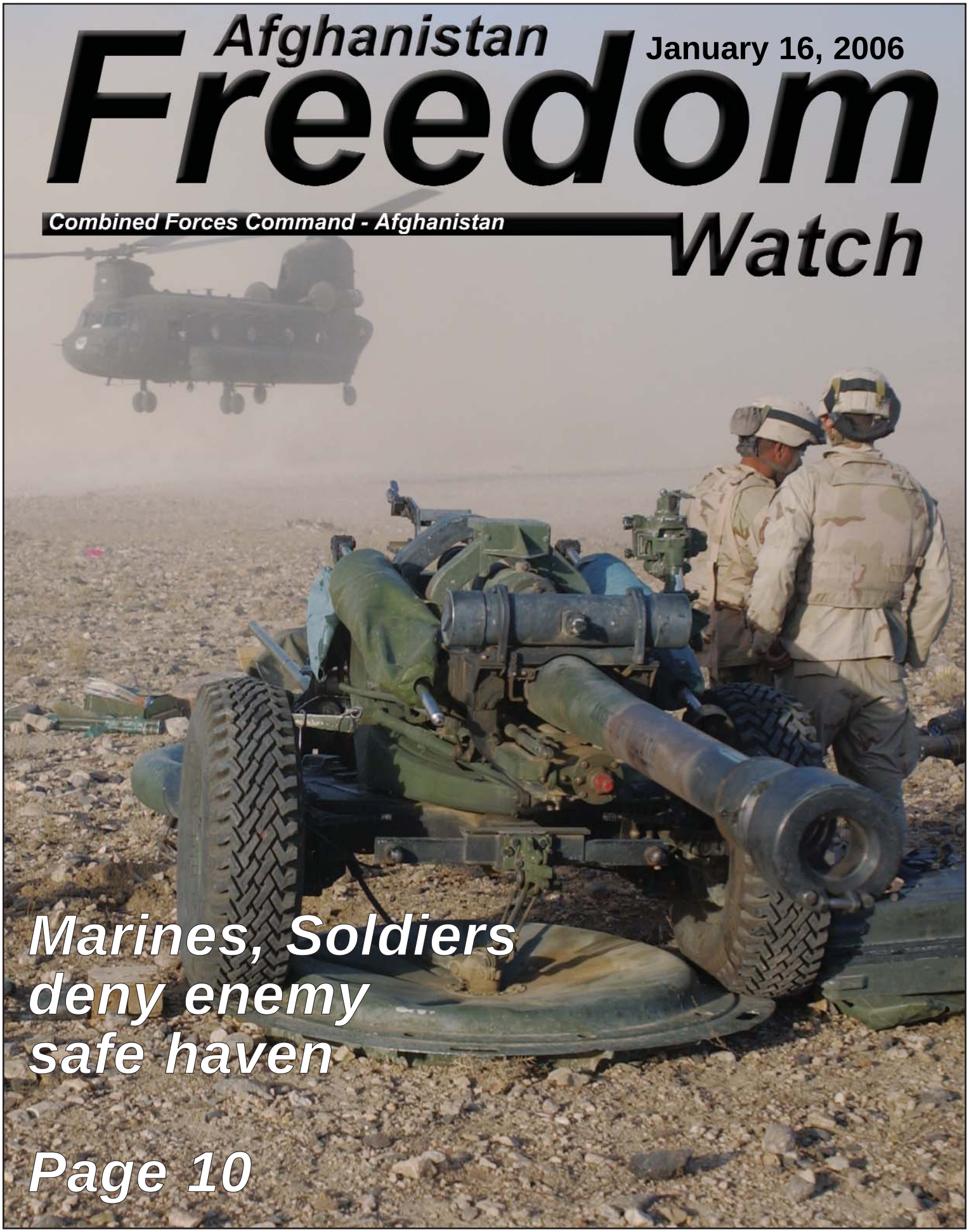
Afghanistan
Freedom Watch
January 16, 2006
Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan



Marines, Soldiers deny enemy safe haven

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Army Spc. Glen McCallum, left, helps Army Master Sgt. David Ballard fold one of the many American flags flown Jan. 1 at the Afghanistan Engineer District headquarters in Kabul. The flags were flown at the request of the men and women assigned to AED for their family and friends back home.

Photo by Eric Aubrey,
Afghanistan Engineer District Project Manager

Cover: A CH-47 Chinook helicopter prepares to land as Soldiers from 1st Platoon, D Battery, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment prepare a 105 mm Howitzer to fire Dec 13.

Photo by Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk, 20th Public Affairs Detachment

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Afghanistan Freedom Watch

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan

Freedom Watch is a weekly publication of Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan.

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Border police open new airport facility

By Air Force Maj. Julie Solberg
Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan -- The Afghan National Police recently opened a new facility for its protection battalion at the Kabul International Airport.

The new facility was built by the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief and financed by the German Federal Foreign Office. It was handed over to the Afghan Border Police on Dec. 15. The buildings were rebuilt and renovated during the past year. They were refitted with modern conveniences such as electricity, plumbing, and kitchens, and now provide space for 120 employees.

Photo by Air Force Maj. Julie Solberg

A member of the Afghan Border Police stands guard at the Kabul International Airport. The Afghan National Police have a new facility at the airport.

The protection battalion is a special section of the Afghan Border Police responsible for the security of the airport and air traffic, as well as that of the airport's employees and passengers.

German Special Ambassador for the Police Sector Reform Dr. Helmut Frick and Acting Afghan Minister of the Interior Zarar Ahmad Moqbil inaugurated the new facility.

Frick said the airport security mission can now be fulfilled in a more effective way at Afghanistan's largest airport. The new facility is located about 300 meters from the terminal and represents the development that is continually ongoing with the reformation of the Afghan National Police and Afghanistan as a whole.

"This is another example of many major advances by the Afghan Border Police which clearly reflects great progress and reform. Citizens see this as a positive step toward the security and prosperity of Afghanistan," said Ray Fitzgerald, Director of the Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan's Police Reform Directorate.

The commander of the Afghan Border Police stationed at the Kabul International Airport, Brig. Gen. Aminullah Anarkhil, said he has seen major improvements in security at the airport during the past year.

"Last year, the (security for) Hajj was no good but this year it was good. People felt more secure," he said.

Anarkhil highlighted how the police recently arrested drug smugglers coming through the airport with 30 kilograms of heroin.

While coordinating with the international community since 2002, Germany helped finance numerous projects throughout the country in the framework of the reconstruction of the Afghan National Police. The projects mainly concentrate on reconstruction of the police infrastructure.

Congratulations

Dari
Tabriq
(Tah-bree-ck)

Pashtu
Mu baraksha
(Moo bah-rock-shaw)

According to a study released in July 2004, about 4 million Afghan children are enrolled in school, about 30 percent of whom are girls. The Afghan Ministry of Education introduced human rights as a subject in the national school curriculum at the beginning of the school year in March 2003 and extended it nationwide in March

Citizens of Paktika Province welcome new road

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan Press Release

SHARANA, Afghanistan -- Hundreds of people, including Paktika Province Gov. Ghulab Mangal and many local elders, gathered here Dec. 20 to mark the opening of a 55-kilometer road between Sharana and Orgun-E.

The government of Afghanistan and Coalition forces built the $2 million road to increase security in the province and provide opportunities for commerce.

"Afghans dedicated themselves to this work to improve conditions for their countrymen," said Army Col. Michael Flanagan, commander of the Coalition's engineering brigade, Task Force Sword.

Other speakers at the ceremony included Mangal and U.S. Army Col. Patrick Donahue, who commands Task Force Devil, the Coalition troops that carry out combat operations in eastern Afghanistan.

Photo by Army Spc. Joshua Balog, 55th Signal Company

Gov. Ghulab Mangal of Paktika Province cuts the ribbon at ceremonies opening a 55-kilometer road between Sharana and Orgun-E. The government of Afghanistan and Coalition forces built the $2 million road.

Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Derrick L. Mims, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (Task Force Storm)

A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter hovers above Soldiers from Task Force Storm who were dropped off to conduct a re-enlistment ceremony on a mountain peak outside of Kandahar Airfield.

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

Range helps battalion stay prepared

By Army Pfc. Vincent Fusco
20th Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- The 173rd Support Battalion's mission used to be simple: to provide transportation, move pallets and move containers around post.

But since August, the mission includes escorting vehicles to forward operating bases and providing security.

To keep the Soldiers familiar with their equipment, they visited the range near Kandahar Airfield on Dec. 5 to train on weapons systems and perform a live-fire exercise, said Army Staff Sgt. Tywan Jackson, an operations noncommissioned officer with A Company, 173rd SB. The support Soldiers train whenever possible.

"We may train over several months on this," Jackson said. "It makes us more proficient at our job."

U.S. Army Photo

A Soldier from 173rd Support Battalion fires an M-2 machine gun from a Humvee during a live-fire exercise at the range near Kandahar Airfield. The unit conducted the training to keep Soldiers' skills sharp.

The Soldiers engaged various wooden targets, and one squad was split up to maneuver through a battle scenario. Afterward, they fired their M-2 machine gun from their Humvees, and AT-4 anti-tank missiles on the ground.

"It makes us that much more comfortable when we go out, knowing that our Soldiers have the capability to fire their weapons," Jackson said.

Enduring Voices

What have you learned during you deployment that you will pass along to your successor?

Army Capt. Sean Lanier, Joint Logistics Command
"You always have information other people need to know, so communication is what I feel is the most valuable thing for my successor to understand."

Army Chief Warrant Officer Shelton Mickel, Task Force Lighting
"I'm an electronic maintenance technician, and my advice would be to start ordering parts now."

Marine Cpl. Johnny Dalton, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Division
"Use your frequency jammer, seatbelt, and your flak vest and Kevlar. They will save your life."

Army Sgt. Ben Myer, Task Force Saber
"Don't spend your year inside the wire. If you have an opportunity to see a little bit of the country, take advantage of it."

A senior member of Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior proctors a written exam in Kabul. The exam is one of the tools used to select general officers.

Afghan National Police officers review the new Ministry of Interior organizational chart in Kandahar. Rank reform is substantially reducing the number of senior officers in the MOI and ANP.

Photos by Air Force Capt. Dave Huxsoll

Afghan Interior Ministry to select general officers

By Air Force Capt. Dave Huxsoll
Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan -- Afghanistan's Ministry of the Interior, with the assistance of the Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan, has entered the second phase of a rank reform process that will make the Afghan National Police a more efficient and streamlined organization, with clearer chains of command.

The ministry is in the middle of a three-step process that will select ANP senior officers to fill 86 general-level positions in the force. The first phase of rank reform concluded in November when Afghan President Hamid Karzai approved generals to fill the 31 highest ranking positions in the MOI and ANP.

Rank reform is designed to reduce the number of senior-level positions in the ANP and increase the number of junior officers, sergeants and patrolmen. Currently the number of general and field-grade officers outnumber police sergeants by a ratio of almost three to two.

"We want to increase the number of the low-ranking officers and decrease the number of high-ranking officers to make our working environment more efficient," said Maj. Gen. Sakhi Muhammad Baiani, ANP administration chief.

A concurrent process of pay reform within the ANP will result in significant salary increases for almost all members of the police force. Although some members may not maintain their current rank, if they remain on the force, they will be making substantially more money.

Phase 2 of the rank reform kicked off in Kabul on Nov. 23 and 24, when more than 180 general officers filled out applications and took a written exam. Following the Kabul session, a team from the Afghan MOI and OSC-A's Police Reform Directorate traveled to the regional training centers in Gardez, Jalalabad, Mazar-E Sharif, Kunduz, Herat and Kandahar to brief ANP officers on the reform process, accept applications from interested candidates and administer the written exams.

"The current general officers of the ANP are taking a very courageous step forward in the rank reform process," explained Army Col. Paul Calbos, chief of OSC-A's PRD Ministry Reform Division. "The generals have to consider this as a necessary step for Afghanistan's internal security and the safe future of their grandchildren."

"We know many officers are strongly opposed to losing

See MINISTRY Page 7

Afghan troops recognized for contributions

By Army Col. Tom Wilkinson
1st Brigade, 205th Corps Embedded Training Team

Courtesy photo

Maj. Gen. Muslim Ahmed presents a re-enlistment certificate to a soldier at Forward Operating Base Anaconda. Certificates were presented to more than 160 Afghan National Army soldiers who re-enlisted.

SPIN BOLDAK, Afghanistan -- Although the Afghan National Army's 205th Corps is only a year old, many of its soldiers have been fighting the enemies of their country for three years.

The soldiers, who graduated from the Kabul Military Training Center in 2002, have been serving in austere conditions in the southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Oruzgan and Zabul. On a recent afternoon, as some of them completed their tours of duty and 160 re-enlisted, all of the troops got some well-deserved recognition.

"Thank you for re-enlisting," Maj. Gen. Muslim Ahmed, the corps commander, told them at formations in Kandahar and Oruzgan provinces. "Those of you who aren't re-enlisting, I want to thank you as well.

"You have done an outstanding job over the past three years," he continued. "I am hopeful that once you are home and have reacquainted yourselves with your families, you may look back fondly on your service to your country and perhaps come back."

Coalition troops, who are embedded with the Afghan National Army as trainers, helped organize and participated in the ceremonies.

"We owe these brave soldiers something," said Lt. Col. Don Bolduc, commander of the U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group.

In the week following the ceremonies, Maj. Gen. Rahmatullah Raofi assumed command of the 205th Corps from Ahmed. Raofi previously commanded the 203rd Corps in Gardez. He, too, spoke to the troops.

"Today is a pleasure for us and a good moment as you continue to serve Afghanistan," he said. "I have been briefed on all your successes and hardships, and I am honored to stand before you."

MINISTRY, from Page 6

rank," Baiani said, "but this is necessary for the good of the country. We have a fair process to select the qualified officers for the top positions."

"Those not selected in Phase 2 can compete for lower ranking positions during Phase 3. They are not fired, and we value their experience," he said.

The team completed the application and testing portion Dec. 14.

The remainder of the selection process mirrors that of the first stage, with a candidate file review and interview.

The file review will examine each candidate's education, variety and depth of experience, and professional training.

A board of officers from the MOI, along with a representative from OSC-A's PRD and the German Special Ambassador for Police Reform will review the files and conduct the interviews.

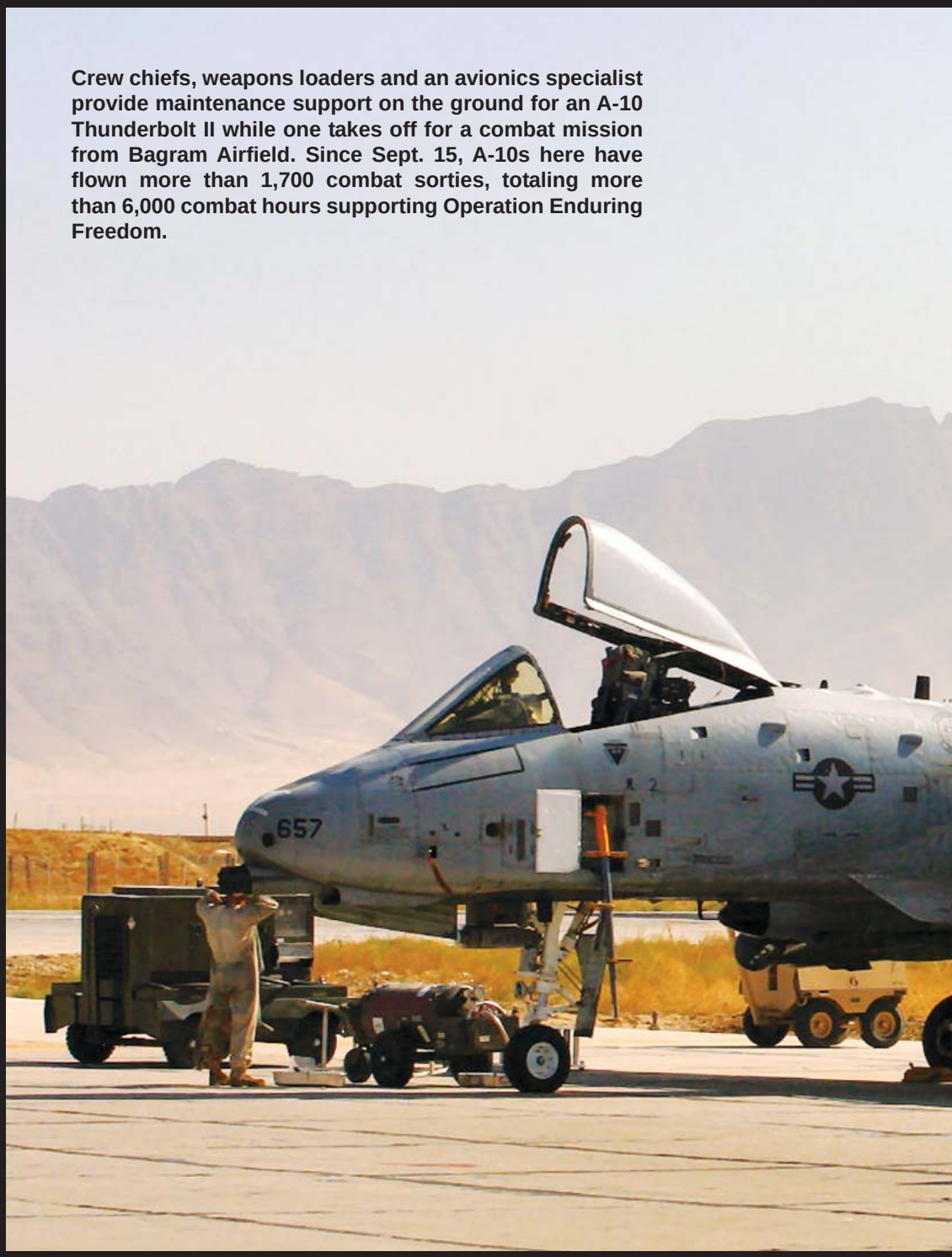
The board will recommend a list of names to Interior Minister Zarar Ahmad Moqbil, who will forward the final list to President Karzai for approval.

"The reform process is going well," Baiani said. "The goal is that after we implement the reforms, we will have an educated and professional police force that serves the people the way they deserve to be served."

The selection process for field-grade officers, Phase 3, and company-grade officers, Phase 4, will be similar to the first two phases, Baiani said. "We want to select the most talented and professional officers for these positions."

Bagram A-10s support tro

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs



Crew chiefs, weapons loaders and an avionics specialist provide maintenance support on the ground for an A-10 Thunderbolt II while one takes off for a combat mission from Bagram Airfield. Since Sept. 15, A-10s here have flown more than 1,700 combat sorties, totaling more than 6,000 combat hours supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- A-10 Thunderbolt IIs continue taking the fight to the enemy by providing close-air support for U.S. and Coalition forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Shortly after deploying from Davis-Monthan Air Base, Ariz., to Bagram in September, the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron "Bulldogs" began making history.

"Our A-10s have provided nonstop presence and lethal firepower since we arrived," said Air Force Lt. Col. Martha McSally, 354th EFS commander. From ensuring the success of Afghanistan's provincial elections in September to the first seating of an Afghan national parliament in more than 30 years, she said "we are continuing to make a footprint on the world around us."

The Bulldogs have succeeded in defeating enemy combatants because of their detailed integration with Coalition ground forces.

"Throughout this … rotation, we've integrated with conventional and special ops battlefield warfighters to seek out and destroy remaining pockets of Taliban, terrorists and anti-coalition militia," McSally explained. "This integration has helped save hundreds of U.S. and Coalition lives and ensured a safe and successful election process."

Since Sept. 15, the Bulldogs have flown more than 1,700 combat sorties, totaling more than 6,000 combat hours, and fired more than 20,000 rounds of 30 mm bullets.

"(The) 30 mm (cannon) is the weapon of choice for A-10 pilots in providing pinpoint accuracy against the enemy (leaving) 'friendlies' or civilians unharmed sometimes less than 100 meters away," the colonel said.

The pilots have also used laser-guided bombs, airburst freefall bombs and high-explosive rockets to demolish enemy forces. On more than 100 occasions, A-10 pilots helped

oops, take fight to enemy

Photo by Air Force Chief Master Sgt. David L. Stuppy, 455th Air Expeditionary Maintenance Group

friendly forces in direct contact with the enemy.

"Our pilots have had to integrate with forces on the ground to neutralize the targets," the colonel said. "It takes a great deal of skill and judgment to swiftly identify friendly and enemy positions in a very fluid fight and deliver ordnance in … close proximity to the friendlies."

Close-air support isn't the only thing the A-10s provide. The Bulldogs have also been the first on the scene at several Coalition helicopter crashes.

Pilots provided cover to deter hostile forces and, sometimes, immediate firepower to defeat their hostile action.

"Uniquely trained to take on the role of rescue mission

See A10 Page 13

A Soldier hangs from the end of a 105 mm Howitzer to balance the weight of the cannon as Soldiers from his platoon move the Howitzer into place. The 1st Platoon, D Battery, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, nicknamed Doghouse, has become a major part of operations and security in Afghanistan.

Photo by Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk

Marines, Soldiers deny enemy safe haven

By Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk
20th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP BLESSING, Afghanistan -- While standing guard, you start to hear a whistling. The noise gets louder and louder. Then the ground erupts around you. And then it stops. What just happened?

What just happened was you became the 95th enemy combatant killed by 1st Platoon, D Battery, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment.

With more than 1,000 shells fired and more than 100 anti-Coalition militants killed, the 1st Plt., D Batt., nicknamed Doghouse, has become a major part of operations and security in Afghanistan.

"Doghouse has proven itself to be a valuable asset. I feel safe, and I know my Marines feel safer knowing D Battery has our back," said Marine Lt. Col. Jim Donnelliann, 2nd Battalion 3rd Marines commander.

First Plt., D Batt. has spread out its deployment between Asadabad Provincial Reconstruction Team and Camp Blessing.

"We were at Asadabad (PRT) for six months, and we will be at Blessing for five," said Army Capt. Michael Breen, platoon leader of 1st Plt., D Batt.

In September, 1st Plt. D Battery's 105 mm Howitzers were flown to Camp Blessing and replaced with 198 mm Howitzers at Asadabad.

"The move made (it) possible for our weapons to now reach the Karangal Valley, an area frequented by ambushes and (improvised explosive devices)," Breen said.

Since the artillery was moved, more than 10 enemy fighters in the valley have turned themselves in.

"It is a huge deterrent to the (enemy) to be able to have rounds on target in two minutes." said Army Sgt. 1st Class Frank Luedtke, of 1st Plt.

This was the second time the weapons were flown, but not the last time.

The Howitzers at Asadabad were moved to a remote location to provide support for Marines conducting Operation Redwings.

The artillery can also be moved by Humvee to points all over the province.

"Whether the weapons are driven or airlifted in, it takes the same amount of time to prepare and set up to fire. Both methods of transporting have their advantages and drawbacks: you can't get shot down in a Humvee, but you can't get (hit by an IED) in the air," Breen said.

Whether the howitzers are flown in or driven in, they still provide the same support: the ability to hit a target from a long ways away.

Being here allows us to do what we are trained to do, send rounds down range. There is no better feeling than knowing you can have rounds on the way in two minutes of the call and make a difference in an engagement.

This is what makes this job worth it, Breen said.

Marines hook a 105 mm Howitzer to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter Dec 13. The Howitzer belongs to 1st Platoon, D Battery, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment.

Photo by Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk

Deputy commanding general to receive royal recognition

By Air Force Tech. Sgt. J. C. Woodring
Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan -- England's royal family soon will present the deputy commanding general for Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan the Companion of the Order of the Bath.

Royal Air Force Air Vice Marshall Paul Luker will make his third trip to the ball room of Buckingham Palace to receive this award, which is one level below knighthood.

"I was not expecting this at all," Luker said. "It was a good surprise."

Queen Elizabeth II previously presented Luker with the Air Force Cross for an early tour in Northern Ireland and the Order of the British Empire following a tour at the Ministry of Defense.

"When the queen presents you with the award, she is very knowledgeable," he said. "She knows exactly why you are getting this award. It's quite an honor."

Luker said he broke the news of the upcoming grand affair to his wife by asking her if she wanted to go out for "dinner in London and have a new outfit."

Honorees traditionally get to bring two or three guests to the very formal ceremony. During his first visit to the palace, his mother and wife accompanied him; the second time, he brought his wife and two eldest daughters.

When his wife found out the trip to London was for the award, she was very happy.

"I think she was happiest for my youngest daughter" because she didn't get a chance to go to the other presentations, he said.

The award highlights the accomplishments of his previous assignment as the commander of Joint Helicopter Command, he said.

"It was a nonstop operation," Luker said. "This award is because of their successes, not mine."

Luker was responsible for consolidating about 15,000 helicopter personnel from all branches of the military into one command. Its headquarters was located near Salisbury, England, but the units are located around the world.

Courtesy photo

Royal Air Force Vice Air Marshall Paul Luker is deputy commanding general for Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan. He will soon travel to Buckingham Palace to receive the Companion of the Order of the Bath.

Based on his previous trips to the palace, Luker said one of the highlights is when the recipients are waiting to enter the ball room.

"You get to meet all sorts of people you'd never have a chance to meet otherwise," he said. "It's really a beautifully orchestrated event fitting of a royal ceremony."

The honor is the third most senior order currently given in the United Kingdom falling behind the Order of the Garter and the Order of the Thistle.

The Order of the Bath was founded in 1725 by King George I. The name comes from an ancient ceremony where honorees participated in a vigil of fasting, prayer and bathing on the day before being knighted. The order is limited to 2,400 members.

Airmen reflect on combat experiences

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Whether getting fired upon while reporting on a mission with Marines or experiencing rocket attacks while serving alongside Army Soldiers, two Airmen here have a story to tell about their joint combat experiences in Operation Enduring Freedom.

While in the field reporting on the 2nd Platoon, W Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines, in northern Afghanistan, Air Force Airman 1st Class Peter Mellon and the Marines experienced an enemy attack Nov. 16. Mellon is a broadcast producer for Bagram's American Forces Network Afghanistan

"Our mission was to join members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police on a convoy through the Wata Poor Valley to find people who had anything they weren't supposed to have," said Mellon, a native of Farmington Hills, Mich., deployed here from Kaiserslautern, Germany. "We were getting reports almost nightly that something was going to happen to hinder our mission. We just didn't know when."

Preparing for whatever came their way proved successful.

"One night, after everyone -- except for those on watch -- had gone to sleep, we heard a loud noise and gunshots," the Airmen explained. "(We) immediately threw on our body armor and helmet, grabbed our M-16s (rifles) and returned fire."

From start to finish, the firefight lasted about two minutes.

"It seems like a lot longer when you're actually there," Mellon said. "I was amazed that I was able to think quickly and clearly through it all. You think that the first time you go through something like this that you'll be frightened and that you wouldn't know what to do. That wasn't the case."

Within a moment's notice, the convoy transitioned from normal operations to the heat of battle.

"Due to previous instruction, each of us knew where we supposed to be and what we were supposed to do in every situation," Mellon said. "Although it was a well-coordinated enemy attack, we did everything right, none of our guys were hurt, and we were able to continue our mission successfully."

Air Force Airman 1st Class Timothy Beers deployed to Salerno Forward Operating Base on Sept. 20. Before his return trip to Bagram in December, the Combined Joint Task Force-76 help desk representative said he found out what it was like to be attacked by rockets and mortars.

"If you have never been through one of these attacks, you're in for an unforgettable experience," said Beers, a native of Houston. He's deployed from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. "At the time, you are scared but excited. Your adrenaline is rushing, you're very alert, you're heart is beating fast, and in your mind you're just wondering what is going to happen next."

Beers said his experiences in Afghanistan have showed him that life was short.

"Tomorrow isn't promised to us," he said. "We shouldn't take things for granted because one day we could be here and the next day we could be gone."

The Airman, who returns from his first deployment this month, said he has enjoyed the experience.

"I will never forget my deployment to Afghanistan," Beers said. "Not only have I been given the opportunity to work alongside the Army, but I was also given a chance to excel in my job and accomplish tasks I would have otherwise not been able to tackle."

A10, from Page 9

commander, the A-10 (pilots) have deconflicted all supporting assets, (providing) command and control in very dynamic situations," McSally said. "We then coordinated for rescue (and medical-evacuation operations), provided lethal coverage overhead against the threat, and escorted rescue assets to safety, saving dozens of U.S. and Coalition lives."

The colonel said the A-10 pilots have also provided escort and presence patrols for friendly convoys, helicopters and cargo aircraft, which sometimes carry high-level Afghan and U.S. leaders, or vital earthquake relief into Pakistan.

Two recently certified A-10 flight leads said protecting friendly forces from those who would cause them harm is a key emphasis for A-10 pilots.

"After dropping a 500-pound bomb or firing 500 rounds of 30 mm high-explosive incendiary bullets, it's a good feeling knowing our forces were no longer taking fire," said Air Force Capt. Dan Cruz, an A-10 pilot.

Cruz said using weapons in combat has been the highlight of his A-10 flying experience. The "Hog," as some Airmen call the jet, was the first Air Force aircraft specially designed to provide close-air support, he said.

"Knowing that friendly forces on the ground were actively taking fire and the need for us to rapidly employ weapons to protect them has been intense and exhilarating," said Cruz.

When conducting close-air-support missions, the captain said there's little room for error.

"The training I've received over the years has instilled the importance of quickly determining all friendly locations before employing weapons," he said. "With the friendlies factored in, it's simply a choice of what weapon to use that will achieve the desired weapons effects."

Air Force Capt. Jay Annis, another A-10 pilot, said he takes pride in what he's doing to support the war on terrorism.

"I've been given the skills and confidence necessary to perform our A-10 mission in combat," said Annis, who is a native of Chanhassen, Minn. "I'm proud to be able to provide my piece of the puzzle -- taking the heat off of our brothers who are taking the fight to the enemy on the ground.

"We've set a new aerospace standard in unforgiving conditions," she said. "A truly amazing precedent has been set. And each and every Bulldog should be proud of a job well done."

Soldier gives kidney to Marine brother-in-law

By Sandy Miller
Times-News reporter

BUHL, Idaho -- You never call a Marine a Soldier and you never call a Soldier a Marine.

And never confuse a Marine's "oohrah" with a Soldier's "hooah."

In fact, one of the few things a Marine and a Soldier will agree on is how much fun it is to make jokes about the Air Force.

But when it comes down to the wire, they come through for each other. So when Marine Lance Cpl. Mitchell Pehrson needed a kidney, Army Spc. Adam Douglas gave him one of his.

Well, OK, Douglas does happen to be married to Pehrson's sister, Andrea.

"It wasn't about being in the military," Douglas said. "He was my brother-in-law and he needed a kidney."

Pehrson, now 22, was stationed on a Marine base in Japan last spring when he injured himself trying to earn his gray belt in martial arts. The injury sent him to the doctor who became concerned over the young Pehrson's high blood pressure. Pehrson admitted he hadn't been feeling too good.

"I was always tired and had trouble on PT runs," Pehrson said.

Tests revealed Pehrson had anemia and his body was starved for oxygen.

"It was killing my kidneys slowly," he said.

He was flown from Japan to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., where more tests confirmed Pehrson had end-stage renal disease. He needed a kidney -- fast. He stayed in the barracks while the Marines worked on getting him on a list for a donor. That's when Douglas, who was stationed in Korea with the Army's 304th Signal Battalion, stepped in.

"I talked to my wife and heard about the donor list," Douglas said. "The family all had high blood pressure, so they couldn't be a donor. I said I would, but our blood types were different."

But as it turned out, Douglas, who has O-positive blood, could donate to a person of any blood type.

"I said I'd do it and went to the hospital in Korea," Douglas said.

Douglas had test after test between June and November.

"It came out I was a perfect match," Douglas said. "I got on a plane in November."

Douglas was admitted into Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., two weeks before the scheduled transplant where he underwent more blood work, EKGs, ultrasounds and a psychiatric evaluation. Everything was a go for a kidney transplant.

On Dec. 1, Douglas was wheeled into surgery. Pehrson was wheeled into surgery two hours later. Nervous family members kept vigil in the waiting room. More than six hours later, they came back out.

"It was hard to see him in the ICU hooked up to all those lines," said Pehrson's mother, Tammy. "It was hard to see him in pain."

The Marine now had the Soldier's left kidney and a renewed chance at life.

Douglas did pretty well except his diaphragm got irritated during surgery which gave him an uncontrollable case of the hiccups. Douglas pointed out that one does not want hiccups while healing from a surgical incision. Pehrson had to go back into surgery to repair a leak in his new kidney's ureter tube. But both came out with a clean bill of health and are now recovering at the Pehrson's spacious country home in Buhl, where the Soldier and the Marine debate about who got stabbed with more needles during the ordeal.

Photo by Ashley Smith, Times-News

Army Spc. Adam Douglas, 26, left, donated a kidney to his brother-in-law, Marine Lance Cpl. Mitchell Pehrson, 22, in December. The two enjoyed a laugh recently while recovering near Buhl, Idaho.

"I feel like a brand new champ," Pehrson said. "Before, I felt like a 60-year-old man. A walk to the mailbox would kill me."

Douglas is happy for Pehrson, though he still enjoys ribbing him.

"They (the Pehrson family) say both of us are full of useless knowledge," Douglas said. "Now, he's even more full of useless knowledge."

Douglas, now 26, first knew Pehrson as the annoying little brother of his best friend, Casey. After graduating from Buhl High School in 1997, Douglas pondered what he wanted to do with his life.

"There's not a lot here for a young kid," he said.

So a year later, on April Fool's Day, he joined the Army. He later married Andrea and had two children - Hailey, now 5, and Tate, 2. In February of 2003, he shipped-off to Iraq where he served an 8-month tour. He's been stationed in Korea for the past eight months, and on Jan. 9, headed back there for another month. Then he'll come home on leave before heading to his next post at Fort Bliss, Texas. Pehrson graduated from Buhl High School in 2002 and then took some classes at the College of Southern Idaho. But like Douglas, he just wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his future.

"I was in a dead-end job and felt I was going nowhere," Pehrson said.

So he joined the Marines.

Pehrson recently received an honorable medical discharge and after resting up a little bit more, plans to return to CSI. Douglas has another year left during which he'll decide whether he wants to re-enlist.

"This is my decision year," Douglas said.

But with only one kidney, his future in the Army is limited.

"I can't go overseas and I can't do heavy work anymore," he said.

Douglas thought about it for a moment. Then he smiled. "I could go in the Air Force," he said with a chuckle. "They don't do a lot."

(This article originally appeared in the January 3 edition of the Twin Falls, Idaho Times-News. It is republished here with permission of the Times-News, which also granted Army newspapers the right to republish this article.)

Photos by Army Staff Sgt. Jacob Caldwell

Paratroopers from B Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, run in formation at a New Year's Day run hosted at Kandahar Airfield by Task Force Gun Devil on Jan. 1.

Army Sgt. Steven Lowery, Headquarters Support Battery, 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, leads his unit in stretching before a New Year's Day run.

Soldiers from Romanian's 151st Infantry Battalion carry their battalion colors during a New Year's Day run.

U.S., international forces celebrate New Year's Day

By Army Staff Sgt. Jacob Caldwell
Task Force Bayonet Public Affairs

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- U.S. and international forces came together for a New Year's Day run hosted by Task Force Gun Devil here Jan. 1.

The troops ran on dirt, gravel and paved roads around the airfield to celebrate the new year.

Running together provided the units that participated an opportunity to increase esprit de corps.

Freedom Watch

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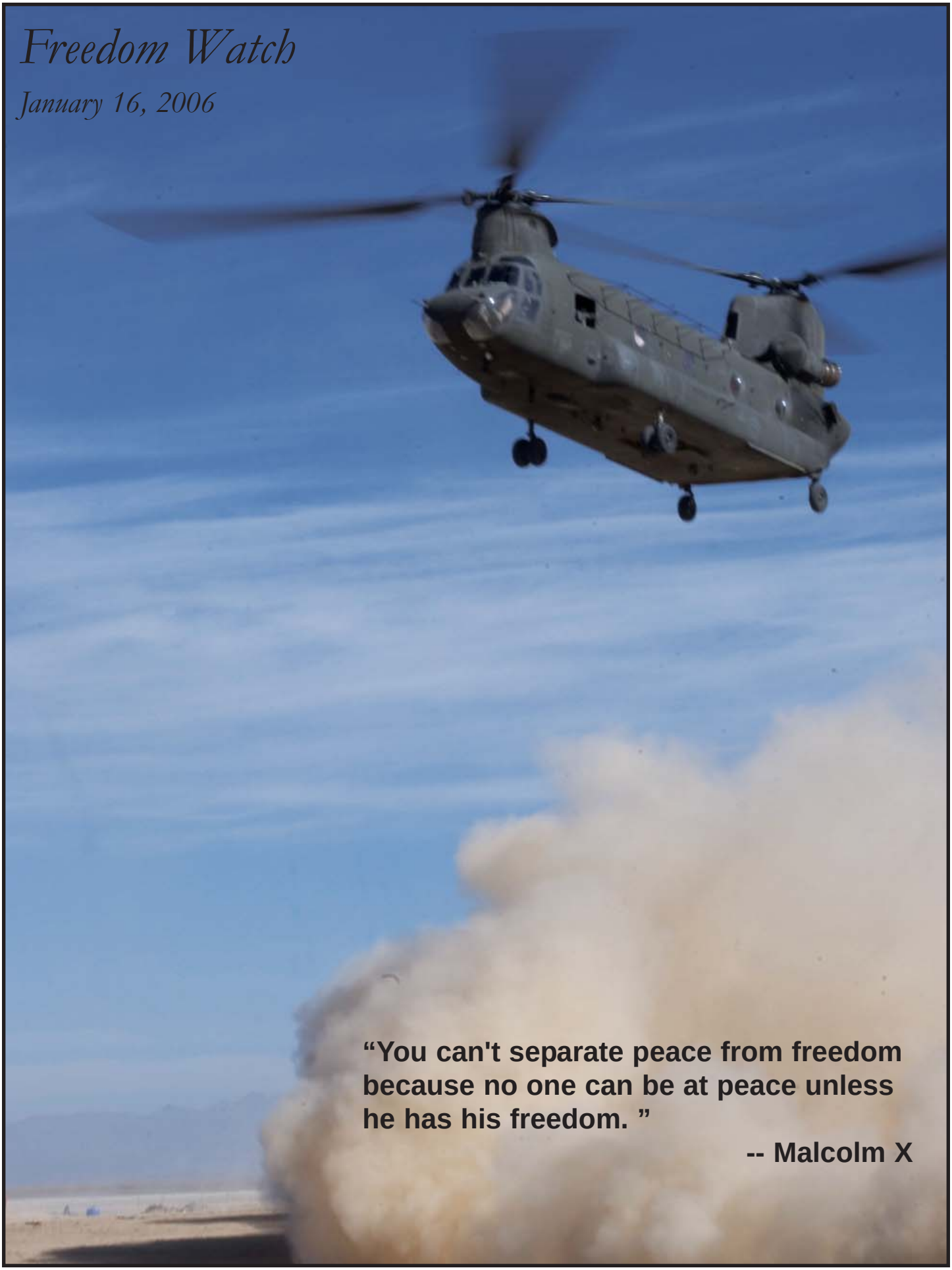

“You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom. ”

-- Malcolm X

A CH-47 Chinook helicopter prepares to land at Forward Operating Base Sharana on Dec. 24. Photo by Army Spc. Tiffany Evans, 20th Public Affairs Detachment