations learned about each other and traded with each other over the routes that passed through Afghanistan.

To a round world, Afghanistan's mountains and vast deserts was only a wasteland that existed between these civilizations. It no longer held importance because it only served as a hub on the Silk Road.

Servicemember on the Street

What are you thankful for or what is one food you want to eat on Thanksgiving?

"I'm thankful for my supportive family."
Captain Jacob Chisolm
Executive Officer
Eglin AFB, Fla.

"I want to eat pumpkin pie with whipped cream."
Airman 1st Class April Spilde
Security Forces Member
Eielson AFB, Alaska

" I'm thankful that I wake up every day."
Senior Airman Alicia Garcia
Force Protection
McGuire AFB, N.J.

"I want to eat my father-in-laws hamburger filling."
Senior Master Sgt. Richard Werni
Red Horse 1st Sergeant
Fort Indian Town Gap, Pa.

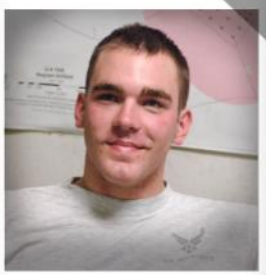
"I'm thankful for 234 years of Marine Corps traditions."
USMC Cpl. Lesley Corbin
Administration Clerk
4th Marine Logistics Group, La.

" I want to eat some sweet potatoes."
Tech. Sgt. Steve Irwin
Heavy Equipment Operator
Nevada Air National Guard

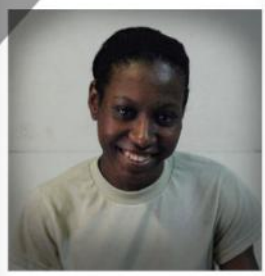
"I'm thankful that I get to go home soon and see my family."
Master Sgt. Clifford Smith
NCOIC of Air Evacuation Comm.
Pope AFB, N.C.

"I would love some deep fried turkey."
Staff Sgt. Efrain Roldan
Electrician
Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

"I'm thankful for the troops and the job I have."
Travis Luethe
Recreation and Marketing Manager
Seattle, Wash.



" I want to eat keylime pie."
Airman 1st Class Nathan Baloga
Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician
Cannon AFB, N.M.

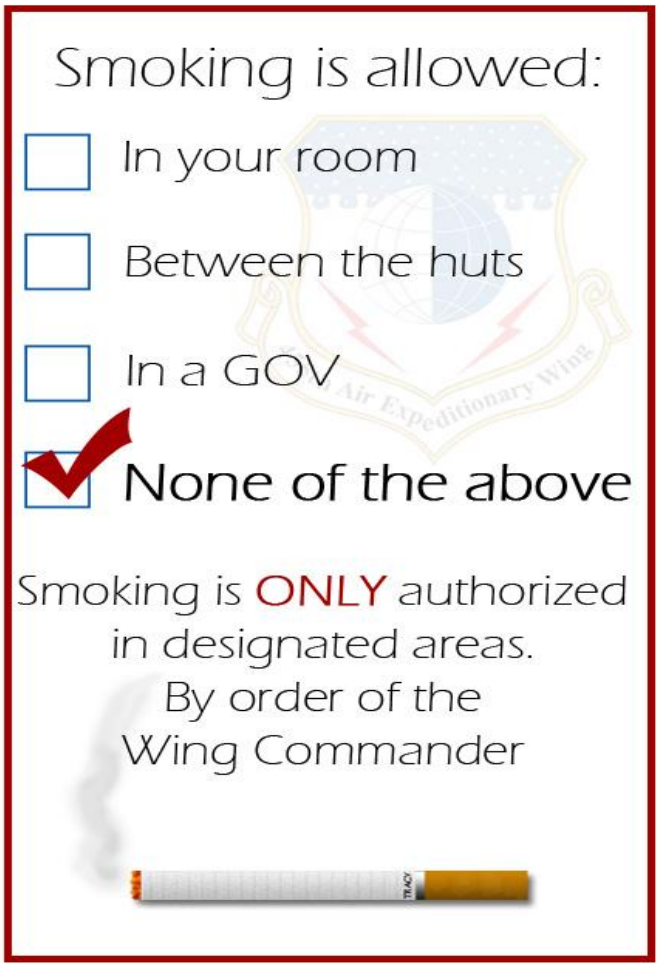


"I'm thankful to be able to protect freedom."
Senior Airman Stacey Lauterbach
Mail Clerk
Fairchild AFB, Wash.

" I want to eat keylime pie."
Senior Airman Jessica Skerda
Red Horse Material Maintenance Chief of Supply
Fort Indian Town Gap, Pa.

NEWS BRIEFS

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, 431-4426.

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.

COMBAT O: Combat Orientation is Wednesday at 0130Z/0600L at the MWR Clamshell. Uniform is Air Force PT uniform for fitness assessment. This is a mandatory briefing for all Air Force personnel assigned to Bagram Airfield. Accountability is tracked and will be forwarded to the first sergeants.