

Bagram News Express

Start Right, Finish Strong  Vol. 3 Issue 25, December 27, 2009

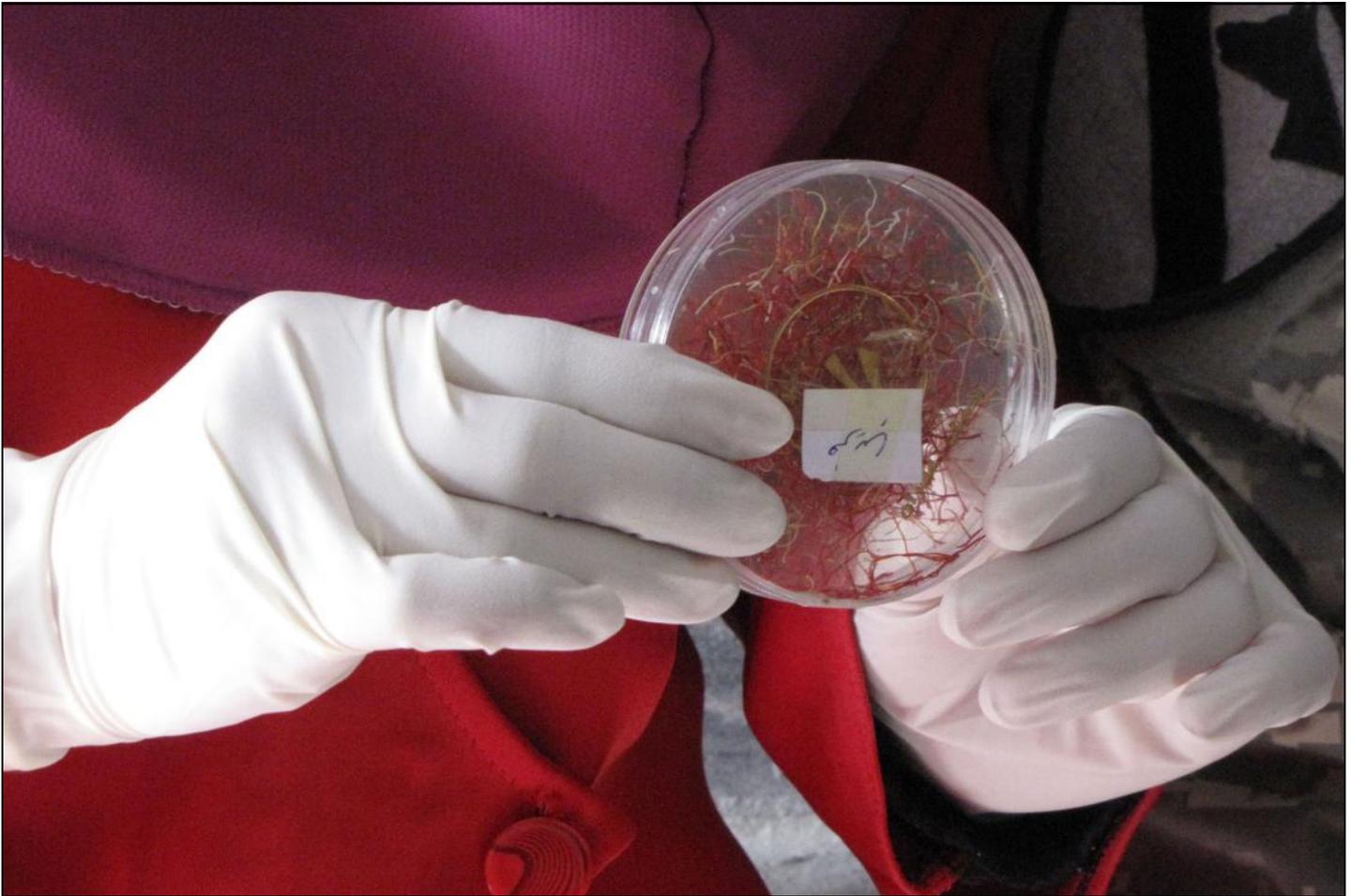


BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Airmen, from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing, deliver boxes of toys, shoes, food, blankets, wool socks and other necessities to local Afghan men and children at one of the hospitals on Bagram Airfield, Dec. 21, 2009. The supplies were all donated from Americans whose friends and family members are deployed to Afghanistan. Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors from all over Bagram participated in the humanitarian aid event. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Major Langdon Root, the executive officer from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing, speaks with a young boy after giving out winter clothing to Afghans during a visit to one of the hospitals on Bagram Airfield, Dec. 21, 2009. Major Root is deployed from Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., and hails from Vincennes, Ind. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)



Commentary: A day with Afghan women



BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - An Afghan woman from the Panjshir valley holds a plastic container of Saffron as an example of how it should be sorted. Saffron is a very valuable herb commonly used in cooking that has recently been introduced to the Afghanistan countryside. Women grow it, sort it, and then sell it to companies as a means to increase their livelihood. (U.S. Air Force photo/1st Lt. Kathryn Graves)

**By Senior Airman Susan Tracy
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs**

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — I had the unique experience on December 17, 2009 of traveling by Army convoy to Forward Operating Base Lion located in the Panjshir valley to go with female service-members as they met with local Afghan women.

Troops at FOB Lion instruct the women on different agricultural projects that can provide additional income for their families to include growing the crop saffron.

Staff Sgt. Danielle Sempter, a medic from Swansborough, N.C. and deployed from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, says that she views the interaction as very rewarding. "It means a lot to be able to go and talk to the women and hear their concerns and get to know them a little," she said.

First we went to a small office to drink tea and meet with a woman named Mirriam. She is the director for all the women's projects in the valley, and was very passionate about the supplies and training they were requesting. She told us

that a meeting was being held in a small all-girls school to discuss the Saffron Project, which was an idea implemented in the area by a Texas National Guard unit called the Agribusiness Development Team.

The room in the school was jammed with 45 women; a range of pink-clad young girls in their teens to older women with gray in their hair met there to discuss how to better

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SAFFRON

their future.

As each speaker stood up to speak about their concerns, our translator, Winna, whispered to us what she considered the key points. Some worried about the quality of their soil, others that there would be no market for their labor.

The crowd quieted as Mirriam stood up, holding a small plastic container full of the bright red saffron. She talked about how to plant it, how to

harvest it, and how to sell the crop. She encouraged the gathering, telling them that the small flower and its profits would be able to change their lives. That they will be able to afford shoes and blankets, that their children could go away to better schools.

Change is happening in this valley, and its name is saffron.

As I sat in the back row in that crowded classroom it struck me that these were the people we're fighting for. I see the occasional rocket flying by, I see the wounded heroes being treated in our hospitals, I hear stories about firefights, but I had never actually seen the people that we are here to help. It was very encouraging to realize that these people care about their country and bettering their lives. Change is happening in this valley, and its name is saffron.



BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Staff Sgt. Danielle Sempter (middle), a medic deployed from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, sits and talks with Mirriam (far left), the director of women's projects in the Panjshir valley through an interpreter named Winna (right). Servicemembers at Forward Operating Base Lion have been teaching the local Afghan women ways to increase their agricultural products. Sergeant Sempter, a Swansborough, N.C. native, also teaches first aid at Afghan elementary schools in the valley. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Susan Tracy)

PRT building Afghanistan's future through schools



BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Afghan children recently received new backpacks and school supplies from an American charity. Four new schools in Donai, Bahrabat, Arazi and Zagrano are slated to be completed next summer. The schools will provide a safe, sanitary learning environment for Afghan children when completed. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Felicia Juenke)

**By Capt. Tony Wickman
Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs**

KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The future of Afghanistan is its children, and the Kunar provincial government and Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team are working together to build that future by delivering new schools.

On a recent trip through the southern part of the province, PRT engineers did construction quality checks on four new schools in Donai, Bahrabat, Arazi and Zagrano that will provide a safe, sanitary learning environment when completed next summer.

The school projects in each of the villages rep-

resent an economic boost and an investment in Afghanistan's future.

One person who knows that well is Hanawadah, a security night watchman at the Arazi site, whose three children attend the school.

"I'm from Donai village and I have three kids in the school," Hanawadah said. "This is a good project, and we need this school soon."

According to U.S. Navy Builder Chief Petty Officer David Zahm, PRT engineer, the projects are going well with only minor issues. One of the

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reasons for the quality assurance and quality checks is providing guidance to the local workers.

“They’ve improved dramatically since we’ve been able to go out there to the sites and give them mentoring,” Chief Zahm said. “I’ve talked with the foremen and laborers at the sites and tell them why they have to do things to our standards, and they’ve been very receptive to that.”

Chief Zahm said because the PRT has a high standard for quality it’s important to teach the laborers the differences in mixing concrete and building structures.

“Some of the issues with material quality are because they don’t understand the difference and can’t see it, so many times they go with what is easier to do,” Chief Zahm said. “That is why we explain strength and durability to them, and hold them to standards.”

Chief Zahm said the projects were all started about a month ago, and the difference in the projects’ progress is like night and day since the PRT started making regular trips to the sites.

“When they started they just didn’t know some things and would wing it,” he said. “Now, they have a process and are applying the right techniques. This is one of the school bundles that has improved since we’ve started coming regularly to check on them.”

Chief Zahm said the contractor adheres to the requirement to hire local villagers for the projects, which brings economic improvements to the re-

gion.

“They are hiring local labor for the projects,” he said. “All the unskilled labor is from the local villages and about half of the skilled labor is from the area.”

One such person who is in high demand is Karibullah, a skilled worker who lives in the area. He was hired for both the school construction project in Bahrabat, as well as work on a road project in the area. He takes much pride in the projects and understands the importance of both.

“With my hands, I’ve done a lot of reconstruction in different places and different projects,” Karibullah said. “Afghans see the changes, but we hope you will continue to help us for a prosperous Afghanistan.”

He said the school is important for the future of the country, and for his nine children.

“I’m happy to build this school. We have a Pashtu saying, ‘with one hand you cannot clap,’” Karibullah said. “We are really tired of fighting and we don’t want our kids in the dark anymore. We want a brighter future for our kids, our families and our people.”

Karibullah explained that he wanted his youngest son to grow up and get an education.

“I don’t want him to become a shepherd. It would be good for him to get an education,” he said. “He can be a good man and work for the future of his country with an education.”

The schools were bundled under one contract for approximately \$1 million and awarded to the Takar Construction Company.

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The bear came over the mountain: The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan



Soviet T-62 tank in Afghanistan

**Story by Doug Beckstead,
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Historian**

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - For ten years from 1979 to 1989, yet another foreign government attempted to occupy Afghanistan. This period saw the small country fighting to retain its autonomy and at the same time ended up being the focal point of the class of two titans: the United States and the Soviet Union. Like all previous attempts to control Afghanistan this most recent attempt was doomed to failure. But, how did it come about and what were the goals of each side?

Russian interests in Afghanistan date back to the early 19th century when they attempted to push south toward the Arabian Sea and the British pushed north in an attempt to keep them away from their colony in India. This 'Great Game' as historians have labeled it, eventually

gave way to the establishment of Afghanistan, as a sovereign nation among nations, in the late 1890s.

Afghanistan has been ruled over the millennia by a number of different types of governments. From 1933 to 1973 it was ruled by King Mohammed Zaire Shah. His cousin, Mohammad Adour Khan, served as Prime Minister from 1954-63. During that time, a new political party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, began to emerge with Marxist leanings. In 1967, the PDPA split into two rival factions. The first, the Kahlo (Masses) faction, was headed by Nor Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, and the second, the Parcham (Flag) faction, was headed by Babrak Karmal.

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On July 17, 1973, former Prime Minister Dauod seized power in a military coup after charges of corruption and poor economic conditions were leveled against the monarchy. Dauod's government was widely unpopular with the people of Afghanistan. Anti-Dauod demonstrations resulted in the arrest of several prominent PDPA leaders.

Five years later, on April 27, 1978, the Afghan Army, which was sympathetic to the PDPA cause staged yet another *coup d'état* overthrowing and executing Dauod along with members of his family. Nur Muhammad Taraki, leader of the PDPA became President of the Revolutionary Council and Prime Minister of the newly established Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. However, his was a government with strong ties to the Soviet Politburo in Moscow and very much Communist in its leanings.

Taraki immediately began imposing a Soviet-style program of modernizing reforms including decrees set forth changes in marriage customs and land reform. These were not well received by a population deeply immersed in Islam and tradition.

In September 1979, Deputy Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin seized power in a palace shootout that resulted in the death of President Taraki.

During the Taraki years, large parts of Afghanistan were in open rebellion against their government. By the spring of 1979, 24 of the 28 provinces had violent uprisings. The result was thousands of Afghans being killed when the Army and Air Force were used against them.

The previous winter, Amin's government secured a treaty allowing him to call on Soviet forces for assistance.

At the same time, the KGB developed information that lead Soviet leaders to believe that Amin's policies were destabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. The KGB station in Kabul warned that his leadership would lead to "harsh repressions, and as a result, the activation and consolidation of the opposition." In other words, they warned that the civil war that started under Taraki would solidify and could potentially lead to yet another overthrow of the government. This time possibly one less than supportive of the Soviet Union's interests.

In late April 1979 the KGB was reporting that Amin was purging his opponents, including Soviet loyalists and that his loyalty to Moscow was in question. He reportedly sought diplomatic links to Pakistan and the People's Republic of China.



Soviet BMPs like this one were commonplace in Afghanistan in 1979

As well as holding secret meetings with the U.S. that brought suspicions of his possible complicity with the CIA.

On Christmas Eve 1979, Soviet planes began landing at Kabul and Bagram Airfield bringing troops, equipment and supplies. Accord-

ing to Soviet officers, planes were landing at Bagram with their cargo ramps partially down every two to three minutes. They disgorged their occupants and equipment and immediately took off before even recovering their ramps. If something went wrong with the operation, the planes would

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simply move off to the side so they did not hinder those coming right behind them.

The following evening, Soviet Spetznaz troops dressed in Afghan uniforms began occupying key government buildings throughout Kabul. They destroyed the communications hub paralyzing the Afghan military command. Then they moved on the Tajbek Palace where President Amin had sought a defensive position when the invasion began the day before.

Shortly thereafter the palace fell and during a scuffle, Amin was shot and killed as was his young son. A short time later, Radio Kabul announced that Afghanistan had been 'liberated' from Amin's rule. According to the statement issued by the Soviet authorities, they were complying with the 1978 treaty that Amin had in fact sought, and that Amin had been "executed by a tribunal for his crimes." Babrak Karmal, leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA, was installed as President.

The initial Soviet force included 1,800 tanks and 80,000 soldiers. During the second week alone, more than 4,000 flights landed at the Kabul Airfield alone. Later, when two additional divisions arrived, the force swelled to more than 100,000 troops.

Soviet land forces began flooding into the country through the Salang Tunnel through the Hindu Kush Mountains. Moving along the primitive road system they quickly took control of the major urban centers, military bases and strategic locations. However, the presence of Soviet troops did not have the anticipated calming effect on the populace. In fact, it exacerbated a nationalistic feeling throughout the country. After all, it appeared that yet another invading army had come to Afghanistan in an attempt to conquer it.

The forces that had opposed the Taraki and Amin governments and their reforms now focused their attention on the Soviet invaders. Loosely connected groups of Mujahideen fighters began forming throughout Afghanistan.

Throughout the next decade, 80% of the country escaped Soviet control. The only areas that they were able to exert control over lie adjacent to

the same road system that they used to invade. The Mujahideen were able to control almost all of the rural and mountainous regions.

The Panjshir Valley, northeast of Bagram, saw some of the fiercest fighting that took place. Nine major offenses were launched against the Mujahideen strongholds there. All nine failed.

Eventually the Soviets turned to trying to depopulate the valley by massive offenses with Hind helicopter gunships and extensive mining operations. They even went so far as to drop brightly colored aerial mines shaped like animals with the expectation that children would pick them up and be killed.

Numerous countries supplied aid in the form of arms and money to the Mujahideen including the U.S. Initially, U.S. aid was limited but eventually increased considerably to the point where we were openly supplying arms, ammunition and finances.

By the time the Soviets pulled out in 1989, more than 620,000 troops had served in-country. Sources point to the loss of 14,453 military personnel and 53,753 wounded. Materially, they lost 451 aircraft, 147 tanks, 1,314 armored personnel carriers and 11,368 trucks and other military equipment.

For Afghanistan, more than one million Afghans were killed, approximately five million fled to Pakistan and Iran and two million people were displaced within the country. In the 1980s, one of out every two refugees worldwide was an Afghan.

In addition to those killed, more than 1.2 million Afghans were disabled and three million were maimed or wounded.

Kandahar, the country's second largest city, saw its population reduced from 200,000 before the war to approximately 25,000 at the war's end.

The legacy of the Soviet invasion is the vast number of land mines still scattered about the country. They killed more than 25,000 Afghans during the war. There remain an estimated 10 to 15 million land mines scattered throughout the country.

Following the war the country fell into another period of civil war that lasted into the early 1990s when the government was overthrown by the Taliban who imposed their own archaic form of government on the people of Afghanistan.

Tax help available through base legal office

Now that the holidays are over, it's tax season. The deadline for filing federal income taxes is 15 April; however, the IRS automatically extends this deadline for military personnel serving in combat zones for 180 days after your last day in the combat zone. For additional details on this extension, please visit the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=101265,00.html>.

If you decide to file here at Bagram, the 455 AEW Legal Office is here to help.

Beginning early Feb 2010, the 455 AEW Legal Office will offer free income tax preparation for military members (to include Guard and reservist personnel) by appointment.

If you elect to use this service, simply bring the following to your tax appointment:

- Social Security numbers and birthdates for the taxpayer, spouse, and dependents, if applicable
- Wage and earning statements (military personnel may obtain copies of their wage and earning W-2 form by logging on to the MyPay web

site) <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>

- Interest and mortgage statements from banks (1098 and 1099 forms)
- Bank account and routing numbers for direct deposit
- Total amount paid for day care and student loans, if applicable
- Day care providers identifying number (tax ID or SSN), if applicable

Free "do-it-yourself" federal tax preparation and e-filing are also available through Military One Source, www.militaryonesource.com

This website offers a free version of H&R Block software that provides a quick and easy way to complete and e-file federal returns without fees. State returns can also be accomplished and e-filed for a small fee at this site.

Due to limited resources, the Legal Office can only provide services for basic income tax returns. More complex returns will need to be completed at your home station legal office.

To make an appointment or more information, please contact the Base Legal Office at 431-3251.

**HOW YOU FINISH ONE THING
IS HOW YOU BEGIN THE NEXT THING**



FINISH STRONG



5K



**Thursday 31 December 0600hrs
@ Camp Cunningham's Town Hall**

**For more information please contact Chris Tyler or Sgt Claybrooks
at The ROCK Fitness Center
431-3585.**



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.

Air Force Equal Opportunity
"Zero Tolerance"

Slurs
Discrimination
Sexual Harassment
Disparaging Comments
Race, Sex, Religious Jokes
E-mailing, Texting Offensive Material
Favoritism on "Protected" Basis
Derogatory Displays
Graffiti

Support Diversity
EO is Everyone's Business

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CHRIS TYLER OR SSGT CLAYBROOKS @ 431-3585

