

PHOENIX RISING

TASK FORCE PHOENIX NEWSLETTER



Photo by Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown

Our Soldiers remain focused and diligent as Task Force Phoenix's Operation Enduring Freedom deployment winds to an end. You can be proud of all that your Soldiers have accomplished since their arrival in country. Stay positive and keep your eyes to the skies for the homecoming of your Soldier!

Born of Fire!

*"When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves."*



Task Force Phoenix Commander's Corner

Dear Phoenix Family, friends and fans,

As we wind down the final weeks of this deployment and welcome our new best friends to Afghanistan (Troopers of 3-82nd Task Force Talon), I stand in awe of the focus our great Soldiers continue to sustain. They make me so proud to be a part of this team. Their accomplishments this year remain truly incredible. Our TF Phoenix Soldiers have expertly conducted their duties when our country needed them most, during this defining year in the War on Terror. This was a tough fight and our Soldiers conquered it with the same professionalism, leadership and Warrior Ethos that were ingrained in them during our train-up and so many years ago. The combat veterans took the younger Soldiers, Pilots and Crew Chiefs under their wings and ensured that they were soaring in the combat zone, in no time. It is pretty incredible and motivating to watch. The incredible sacrifice endured by our great Soldiers as well as their families cannot be measured. I'd like to offer prayers to the Family of our fallen Blue Max Soldier, CW2 Terry Varnadore. Terry will never be forgotten. I'm convinced he is on a security mission right now looking out for each of us as well as for his wonderful Family. I'd also like to personally thank each and every Phoenix Soldier and their Families for their magnificent efforts this year. Finally, I'd like to remind everyone to maintain their vigilance and focus as we redeploy home and reintegrate with our Families. Historically, units that redeploy face some of their most challenging periods within the first 180 days of redeploying. Acts of indiscipline, DUIs and domestic disputes typically are at the top of the list. I only ask that you take care of each other and sustain the same focus and leadership that enabled our success in the combat zone.

“FEEL THE BURN”
LTC Dennis J. McKernan

A Year of Duty, Selfless Service, and Honor

Task Force Phoenix OEF XI Tour



By U.S. Army Spc. Amanda Jo Brown

The last task force of the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade took the reins from the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade during a transfer-of-authority ceremony at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, Nov. 20.

Task Force Phoenix of the 10th CAB stood alongside members of Task Force Knighthawk of 3rd CAB, who were officially marking the conclusion of a 12-month deployment.

TF Knighthawk leaves behind a legacy in BAF long to be remembered.

"To be called for by name on some of the most challenging and important tactical, logistical and humanitarian missions is a great testament for us," said Lt. Col. Thomas Smedley, TF Knighthawk commander.

The task force flew more than 36,000 hours, transported in excess of 78,000 passengers, moved approximately 5.1 million pounds of cargo, evacuated an estimated 4,500 patients and conducted around 150 named deliberate operations. Knighthawk Soldiers proved that no matter what the year presented them they would complete the mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom X-XI.

"When the plan was constantly changing, when the weather was marginal and when the enemy was waiting, the Knighthawk team could be depended on to make the mission successful," said Smedley, a native of Richmond Hill, Ga.

As McKernan assumed command, he said he is sure his Soldiers are well-prepared for the mission ahead.

"I find great confidence in the fact that this unit is highly trained and led by the best (noncommissioned officers) and officers with whom I've ever had the pleasure of serving," said McKernan, a native of Haddon Township, N.J.

The unit has two prior deployments under its belt since the activation of 3rd General Support Aviation Battalion, 10th CAB, in 2006.

"We stand ready to serve the command and the Soldiers of this great coalition team," said McKernan. "We will continue the safe successes of our predecessors wherever we go in Regional Command-East and we look to make our own mark and solidify our reputation as competent, confident aviators who make the needs of the ground force our top priority."

*"Time, which changes people, does not alter the image we have retained of them."
~Marcel Proust*



TF Falcon pilot takes last flight on 9/11 in Afghanistan

By U.S. Army Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown

U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Bobby Sebren, a tactical operations officer and pilot with Task Force Falcon, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, made his last UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter flight for the Army in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on the 10-year mark of Sept. 11.

Sebren stepped out of his Black Hawk with a smile and was greeted by Task Force Phoenix pilots who took turns spraying him and his crew with water from a fire truck. Laughs turned into lots of photos and congratulating handshakes.

After the spray down, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dennis McKernan, TF Phoenix commander, presented Sebren with a near-beer and a certificate of appreciation.

"I enjoyed every hour flown [with TF Phoenix]," said Sebren, "Everyone was always very nice to the old guy. They treated me like one of their own, and I always tried to return the favor."

Sebren, a native of Brandon, Miss., said his last flight was particularly significant for him.

"I'll be going back to Fort Rucker to run the aircraft shutdown assessment team for two more years," said Sebren, "Since that job is so busy there is no flying. Being able to finish my flying career in Afghanistan with 10th CAB on 9/11 was very special."

He recalled his memories from the fateful night for Americans.

"I flew down to Andrews Air Force Base that night to pick up a Federal Emergency Management Agency team to take to Shanksville, Pa., and was parked right in front of Air Force One," said Sebren. "The Baltimore/Washington airspace is usually so busy you have to butt in to get a call to approach control, but on this night I only heard one other aircraft. It was very surreal."

Sebren has served in the Army for 32 years – 25 of those years as an aviator. He is qualified on the TH-55 Osage; UH-1 Iroquois; OH-6 Cayuse; UH-60 Black Hawk; Bell 206 BIII, L1, L3, L4; BO-105 and BK-117 helicopter. Over the course of his career, he has acquired approximately 6,800 flight hours and 2,500 civilian flight hours.

Making his last flight on a Black Hawk was fitting for Sebren as it holds a special place in his heart.

"I enjoy the mission [of a Black Hawk] - everything from MEDEVAC to Air Assaults to flying VIPs," said Sebren, "It is never boring and rarely the same. Of the 10 helicopters I've flown the Black Hawk is by far my favorite."

Operation Enduring Freedom XI is Sebren's first deployment with a combat aviation brigade; however, he used to run the Aircraft Shutdown Assessment Team which brought him to Iraq and Afghanistan.

He looks forward to his retirement to play golf, hunt, enjoy life with his family and occasionally fly; however, parting will leave a hole after so many years of service.

"[I will miss] the camaraderie of the Army the most," said Sebren, "Even though we mess with each other, everyone is like family."



*Nurses join MEDEVAC unit
under new Army program*

By Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown

Aviation medical evacuation Soldiers are tasked with a hefty mission to retrieve injured patients and keep their vital signs stable until they can reach a hospital to receive higher level treatment.

Soldiers in Company C "Dustoff," Task Force Phoenix, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, have made strides in improving patient care since their arrival in country last August. This is due, in part, to the inclusion of the Army's new program in which flight nurses have been attached to the unit.

U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Brian Peplinski, a native of Bay City, Mich., said having nurses on the team to help with critical patients ultimately helps achieve their goal – to save lives.

"[Having nurses attached to MEDEVAC units in high operation areas] is good for the patients," said Peplinski, "At the end of the day taking care of people – U.S. military, contractors, coalition forces and those in need - is what it's all about."

Peplinski said he feels extremely lucky to have the nurses working with Dustoff.

"They are very talented additions to the team," said Peplinski, "The nurses provide an extra set of hands in critical situations that has repeatedly made a difference in patient care and outcomes."

Every six months, five nurses travel from stateside hospitals, such as Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Madigan Army Medical Center, to serve with MEDEVAC units to provide en route critical care for patients in Afghanistan.

These highly skilled nurses undergo a wealth of training upon arrival to their Dustoff team including training on the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter, emergency procedures, medical equipment familiarization, as well as receive classes in the areas of administering medication and trauma care.

The flight nurses are trained to the level of a non-rated crew member. They complete a myriad of tasks from attending crew member briefs, cleaning windows, and ensuring all medical equipment is functional.

*"You can avoid having ulcers by adapting to the situation:
If you fall in the mud puddle, check your pockets for fish."*

~Author Unknown

U.S. Army Capt. Tanesha Richardson, of Louisville, Ky., just completed her six-month tour with the company and says she is leaving Afghanistan as a more-rounded nurse.

“This experience has been very rewarding,” said Richardson, “I’ve become more knowledgeable and independent. I now understand why certain things were done for the patient. I can see the bigger picture of what the patient has gone through.”

As Richardson, and the four other nurses who accompanied her to Afghanistan, end their deployment and prepare to return to the hospital environment of the States, she shared some of the complex situations she faced when she first got to the unit.

“One of the most challenging things for me was learning how to assess the patient in the dark while flying,” said Richardson, “You have to gather the information in a different way.”

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jason Taylor, one of the newly arrived nurses on the Dustoff team, agreed with Richardson. He said the challenge would lie in the new surroundings.

“I think the most difficult thing about this tour will be adapting to a new environment,” said Taylor, a native of Mokena, Ill.

The nurses are well aware they will not have the controlled atmosphere that a hospital offers – such as proper lighting and a broad range of medical supplies at the ready; however, Taylor expressed confidence in the new team of nurses.

Taylor is certain that the next six months will be successful for them because of the knowledge and experience they already possess.

“[Nurses] have the skill set needed to do the job well,” he said. “It’s just a matter of applying and doing it in this environment.”

All of the nurses who have served with Dustoff, in Regional Command – East, are among the first Army nurses to receive the Air Medal for Service and Basic Army Aviation Badge.

Richardson said this experience has provided her with knowledge that she will utilize stateside when caring for patients.

“I think by performing my duties with [Dustoff] my skills as a nurse have broadened and given me a better understanding of injuries,” said Richardson, “It has given me a better understanding of what patients have been through from start to finish.”



French, US forces continue working side by side

KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sean Wojansinski of Brownville, N.Y., AH-64 Apache pilot with Task Force Phoenix, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, looks at the French Army Tigre helicopter at Forward Operating Base Morales-Frazier during a joint U.S. and French live fire helicopter exercise here Jan. 23. The exercise consisted of a pre-mission brief, walk around of aerial assets, and live fire practice on the FOB's Blue Max range. Pilots and combat ground controllers took the opportunity to practice communication between the two forces. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Brasier, Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs / released)



By U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Ashley Skillman

KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan – More than 70 years ago, French and U.S. soldiers fought side by side as brothers on the battlefield of Normandy to defeat a common enemy and restore peace amongst the population. Today, the same is occurring within the battlefields of Afghanistan.

There are approximately 3,850 French forces currently supporting International Security Assistance Force operations in Afghanistan alongside American servicemembers every day. Of particular note is Kapisa Province, where French Task Force Lafayette is the provincial battle space owner and a series of joint French-U.S. ground operations occur on a regular basis.

This level of joint effort doesn't just fall within the mountains and rigid ground terrain though; it extends to the skies above where French and U.S. rotary wing pilots work together amidst the clouds to support the fight below with the coordination of joint terminal attack controllers positioned on the ground.

To further strengthen this working relationship between French and U.S. Forces, TF Lafayette coordinated a joint training exercise at Forward Operating Base Morales-Frazier Jan. 22 for approximately 20 members of Task Force Phoenix, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division; Task Force 10, and the 5th Combat Helicopter Regiment.

The intent of today's training was really twofold, explained U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Bonenfant, Task Force Phoenix AH-64 Apache pilot and aviation liaison for TF Lafayette. "On one hand, we wanted to foster face-to-face time between the JTACs and pilots. We always talk to these individuals on the ground but we never really get to put a face to the voice behind the microphone."

*"If nothing ever changed, there'd be no butterflies."
~Author Unknown*

“On the other hand, the training also served as a great opportunity for everyone to fine-tune small challenges we sometimes encounter while working together on the battlefield including language barriers and different tactical methods and procedures,” said Bonenfant of Madawaska, Maine. “This training also enabled both parties to familiarize themselves with the others’ capabilities, tactics and procedures, which I believe has helped to create a better overall working relationship.”

To provide the best training possible, a real-life scenario was created in order to put all rotary wing assets and JTACs to the full test.

“This particular scenario was based upon a theoretical insurgent attack against FOB Morales-Frazier,” Bonenfant said.

To defend the FOB from the attack, French and U.S. JTACs worked together to call in close combat support provided by a U.S. Army AH-64 Apache, a U.S. Army OH-58 Kiowa, two French Army AH Tigres and a French Army OH Gazelle.

Radio transmissions buzzed back and forth throughout the entire event as JTACs worked meticulously to adjust fire and request additional support from the pilots above to combat the hypothetical attacks from a nearby mountain.

“As pilots, we rely heavily on the support provided to us by JTACs on the ground,” said Bonenfant. “Their role as the primary means of communication between ground forces and close combat air support directly affects the lives of others around them. They’re the ones who call us for support, identify the type of ammunition needed and determine where a specific target should be.”

According to a U.S. Air Force combat controller from Task Force 10, this training proved to be very beneficial for the JTACs since they were able to practice transmitting aerial requests to both French and U.S. pilots. But, more importantly, this was a rare window of opportunity for the French and U.S. JTACs to work side by side.

“We were kind of able to feed off each other,” he said. “They’re trained in France and we’re trained primarily in the U.S., so there are lessons to be learned from both sides. We all do stuff differently ... and we can learn from that.”

Another key aspect of the training was a battle handover drill between the French and U.S. rotary pilots, which often occurs during real-life combat when aircraft need to refuel or resupply. During the handover, the outgoing group of aircraft is replaced by another in order to maintain support for ground forces.

This proved to be particularly useful to French Army Capt. Cedric Pruvot, commander of the Tigre helicopter squadron.

“Most of the time we only need to speak with French JTACs or pilots, but today’s battle handover required us to communicate closely with U.S. pilots, which is something we don’t often have the opportunity to do,” he shared.

“When you’re talking about live fire mixed with a ground controlling agency, that type of coordination is imperative,” said U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sean Wojansinski of Brownville, N.Y., TF Phoenix AH-64 Apache pilot. “So if we get the chance to do it in a safer environment and take what we learn out to the field, it just transfers to success. This is definitely something we want to sustain and hope to improve.”

Luckily for future rotary wing pilots and JTACs, this exercise was established as part of an ongoing training program.

“This event was really just the baseline,” Bonenfant said. “With this exercise, I was able to create a rotary range and a set of exercise procedures that others can use for similar training or test-fire purposes in the future. I expect that when I come back to FOB Morales-Frazier in a few years, this range will still be active and people will still be using it to train.”



Aviation crew's selfless service saves lives

By U.S. Army Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown



NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The DUSTOFF Association's motto is “dedicated, unhesitating support to our fighting forces.” This TF Phoenix MEDEVAC Company displays this support every day in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Company C DUSTOFF, Task Force Phoenix, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, had displayed their duty, selfless service, and personal courage

Feb. 3 when they evacuated a wounded Soldier from an area under fire from the enemy.

“Without hesitation, the crew launched into a known engagement area to retrieve a fallen comrade. In talking to the crew after the incident, each of us identified having a sense of fear seeing the battle unfold and knowing we would have to fly into the heart of it to retrieve the Soldier,” said U.S. Army Capt. Andrew Wilson, a native of Edmond, Okla., one of the pilots that day. “However, the second we were cleared in for extraction, we all pushed aside those feelings and were focused on the task at hand.”

The medvac crew assessed the situation before extracting U.S. Army Spc. Ronnie Vargas, a wounded Soldier with Co. C, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry, TF No Slack, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. Vargas and his unit had been bogged down by enemy fire on top of a ridgeline that day. As the battle continued, the medevac crew found themselves making difficult decisions.

U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Richard Ernst, a native of Islip, N.Y., was the pilot in command. Ground forces guided Ernst to a landing zone to pick up Vargas; however, he was unable to land on the confirmed area due to difficult terrain.

The aircrew remained in the air and identified a more suitable location to attempt a landing. After confirming the location with ground troops, Ernst again attempted to land. However, as they approached the new landing area, the aircraft began taking rounds. Ernst immediately broke off to reassess the situation.

U.S. Army Sgt. Elena Romero, the flight medic from Vernon, N.J., received minor shrapnel wounds on her left arm and near her left knee.

*“Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches,
letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights.”*

~Pauline R. Kezer

“While we continually asked about her condition, she adamantly reiterated that she was okay,” said Wilson.

The crew received word that the original landing zone had been cleared for landing. Ernst flew a second time to the original landing zone.

Once there, he determined he would not be able to do a complete landing. He also determined using the high hover for a hoist rescue was too risky. The crew decided the best option to extract Vargas was a low hover. This required Ernst to hover approximately five feet from the ground.

“We do not normally hover to pick up anybody, but it was the only option to get the patient and not sustain loss of aircraft or injury to the flight crew,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Abe Cutsinger, the Black Hawk crew chief.

U.S. Army Spc. Brit Jacobs, a combat medic with TF No Slack, had been treating Vargas while they waited for the medevac.

“He was just so happy (when the aircraft arrived),” said Jacobs, a native of Sarasota, Fla. “He was joking around and stuff. He was really calm for the situation.”

When DUSTOFF arrived, Jacobs helped Vargas up to the aircraft.

“I could hear rounds pinging off of the aircraft,” said Jacobs. “I had it in my mind that I was going to get hit.”

The wind from the helicopter’s rotors made getting Vargas into the aircraft difficult. Cutsinger and Romero struggled to pull Vargas into the aircraft by his hands. Vargas dangled, fighting to get into the aircraft for at least a minute.

“You could see him giving everything he had to get into the aircraft,” said Jacobs. “He never gave up and was determined to get in there.”

With help from Jacobs, the DUSTOFF team pulled Vargas inside. Ernst took flight as soon as Vargas was inside and cleared the area.

“(Vargas) was very thankful and in high spirits once on board the helicopter,” said Cutsinger, a native of Copperas Cove, Texas.

Despite her own wounds, Romero administered aid to Vargas. She bandaged the wounds and determined Vargas was stable enough to make the flight to Jalalabad Airfield.

“Sgt. Romero had the capability and supplies to stabilize him enough to return him to JAF,” said Wilson. “If she, or any other flight medic, is unable to sustain a (patient), we will fly (the casualty) to the nearest forward surgical team.”

The DUSTOFF crew removed Vargas from the hostile area and took him safely to Jalalabad Airfield. Romero accompanied Vargas to the forward surgical team where he received further care for his wounds.

“The medevac team was very professional,” said Jacobs, “They were trying everything possible to get to him. They were pretty brave and didn’t back out - even under fire. They were heroes.”

*“We spend our time searching for security and hate it when we get it.”
~John Steinbeck*

10th CAB Soldiers bring communications to Bagram's east side

PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Modern communication seems to work like magic for the end-user; the press of a power button, the click of a mouse, or the strike of a key and messages send or receive in an instant. Even in areas as austere as Afghanistan, instant communication exists, in part, due to the Soldiers who run the cables.

In Bagram, the freshly-developed east side boasts state-of-the-art communications technology, thanks to a collaborative effort of communications Soldiers from the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade.

“It starts with an idea, a plan, and a lot of manual labor,” says U.S. Army Maj. Scott Herzog, brigade communications officer-in-charge.

According to Herzog, who hails from Auburn Hills, Mich., the idea began with Soldiers learning to splice fiber optics cable.

“Fiber cable is made of glass, so you have to know what you’re doing in order to run lines from the main fiber,” explains Herzog. “From there, you splice from the main cable, to connectors, to switches, to ports.”

Picture the human circulatory system: arteries carry the main flow of blood to veins; veins carry blood to the capillaries; capillaries then divide and bring the parts of the blood needed in the body. The cable lines work in a similar fashion.

“When you splice into the main line, you connect to a switch,” Herzog continues, “The switch converts glass cable to copper wire. The wire sends messages to specific ports. Your computer plugs into a port and that’s how you get your information.”

The plan for the east side involves wiring a total of 33 buildings. Of those 33, 18 now possess instant communications with the remaining 15 still in progress. However, the most daunting portion of the plan meant running the main fiber cables through man-hole systems.

“Since the man-hole systems only went so far, we were looking at digging two trenches, splicing into the main cable for wiring, running wires into the buildings,



wiring the buildings and establishing ports,” says U.S. Army Capt. David Edwards, the communications officer-in-charge for Task Force Phoenix.

Capt. Edwards asserts that a project of this magnitude occurs with the assistance of communications Soldiers, lending their skills and experience. The Dallas native credits the collaboration of the different shops with the over-all success.

“We had the brigade S6, himself, out in the bad weather with us, climbing down into cold, muddy water to run cable. You know, that really says something; it means a lot,” emphasizes Edwards.

While Herzog’s team from brigade headquarters assisted with the manual labor, Edwards readily admits that U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jason Maldonado’s team from Task Force Mountain Eagle took on the brunt of it.

“They really had an interesting time,” said Edwards laughing.

Since the winter months in Bagram bring cold, wet weather, running the cables meant climbing down into cold, wet man-holes. In at least one case, the water in the man-hole came up to the Soldiers’ chest.

“We ran two lines of fiber cable through three man-holes, which were all about a half-mile apart from each other,” explains Staff Sgt. Maldonado, who hails from Toa Baja, Puerto Rico.

“It was not an ideal situation,” Maldonado concedes.

In four days, the team waded through cold water and mud to: run the cables through the man-hole systems; dig two trenches, each a half-mile long; cover the lines in the trenches; and run the wires into the building.

*“There is no reason why the same man should like the same books
at eighteen and forty-eight.”*

~Ezra Pound

Once indoors, the work proved just as harrowing at moments.

“We had to run wires throughout the building, so we had to walk along the rafters in the ceilings sometimes to make that happen. So, if you don’t step in the right spot, you risk falling right through the ceiling,” explains Maldonado.

Wiring a single building includes running the lines inside and terminating the ends to add connections to run to the switch. In this case, Maldonado’s four-man team ran 375 lines to ports, put on the faceplates, terminated the ends, tested the lines, and then labelled the ports.

U.S. Army Spc. Danny Griffin, a cable system installer from Knoxville, Tenn. and member of Maldonado’s team, puts the meticulous work into perspective, “My motivation is to just get it done; getting to the next mission.”

“Definitely a lot of work goes into it,” stresses Spc. Griffin, “At the start, when you think about everything that needs to happen, it seems mind-boggling. So you just have to keep working and get it done.”

Ultimately, it took the team 10 days to complete the project - just 11 days shy of their original projection of three weeks.

“The reason we finished this project so early,” Edwards maintains, “and why it meant so much is because the whole S6 community came together. We had my shop (TF Phoenix), Staff Sgt. Maldonado’s team (TF Mountain Eagle), and even the Soldiers at brigade all pulling together.”

With a good system in place, the teams expect to finish wiring the east side buildings by the end of the deployment, just in time for the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade - and subsequent units - to enjoy the magic of full spectrum communications.

“Just remember,” reminds Herzog, “every time you pick up a phone, receive an email on NIPR, SIPR or Centrix or check out Facebook- the S6 has touched your life.”



“We all have big changes in our lives that are more or less a second chance.”

~Harrison Ford

ANSF, ISAF begin major operation in Laghman valley

By Bagram Media Center

LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – The Afghan National Security Forces, partnered with U.S. Task Forces Red Bulls and Phoenix and French Task Force La Fayette, began operations in Galuch Valley, Laghman Province, March 25.

Soldiers of the Afghan National Army's 201st Corps, Afghan National Police's 202nd Shamshod and the U.S. Army's 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, TF Red Bulls, supported by the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, TF Phoenix, conducted an air assault into the valley to remove enemy forces. Battle Group Richelieu, TF La Fayette, provided artillery support from Kapisa Province.

While conducting operations, the forces found multiple weapons caches including assorted rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, Russian rockets, materials to make homemade explosives, various other ordnances and communication equipment.

While moving through the valley, unit leadership met with village elders to discuss the security situation and to allow them to give up insurgents still in the area.

The operation will assist the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in establishing the valley as a new district giving the Afghan people in the area freedom from the insurgency.

President Hamid Karzai approved the creation of the additional district and hopes the new district will help improve the security of the area and support the reconstruction effort.

Mohammad Iqbal Azizi, Laghman Province governor, held a press conference March 7 announcing the establishment of a new district located in the valley.

*"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it."
~Kurt Lewin*

TF Phoenix supports largest air assault in RC-East

By U.S. Army Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown



LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Fierce lightning shattered the night sky as a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter’s 350-pound blades sliced through the air producing a continuous rain of thunder over the otherwise quiet Galuch Valley March 25.

Crews and helicopters from Task Force Phoenix, TF Falcon, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, provided air transport for a major air assault mission in Regional Command – East in support of Afghan National Security Forces and TF Red Bull operations.

TF Phoenix collaborated with Chinook crews from TF Shooter to complete their essential mission: to provide static load training to ANSF and conduct an air assault into the Galuch Valley allowing ANSF and TF Red Bull to remove enemy forces and speak with village elders.

“Static load training with (the ANSF) is absolutely critical to the success of our operations,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dennis McKernan, TF Phoenix, TF Falcon commander, and a native of Haddon Township, N.J., “Operating around helicopters is extremely dangerous and any soldier from any country must be trained how to operate on an aircraft to include loading and unloading. The terrain is extremely rugged in Afghanistan. Off-loading soldiers into tight landing zones can be specifically challenging if the soldiers don’t know what to do.”

To ensure everyone was prepared to off-load an aircraft even in unsatisfactory conditions, TF Phoenix and

Shooter Chinook crews flew despite lightning.

The huge engines quieted their loud roar and the blades slowed to a halt as the crews landed in Combat Outpost Xio and stepped out into the thick darkness.

“Most of the (ANSF) have never been on a CH-47 before. Cold load training allows them to get used to the aircraft and efficient at exiting the ramp when we arrive at the landing zone,” said U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Daniel Snyder, Company D, TF Phoenix, first sergeant.

The training, conducted in complete darkness, is a simple, but crucial part of a successful air assault. It provides soldiers with familiarity of the aircraft and procedures used during a mission.

Time is of the essence during air assaults with the challenges of rugged terrain, unpredictable weather, and the threat of enemy forces hidden in the shadows, said Snyder.

“You never know what kind of landing zone you will be flying into on a mission,” said Snyder, a native of Millington, Mich., “It could have hostiles present, or it could just be a difficult landing where we can only put the back two wheels on the ground. When that happens, there is a lot of stress on the pilots and crew.”

“The faster (passengers) exit, the less that can go wrong,” added Snyder.

The Chinook crews cycled through the groups just as efficiently as the ANSF absorbed the training.

When the training was complete, the ANSF and TF Red Bull Soldiers loaded into the aircraft and prepared to put all of their training into action during the air assault.

The ANSF and TF Red Bull Soldiers were all business when it came time to dismount the aircraft into the shadowy mountains surrounding the valley.

“I think it’s great that the ANSF are augmented with our forces,” said Snyder, “It lets them see what right looks like.”

The aviation crews worked diligently to ensure each landing into the mountains was done to standard and done safely regardless of the unique challenges presented by the terrain.

“The greatest hazards were unimproved landing zones that can have large rocks that could damage the aircraft, or steep slopes that are near impossible to land on, unpredictable wind gusts, and enemy personnel (concealed) in the mountain sides and ditches,” said Snyder.

With experienced crews manning each helicopter, the Soldiers were confident in the success of the operation.

“Our crews are the best. We purposely stack the crews to best complement each other,” said Snyder, “All of us on this mission had done (air assaults) before. It’s awesome when you use almost all of your training on one landing and the mission was successful. It’s an amazing feeling,”

In a matter of hours, the Chinook crews safely inserted all of the groups into the Galuch Valley with no issues.

As the crews returned to Bagram Airfield, they reflected on a successful joint mission. U.S. Army Sgt. John Colwell, a flight engineer with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, TF Shooter, TF Falcon, 10th CAB, 10th Mountain Division, and a native of Phoenix, said he felt the ANSF were very motivated and ready for the mission.

“I feel that (Afghans) will soon be able to obtain their role as defenders in their fight against the forces threatening their country,” said Colwell.

“Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.”

~Bertold Brecht

Fill 'er up!

Fuelers keep vehicles, aircraft on the go

By Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Matson



LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Being an Army petroleum supply specialist, or fueler, is a bit like working at an old-time gas station.

A vehicle pulls up to the pumps, and the crew runs out to fill it up. The only difference for the Army fuelers of Company E, 310th Task Force Phoenix, is that some of the vehicles are helicopters, and they are in Afghanistan.

“Most of what we do is ground fuel for vehicles, but our priority mission is for the birds (Army helicopters),” said U.S. Army Sgt. Matthew Lauilefue, a shift leader of the petroleum supply specialist team from Co. E. “We fill up Chinooks, Apaches, Kiowas, and a whole bunch of civilian birds.”

Lauilefue, from Honolulu, and his team of fellow fuelers from Fort Drum, N.Y., who run the Forward Area Refueling Point at Forward Operating Base Mehtar Lam, in support of the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, Task Force Ironman, are coming off a very busy week. They provided the fuel for every bird participating in Operation Bull Whip, which was the largest air assault mission conducted by the 101st Airborne Division during their year-long deployment to Afghanistan.

During Bull Whip, Co. E’s fuelers pumped more aircraft fuel than at any other time all year. They refueled 40 helicopters in a single day.

“We pumped 10,000 gallons of aircraft fuel alone in one day during that mission,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Grabowski, the other shift leader for the petroleum supply specialist team from Co. E, and a native of Hinsdale, N.Y.



The fuelers usually pump around 4,000 gallons of fuel in a typical day.

On this day, April 9, the fuelers were having a fairly busy day. A couple Blackhawks came in for fuel, and the fuelers, hearing the helicopters in the distance grabbed their helmets, gloves and eye protection. They were waiting by the fuel points when the helicopters landed. As soon as the Soldiers got back to the shack and removed their gear, they had to put it back on, this time it was a team of Kiowas.

Another responsibility of the fuelers at the Mehtar Lam FARP is re-arming Kiowa helicopters with missiles, rockets and ammunition, but do not handle Apaches.

The fuelers do what is known as a “hot” refuel, meaning they are refuelling the birds with the rotors turning and engines still on. They do this for speed, said Givian.

The fuelers do not know the situation behind the aircraft they are refuelling. While that helicopter may just be delivering some equipment from one base to another, it could also be en route to a medical evacuation or a situation with troops in contact and need to get there.

This means that time is of the essence, so the goal is to get the helicopters refuelled as quickly as possible while still being safe, said U.S. Army Sgt. Rockieve Givian, the fuel team’s non-commissioned officer-in-charge from Atlanta, Ga.

Doing this successfully is how the fuelers are able to make an impact on the battlefield, the fuelers said.

“We know that we’re a support element, but at the same time we know when birds are coming in hot that we need to get them loaded, get them moved and get them back in the fight,” said Grabowski. “Time on ground is time lost for an infantry unit who may need them.”

“We did not change as we grew older; we just became more clearly ourselves.”

~Lynn Hall

Aviation Soldiers provide humanitarian aid to Afghan girls school

By U.S. Army Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown



PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – A small Afghan town, tucked away in the Salang Mountains between two of Afghanistan’s most populated cities, bustled when a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter – crewed by Company A, 1st Battalion, 169th General Support Aviation Regiment, Task Force Phoenix, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division - touched down and unloaded Soldiers so they could provide humanitarian

aid to the local Salang Girls School June 11.

The Phoenix Soldiers secured their ground positions as massive aircraft blades tossed large brown plumes of dirt into the air around them.

As the dirt settled, Soldiers made their way to the school, distributed supplies and spoke with the school administrators.

U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Jamie Latham, Company E, TF Phoenix distribution platoon leader, was the officer-in-charge of the female engagement team.

“When we arrived at the school, the school administrators were welcoming and elated to see the group,” said Latham, of Bethlehem, Pa., “The people (of Salang) are very eager to learn and improve their own education. With the aid of our interpreter, we handed out book bags full with pencils, pens, notebooks, and other school supplies ... to kindergarten through seventh graders. Afterward, we visited the classrooms and interacted with the children that we were able to help.”

Latham asked the girls about their educational goals for their future.

“Many of the students expressed interest in becoming doctors, lawyers or policewomen,” said Latham, “School supplies and continued support of the education system will help create more beneficial members of



society.”

TF Phoenix Chaplain (Capt.) Robert Hearon agreed.

“I wanted to give much needed supplies to the female students who have very little,” said Hearon, a native of Greenville, S.C., “To help ensure they have a brighter future with more opportunities by enabling them to obtain a better education.”

Hearon said school supplies and electricity are things many people take for granted on a day-to-day basis. While the school in Salang Valley has a shortage of both of these commodities, the locals are not deterred from pursuing their dreams of a better educated generation.

The male TF Phoenix Soldiers on the mission watched from outside the room as the school supplies were distributed. U.S. Army Sgt. Brian MacConaghy, chaplain assistant, watched the event from the hallway.

“The (children) seemed very receptive and thankful,” said MacConaghy, of Madison Heights, Mich., “You could see by the looks on the girls’ faces — as they received items — that this was a rare occasion for them.”

MacConaghy said even though he could not interact with the students, he felt rewarded to provide aid to those in need.

“My goal for the deployment was to do my part to leave a positive impact on the people of Afghanistan,” said MacConaghy, “Through this mission, I was able to accomplish that by utilizing outside resources to collect supplies that would be used to enhance the Afghan females’ education which would help them achieve their career goals.”

The group said they feel accomplished knowing they helped people in need in Regional Command – East and hope to do so again before redeploying stateside.

*“Things do not change; we change.”
~Henry David Thoreau*

TF Phoenix Soldier delivers care packages to remote locations



By U.S. Army Sgt. Amanda Jo Brown

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Many deployed Soldiers sacrifice having common comforts in order to accomplish their unit’s mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Some Soldiers reside in remote areas, work with no running water, consume only pre-packaged meals, receive mail infrequently and have no electricity.

U.S. Army Sgt. Paul Roberts, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter door gunner with Company B, 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment; a reserve unit serving with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force Phoenix, made it his personal mission to provide care packages for Soldiers located in these remote areas.

“I was an infantry Soldier when I first entered the Army in 1989, so I know firsthand how difficult

it can be living under these conditions,” said Roberts, “I took it upon myself to go to all the units at Bagram asking for anything they could donate

to help these Soldiers.”

Roberts said he understands how important receiving mail is for the morale of deployed Soldiers.

“We fly all over Afghanistan and see the living conditions some of our fellow Soldiers ... live in - which is extremely rough,” said Roberts, “Whenever we fly [into remote locations] we always do our best to give them whatever we can.”

Roberts and his crew make quick supply drops to many areas that do not have common amenities. During these scheduled flights, Roberts and his crew quickly unload the supplies as well as care packages to these Soldiers. The supplies are often quickly delivered without landing; and in rare circumstances, the crew gets to interact with the Soldiers they help.

“[On one occasion], instead of just dropping off the load and immediately taking off - we landed. This is something we do not do very often,” said Roberts, “One of the Soldiers assigned there walked over to our bird and looked in; we gave him the first of a long line of donated boxes. It took about one minute and we had about 30 Soldiers running to our bird to get the rest. It felt like Christmas in July to us and our hearts felt joy!”

The leadership within Roberts’ unit supports his endeavor and has noticed the positive effects it has had on their Soldiers.

“I believe that Sgt. Roberts’ efforts have improved the

“Change always comes bearing gifts.”
~Price Pritchett

morale of our [unit],” said U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Todd Carter, the Co. D, 7-158th first sergeant, “Every Soldier knows what it is like to receive a package from home. Getting the opportunity to help Soldiers in austere conditions receive packages makes us feel good.”

Carter, a native of Gardner, Kan., has served in the Army for almost 20 years. He said he is immensely impressed by Roberts’ drive to help other Soldiers.

“I have never witnessed one Soldier support [so many] other Soldiers in the way that Sgt. Roberts has; he is the epitome of selfless service,” said Carter.

Carter added that the experience is very rewarding for his Soldiers when they get to see the joy that they can bring to others.

“It is great to see the smiling faces at [remote bases] when we arrive,” said Carter, “It’s like Santa coming in a big green Chinook.”

Roberts received the rare opportunity to spend some time at one of the locations in August and finally interacted with the Soldiers since his arrival in May.

“I was on a crew that flew a maintenance team for helicopter repairs to FOB Bluejay,” said Roberts, “We were there for a little over 24 hours, and because of this, I was able to talk with the Soldiers assigned there.”

Roberts said the Soldiers in this location rarely see fresh food – especially fruit. Knowing this, he offered an apple that he brought with him to one of the medics he found enjoying some down time. The medic cut the apple



*Making a
difference, by
way of air, one
day at a time.*

*Thank you Sgt.
Roberts and B
Company 7-158!*

“The vision that you glorify in your mind, the ideal that you enthrone in your heart, this you will build your life by, and this you will become.”

~ James Allen

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“They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

~ Carl W. Buechner

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PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – C Company “Warlords” flew flags over Afghanistan on 9/11 for Family, organizations, and friends.