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Kandahar opens runway for Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca

By Cpl. Keith A. Kluwe
109th Mobile Public
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KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, AFGHANISTAN - More than 1,250 Muslims from the local area have departed in the last week through Kandahar Air Field for their annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia for the Hajj.

The Hajj is the largest annual journey by people to any religious site in the world. Several million Muslims go to Mecca to pray each Hajj. Islamic religious law requires a pilgrimage to the holy site at least once in a lifetime for anyone who is capable of going.

"We recognize that the Hajj is one

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Cpl. Keith Kluwe

Hajjis line up to board the Airbus 300 jet plane that will transport them on their journey to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Jan 8. Planes such as this one will ferry more than 7,100 locals to and from the Muslim religious site over the next few months.

Scott Canavan, a food technician from Outback Steakhouse in Pittsburgh, Pa., transfers a tray of freshly baked fries to a serving bin, Jan. 11. This was Canavan's first trip to Afghanistan with Outback. Other volunteers were here in June to serve troops dinner and say thank you.



Sgt. Ed Zink

Outback back again: Steakhouse dishes out meals, morale for troops in Kandahar

By Sgt. Ed Zink

109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan - Outback Steakhouse employees arrived in Kandahar Jan. 10 for their second visit since June to serve troops here an extra helping of steaks, Bloomin' Onions® and a side order of morale.

The line for the mess tent stretched at least a hundred soldiers deep at any one time as Coalition troops here waited their turn for a little taste of home.

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From the top —



Devil Six

It's our turn now. Task Force Panther has done an excellent service to our country by their performance in Afghanistan. Now the Devils are here to add to our legacy of outstanding service to the People of the United States of America. We are already displaying the same courage, tenacity, and cleverness that inspired our previous enemies to dub us as the "Devils in Baggy Pants." On Jan. 10, TF Devil completed its transfer of authority with TF Panther. Several units in the Task Force continue to RIP and by the end of the month should be complete. I would personally like to thank Col. Huggins and the rest of

the Panthers for their great service and their dedication to service. The process of TOA was seamless and this was attributable to all of you and your great sense of urgency in taking on this important task.

I am very proud to command this great task force and look forward to the coming months as together we all join together — paratroopers, airmen, sailors, Marines, special forces and coalition members to continue to fight this War on Terrorism. As we hunt down and destroy our enemies we prove that America's resolve is strong and that we will not tremble at the thought of a coward's threat. The President and the people of the United States, the U.S. military, and our allies are committed to this fight.

Discipline and teamwork will guide us to victory. One aspect of this teamwork is communication. As commander I speak for the entire command staff as I say that it will be a pleasure to write a monthly update for our soldiers and their families to read. As a husband and father I know how important it is for families to stay involved in their soldier's life. Times are hard when we are far away. I am thankful for the sacrifices that all the Devils and their families are making as we continue this fight to preserve our way of life. I hope that this will make things a little easier.

Strike Hold!

Col. John F. Campbell

Desert Devil Dispatch falls under the supervision of Task Force Devil.

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Off the record ... What 's your favorite thing to do with your down time?



"Staying in the tent and watching movies."

Cpl. James Arbuckle
Team Leader
Co. A, 1st Bn., 505th PIR



"My favorite way to spend my down time was to sleep and read."

Pfc. Ryan Kibat
Mortarman
HHC, 1st Bn., 505th PIR



"Reading, mostly Dean Koontz."

Sgt. 1st Class David Walker
Firing Battery Chief
Bttry. B, 1st Bn., 319th Artillery Bde.



"My best thing to do would be to put myself into a cocoon for the next four months."

Bob Sadler
Quality Assurance Rep.
Defense Contract Managing Agency

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of the five pillars of Islam, and is very important for individual Muslims,” said Lt. Col. Walt Pjetraj, the civil-military officer for Combined Task Force 82. “We are trying to help the local government and the central government facilitate their pilgrimage.”

The Saudi Arabian government provides a quota for the Hajj to all the countries that have Muslims. The quota for Afghanistan is 25,000 people. Of the 25,000 people who will depart from Afghanistan to go to Saudi Arabia, 7,100 are scheduled to depart from Kandahar Air Field. The other hub for Hajj flights is Kabul. Minor hubs will feed into the Kabul airport. Each individual Hajji, as the religious pilgrims are called, is paying \$1,500 to get his passport, make sure his shots are up to date, and to get his flight ticket.

The Afghan Ministry of the Hajj is the driving force behind this year's pilgrimage.

“This is an Afghan activity. This is a Muslim tradition,” said Pjetraj. “This is going to be Afghans helping Afghans, Muslims helping Muslims.”

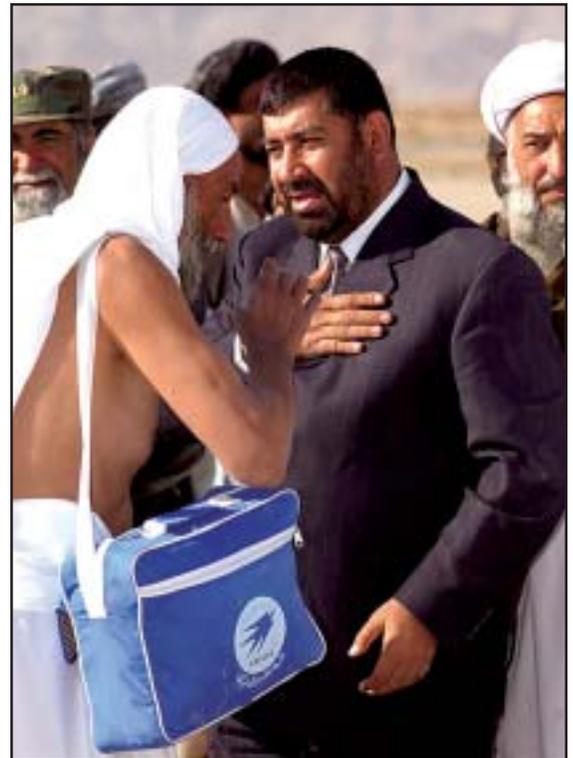
The Afghan Ministry of the Hajj is the liaison between individual Hajjis

and the Saudi Arabian government for the issuing of visas.

The Afghan Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and the Afghan Ministry of Cooperation are coordinating transportation to and from Mecca while the Kandahar Police Department and local Afghan Militia Forces are providing security. Ariana Air Lines, the Afghan national air carrier, is providing all the planes, pilots and support crews.

“The coordination and cooperation with all the ministries is excellent,” Pjetraj said. “We’ve had a lot of face-to-face contact the night before and the day of each flight. We had a half-dozen meetings before the flights began and meetings everyday after the Hajj flights depart to make sure we are all in sync.”

Flights going to the Hajj began Jan. 5 and will continue through the beginning of next month. The flights were delayed a few days while the local representative of the Ministry of the Hajj waited on the return of passports and visas.



Cpl. Keith Kluwe

Governor Sharzi, Kandahar's governor, welcomes a Hajji to the flight that will carry the pilgrim to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Jan. 8 at Kandahar Air Field.

Because of the late start, Ministry officials prepared for departures to extend past the projected ending date. Instead, larger aircraft have been provided to help get the departures back on schedule.

Governor Sharzi, Kandahar's governor and his brother Gen. Sharzi, commander of the local Afghan Militia Forces, are very grateful for the cooperation of the Coalition and for our support of the pilgrimage, said Pjetra.

“We have also had our soldiers at the front gate and at the (waiting area) several of the Hajjis come up and have thanked them for their role and for allowing them to go on this Hajj.”

Last year's Hajj could not be supported because of the bombed-out conditions of the air field, but Coalition forces have since repaired and reopened the runway.

Flights will return from Mecca to Kandahar Air Field during March and April, bringing the Hajjis home.

Task Force Saber unsheathed for KAF duty

By 1st Lt. Cory Angell

109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Task Force Saber officially assumed command of operations from Task Force Corsair at Kandahar Airfield Friday.

Both units are comprised of elements of the 82nd Aviation Brigade, 229th Aviation Regiment, the 101st Aviation Brigade, and National Guard Air Ambulance.

“We understand that Aviation plays a vital role for operations in Afghanistan and we are prepared to conduct combat operations,” said Lt. Col. Terry V. Morgan, commander of TF Saber. “Conditions for success were set through tough and realistic relief-in-place objectives and we look forward to carrying the flag for the next several months. Safety and discipline is at the forefront of everything we do and we are committed to executing all operations in the most professional manner.”

OUTBACK from page 1

“I think it’s a really nice thing for them to do to bring this out here,” said Spc. Carlos Clavijo, between bites of corn on the cob and forkfuls of freshly grilled steak.

Clavijo, a supply specialist with Company B, 307th Forward Support Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division, said when he’s not deployed he and his wife go out every weekend to the Outback Steakhouse for dinner. “It’s not back home, you’re not with your family, but it’s good and it’s free,” he said.

With support from U.S. Army food service personnel here, the Outbackers grilled several hundred pounds of steaks, and served up a truckload of baked potatoes, corn on the cob, french fries, and Outback’s trademark Bloomin’ Onions®.

The soldiers were able to wash down their meals with non-alcoholic beer, brought in special for the occasion since troops here are not allowed to consume alcohol.

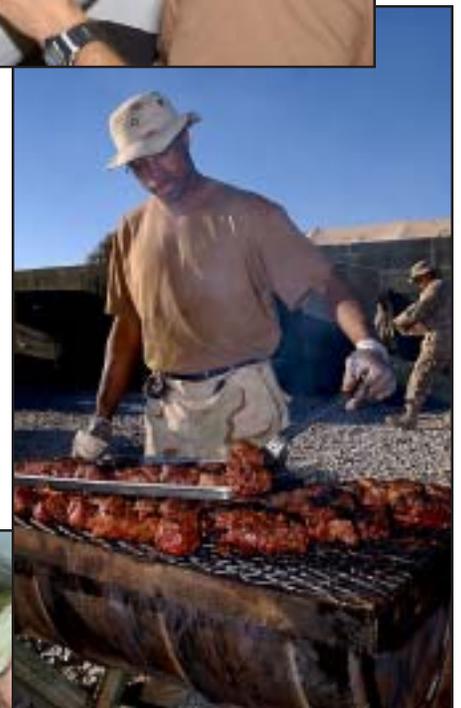
Dave Alvarado, an Outback research and development employee was in charge of the 15 Outback food and service technicians who made the 41-hour trip from the states to Kandahar Air Field.

Alvarado said the Outbackers here were hand picked from restaurants around the United States and could only qualify if they had been with the company for at least two years.

“These are the best people that I could find,” said Alvarado. “They are all volunteers. Nobody’s being paid extra. People are doing it from the bottom of their heart. It’s something to give back to the troops.”

Ginger Wart, an Outback regional service technician from Oklahoma City, Okla., slipped among the tables of hungry troops Jan 11, handing out hot trays of Bloomin’ Onions®. She said she volunteered for the mission to Afghanistan because it touches her heart to see “all these gentlemen” putting their lives on hold for their country.

“They’ve (the troops) said that whether I gave them a Bloomin’ Onion® or not, that this was going to be the best day from their whole tour. I feel blessed to be here,” said Wart.



Top, Ginger Wart, a food technician with Outback Steakhouse, serves up a Bloomin’ Onion®, to Task Force Panter’s command staff. Center, Pfc. Eric White, a food service specialist with HHC, 2nd Bn., 504th PIR, transfers sizzling steaks to a tray for serving. Above, Sgt. Brandon Chesser, an air defense artilleryman with Bttry A., 3rd Bn. 4th ADA, sizes up his meal as he waits for more of the popular dinner to be delivered to the rapidly depleting service line.

DEVIL SPORTS & LEISURE

Activities abound at Kandahar Air Field



By Sgt. Ed Zink

109th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — When soldiers return inside the fences of Kandahar Air Field to take a break from fighting the war on terrorism, they often begin fighting another war — the war on boredom.

Physical and mental workouts are two powerful weapons that can be used on the front-lines of the boredom war, say physical and mental health specialists here.

Training in the gym, or going to the Morale, Welfare and Recreation tents to play games helps soldiers combat boredom and relieve the stress and anxiety that come along with it, said Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Williams, noncommissioned officer in charge for the 82nd Airborne Division Mental Health section.

“When a person goes to the gym, he’s concentrating on lifting weights, he’s not concentrating on that stress,” said Williams. “That way stress is relieved and by building up that body strength, he’s also building up his mind.”

The Kandahar Gym and MWR tents are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with activities from weightlifting and cardio-fitness machines to pool, ping-pong, board games and movies available to soldiers at all times.

“It relieves a lot of stress,” said Cpl. Gary Wilson, hefting 35 pound dumbbells during a session of one-armed dumbbell

rows in the gym Thursday. “You can take out your aggressions on the weights, instead of on somebody else.”

Wilson, a team leader with Company A, 1st Battalion, 504th PIR said he likes to read about military history and listen to music to help him relax when he’s not hitting the gym.

Spc. Robert Culbreth said he spends his time playing games in the MWR tents with friends.

“It’s interaction with the people around you,” said Culbreth, also a team leader with Co. A, 1st Bn., 504th PIR. “It helps pass the time so it doesn’t drag by so much.”

Lt. Col. (P) Thomas Martinko, a physician with the 307th Logistical Task Force here said that in addition to giving them something to pass the time, frequent trips to the gym helps soldiers stay prepared for their duties when they step back outside the wire.

“The soldier of today has an incredible load to carry and they have to stay in top shape for it,” said Martinko.

He added that exercising properly will help reduce the strains and sprains that often go along with soldiers putting too much into their workouts.

Williams put in a final thought on how, after 19 years of service, he’s learned to fight back once boredom starts to set in.

“I advise people to stay as busy as possible,” he said. “Get into as many activities as you can, talk to people, and don’t just go by yourself. Get active with others and do some stuff.”

Sports Cont. (Compiled from ESPN.com)

Duo aiming at Winston Cup team for '04

Associated Press

Troy Aikman and Roger Staubach quarterbacked the same NFL team. Now they're part owners of the same team — planning to enter a car in NASCAR's Winston Cup Series in 2004.

The former Dallas Cowboys quarterbacks are partners in Hall of Fame Racing, which will be directed by former Trans-Am driver Bill Saunders, who will act as managing partner.

"Roger and I have discussed this for a while, and all the pieces just came together. We're not naive going into this thing. We recognize it will be a real challenge," Aikman said in a telephone interview Thursday with The Associated Press.

So far, Aikman said, the team has no shop, no equipment, no employees other than the three owners, no driver and no sponsor. The latter will be a priority, the three-time Super Bowl winner added.

"For Roger and me, our involvement will, hopefully, be in sponsorship, and we'll be going to the races when we can," he said.

"Maybe we can bring some things

to a company that others can't. We're not in it for the sake of being in it," Aikman added. "We'll be up and running in 2004 but we know we've got a lot of work ahead." Stars from other sports have not had a very good track record in NASCAR. NBA great Julius Erving and NFL star Joe Washington had a Busch team, but couldn't sustain momentum, lost their sponsor and disappeared from the stock car sport. Three years ago, Olympic track star Jackie Joyner-Kersey and her husband, Bob, announced plans to form a team, but nothing ever materialized.

Aikman, 36, retired from the NFL after the 2000 season. Two-time Super Bowl winner Staubach will turn 61 on Feb. 5 and retired following the 1979 season.

"Roger has been a friend and mentor to me for many years," Aikman said. "Roger is very competitive and I am very competitive, and now we get to be involved in a sport and have an opportunity to get together and do something special."

Aikman said Joe Gibbs, former coach of the Washington Redskins and now owner of Joe Gibbs Racing, which won Winston Cup championships in 2000 and 2002, has helped get the team off the ground.

Aikman said. "When he got involved in the sport, people helped him and he is returning the favor and keeping us, hopefully, from hitting some of the same pitfalls he found." He also said it's premature to be talking about a driver.

The team will be headquartered in Dallas while maintaining a race shop in Charlotte, N.C., where most of the Winston Cup teams are based.

SPORTS BRIEFS

McNair expected to practice Friday

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Quarterback Steve McNair was unable to practice Thursday, ESPN's Ed Werder reported.

McNair missed a third straight day because the Titans wanted to be careful with his turf-toe condition. He had missed the previous two practices because of soreness in the bruised thumb on his passing hand.

Armstrong out for playoffs with ruptured groin

ALAMEDA, Calif. — Oakland Raiders defensive end Trace Armstrong was placed on injured reserve Wednesday with a ruptured groin, ending his successful comeback season.

Armstrong will miss Sunday's AFC championship game against the Tennessee Titans, and he won't play if the Raiders advance to the Super Bowl.

Shaq says mock accent was used jokingly

LOS ANGELES — The Lakers' Shaquille O'Neal said he was joking, not being a racist, when he used a mock Chinese accent while talking about Houston center Yao Ming.

A columnist for AsianWeek complained in his newspaper that O'Neal made several derogatory comments about Yao, with the Lakers' center saying, "Tell Yao Ming, 'ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-soh.'"

- Murphy, where is your weapon?



Pvt. Murpy's Law by Mark Baker