

Robot finds booby traps for engineers

Story and photo by Spc. Steve Marroni
109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — MATILDA has lent “her” helping hand, or more appropriately, helping claw, to law enforcement agencies for several years. Now she’s aiding the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

MATILDA is a robot, affixed with a retractable arm and claw. It can find booby traps, search caves, tunnels and buildings and haul a pretty good load for being the size of a small dog.

The robot’s name stands for Mesa Associates’ Tactical Integrated Light-Force Deployment Assembly, and several are in use in Afghanistan by units such as the 27th Engineer Battalion, Fort Bragg, N.C.

“It’s better to send a robot into a cave



Pfc. Matthew Varrato, C Company, 27th Engineer Battalion, inspects MATILDA, the booby trap-seeking robot.

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Rain, dust, wind predicted for next few months



As the wind picked up this past week, soldiers throughout Bagram fought against it to tie down their tents.

Story and photo by
Pfc. Christina Carde
11th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — As the winter months come to a close, troops shove their cold-weather gear to the bottom of their duffle bags, getting ready for warmer weather. However, the weather prediction for the next few months says they may want to keep that cold-weather jacket out a little longer.

Rainy days, dusty winds and cold wind chills are to be expected over the next six months here. Because of the new challenges to health and equipment there are some extra precautions troops need to take to safeguard

themselves and their gear.

“The old saying ‘March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb’ has begun to take effect,” said Tech. Sgt. Timothy Fields, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Combat Weather Team, 455th Expeditionary Operations Group.

According to Fields, the recent weather is not normal for this time of year.

“The strong winds we have been experiencing lately are due to winds passing through the mountains from the north. The cold temperatures have been the fuel behind its force,” said Fields. “This time of year usually begins

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World News

(Compiled from CNN.com)

U.S. to protest North Korea's 'higher-level provocation'

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration plans to formally protest North Korea's actions during a weekend incident in which four North Korean jet fighters intercepted a U.S. surveillance plane over the Sea of Japan, officials said Monday.

The administration also said the incident could persuade China and Russia to be more open to U.S. requests to apply pressure on Pyongyang.

"As they look at the facts of what happened here, it will be hard for Russia and China not to conclude, 'OK, now North Korea has gone too far,'" a senior administration official told CNN.

Tension has been rising on the Korean Peninsula since North Korea disclosed in October that it had renewed efforts to develop nuclear weapons it swore off of in a 1994 agreement.

The official said the forum for lodging a formal protest had not been settled on, but that one possible method would be to communicate with North Korean diplomats at the United Nations. Japan and South Korea are being consulted on the best approach, that official and others said.

"There is no question this is a higher-level provocation than what we have been seeing," the senior official said. "This is a type of situation where one miscalculation and people lose their lives, and then there is the risk of some counter-response where more people can lose their lives."

Pakistan raid nets 'treasure'

WASHINGTON — The names of possible al-Qaida operatives, including some believed to be in Washington and other U.S. cities, were found among a "treasure trove" of material recovered during the capture of al-Qaida operations chief Khalid Shaikh Mohammed in Pakistan on Saturday, sources said Monday.

Mohammed is the suspected mastermind behind the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Government sources would not say in



Photo by Pvt. 2 Terri Rorke

Loading up...

Laser eye surgery equipment is loaded onto a C-130 Hercules at Bagram Air Base today. The equipment is destined for an Afghan clinic and is the result of efforts by the 450th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), Riverdale, Md., U.S. Army Special Operations Command, KnightsBridge International and the Combined Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force.

how many cities the suspected operatives might be living.

FBI agents are trying to track them down, an effort that includes keeping people with possible links to al-Qaida under surveillance, the sources said.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the recent increase in the nation's terror alert level from yellow to orange for most of February was tied to Mohammed.

"We had information. We had various reporting, all of which to varying degrees could be traced back to Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, and that gave more credibility to our concerns," Fleischer said.

He said there had been an increasing amount of terrorist "chatter" — including a good "quality of chatter" — that was connected to Mohammed.

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge told reporters Monday that some of the concerns that caused the higher threat level were attributable to planning Mohammed was involved in.

Mohammed was arrested early Saturday in the Islamabad suburb of Rawalpindi, a week after he eluded capture during a raid in Quetta, Pakistan, 400 miles away.

Pentagon to look at Plan B

CNN — The Pentagon had a Plan B ready just in case Turkey refused to allow its bases to be used by 62,000 U.S. troops during a possible northern strike against Iraq, officials say.

"I don't think it's absolutely a showstopper in terms of whether you have a northern front or not," Gen. James L. Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, said in Stuttgart, Germany.

Military experts, however, are not enthusiastic about Plan B, and more than 20 U.S. transport ships remain in the Mediterranean in hopes that Turkey changes its mind.

Analysts said the first choice was to send the 4th Infantry "Iron Horse" Division into northern Iraq from southern Turkey.

That strategy would prevent Iraq from concentrating all its forces to the south and around Baghdad. It would also allow U.S. troops to act as a buffer between Turkish forces and millions of Kurds in northern Iraq and would likely allow U.S. troops to reach Iraqi oil fields in Kirkuk quickly enough to prevent their destruction or seizure by the Kurds.

Meet CJTF-180's acronym hunter

Story and photo by Pvt. 2 Terri Rorke
11th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — A reservist is taking on a new meaning of being a part-timer, because he spends part of his time working for the Army, part for a bank and the rest as an acronym hunter.

Capt. Jose A. Figueroa-Seary, 360th Civil Affairs Brigade, Fort Jackson, S.C. makes sure he always has something to do by being involved with his family and his work.

The Puerto Rico-born soldier, who now lives in Charlotte, N.C. first enlisted in the Army September 1980 in field artillery.

After serving as an active-duty-enlisted soldier for his first tour, he decided it would be better for him to serve as a reserve officer. He said he noticed that a lot of the officers were “squared away.”

In September 1983, the computer-savvy family man went through Reserve Officer Training Corps and received his commission. He attended college at New York University and earned an associate's degree in science and bachelor's in finance and investments.

The married man said his only child, Juan Pablo, was born four days before he left for Bosnia — his first deployment.

So, the again deployed-captain said he

enjoys spending time with his two-year-old son when he can.

As a seasoned officer in the Army, in late 2001, he said he noticed a lot of people on the civil affairs side were not familiar with all of the acronyms in a joint operation.

“So, I decided to create a list of acronyms.” And he has continued to build it. In August of 2002 he was deployed here and brought his list with him.

It became even more important here, he said, because of combined joint operations, including all branches of the Department of the Defense.

Usually, when he is not working for the Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force, he is clicking links on the Combined Joint Task Force-180's website, searching for additional acronyms for his list.

By searching through these documents, he averages 15 to 20 new acronyms daily to add to his spreadsheet.

His collection has reached about 1,500 acronyms.

“It is very time consuming, but at the same time it gives me situational awareness of everything that is going on (because) I have to read the document in order to understand what the acronym means. I don't mind doing it.”

The list contains not only military ac-



Capt. Jose A. Figueroa-Seary said he has already built his list up to about 1,500 acronyms.

ronyms, but Non-Government Organization acronyms.

Figueroa-Seary has posted his list on CJTF-180's website where it can be found through a couple of links.

He said he is currently trying to get his list posted on the CJTF-180's homepage so it is easily found for someone stumbling upon an unknown acronym.

“It is a good resource” that was needed for people, he added.

Figueroa-Seary is scheduled to re-deploy in May, and his goal is to pass this list on to someone else and let them continue to add to it.

When he returns home, he will continue his work at Bank of America and continue to drive 100 miles to Fort Jackson, S.C. for his drill weekends when he is not spending time with his family.

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or tunnel than a soldier,” said Terry O'Donoghue, who traveled to Afghanistan to train soldiers on MATILDA.

O'Donoghue and several members of the Countermines/Counter Booby Trap Center, Fort Leonardwood, Mo., spent February teaching new tactics for dealing with the old threats of booby traps and mines.

Besides MATILDA, the group also instructed soldiers on new mine-mapping software, mine detectors and other techniques.

“Landmines and explosives are the poor man's way of waging war,” said the center's department director, Dorian D'aria.

“He doesn't have to fight in the open. This is the type of warfare we face now,” he added.

Center representatives, who developed the Army's training manual on mines and booby traps, trained close to 100 engineers in Afghanistan on the new technologies.

They displayed a variety of detection methods and taught soldiers how to avoid and de-

ter these hazards, which are prevalent in Afghanistan.

MATILDA sports an arm with a 35-pound lift, seven cameras capable of panning, tilting, zooming and operating in low-light conditions, a one-kilometer reel that can tow 475 pounds and a fiber-optic control system.

The track-wheeled machine can climb stairs and carry more than 100 pounds.

C Company, 27th Eng. Bn., learned how to operate MATILDA last week. Soldiers controlled the robot remotely and looked through its eye

view with its cameras to master its maneuverability.

The robot saves engineers from some of their hazardous work.

“It can go into buildings and make sure its safe,” said Pfc. Matthew Varrato, C Co., 27th Eng. Bn.

Each soldier got their turn at the helm. They started simply by learning how to operate the arm and retrieve a bottle off of a shelf. By the end of the course, they sent MATILDA into an abandoned building, rigged with imitation booby traps.

WEATHER, from Page 1

the rainy season, so the strong winds are a little abnormal.”

Although March and April are the months where the most rainfall is expected, this has not been the case in the past several years.

“Afghanistan has been experiencing a drought over the past six years,” said Fields. “This month we have predicted 2 inches of rainfall, half of which we have already seen in the past few days.”

Although the temperatures have been between 25 and 35 degrees, those numbers should rise.

“Starting this month, temperatures should start gradually increasing about 10 degrees every month through June,” said Fields. “These temperatures will vary due to rain and wind chills, which can make the air outside seem colder.”

As things begin to dry out by the end of April, another act of nature will begin to take its course – the 120 days of wind.

“Between the end of May and the beginning of June, the winds will begin to pick up to between 40 and 50 mph all day and then slow down with nightfall,” said Fields.

“This is expected to last through October.”

Along with the strong winds comes the problem of dust.

“Once the wind begins to spread dust around, people will start to experience mechanical problems with computers, vehicles and electronic equipment,” said Fields. “The best thing to do is to cover all equipment when it’s not being used to avoid this problem.”

There are also measures troops need to take to protect themselves against illnesses due to the weather changes. A physician from the 48th Combat Support Hospital, Fort Meade, Md., had some helpful hints.

“During the cold and rainy weather, troops should dress in layers and try to keep dry,” said Capt. Melissa TeBrock, physician, 48th CSH. “As the wind and the dust start to pick up, there is the added threat of wind burn and skin irritation. Protective face gear and a wet rag over the mouth and nose should help protect against the dust.”

“Also, those who suffer from asthma should try to stay out of these conditions altogether,” TeBrock added. “Anyone experiencing cold or flu symptoms should go to sick call.”

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

1530Z at the MWR building: “8 Seconds.” This film chronicles the life of Lane Frost, 1987 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Bull Riding World Champion, his marriage and his friendships with Tuff Hedeman (three-time World Champion) and Cody Lambert.

Tomorrow’s movie will be “Mission Impossible II.”



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Wednesday
Bagram:	Mostly clear H: 46F L: 21F	Partly cloudy H: 52F L: 27F
Kandahar:	Mostly clear H: 57F L: 28F	Clear H: 61F L: 37F
Kabul:	Haze H: 39F L: 21F	Haze H: 45F L: 28F
Uzbekistan:	Partly cloudy H: 45F L: 25F	Mostly cloudy H: 55F L: 35F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from
ESPN.com)

A good year for the good guys

ESPN — On Saturday in Milwaukee, Butler will play a semifinal game in the Horizon League tournament. The Bulldogs and Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the top two seeds in the event, have a bye into the league semis this year.

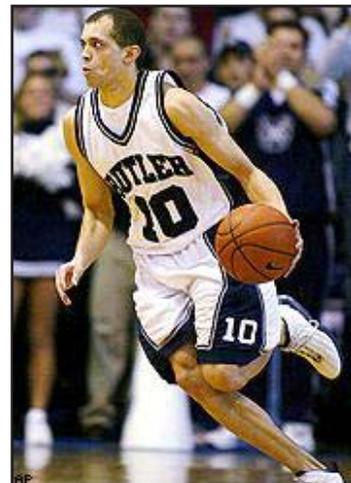
The West Coast Conference and Metro-Atlantic Athletic Conference have new and similar arrangements for Championship Week. In the WCC, top seeds Gonzaga and San Diego benefit from a restructured bracket with a bye into the conference semifinals. In the MAAC, regular-season winner Manhattan will also sit tight until only four teams remain.

A year ago, you may remember, last-place Wisconsin-Green Bay nipped Butler, 49-48, in the Horizon quarterfinals. Ultimately that loss, after wins in 25 of its 29 starts prior to the conference tournament, relegated Butler to the NIT.

Now, the Butlers and Gonzagas need to win only two games to claim an automatic NCAA bid. Perhaps more importantly, the changes in their respective conference tournaments have greatly reduced the possibility of the dreaded “bad loss.” And, by playing only the

better teams in their leagues, the RPI “hit” that often comes from beating bottom-feeders is also minimized.

So there are procedural reasons for more mid-majors to be optimistic this March. Thankfully, there are also basketball reasons. It says here that Butler, along with perhaps both Gonzaga and Southern Illinois, have already tied up NCAA at-large bids. None are “locks,” of course (we’ve learned that the hard way!), but these three “mids” are in the best position to survive a stumble as conference tournaments begin play later this week.



Win or lose in the Horizon League tournament, Darnell Achey and Butler have done enough to go dancing.

Butler, in particular, has a much stronger profile than it did a year ago. Southern Illinois is not as strong as last season, but neither is the pool of “bubble” teams from the traditional multi-bid conferences. I’m here to tell you that there are going to be some very mediocre teams seeded No. 11 or No. 12 come Selection Sunday, and that should make it even easier for the men’s basketball committee to do the right thing — that is, take an extra mid-major or two instead of a seventh team from the SEC or Big 12 or wherever.

Butler, in my view, is already safe. At 23-4 overall and as champions of the No. 14 conference, the Bulldogs are in. They project as a No. 9 seed this week and simply cannot fall far enough to miss the NAAs, even if they were to lose a Horizon semifinal game.

Gonzaga is obviously not the national contender it was a year ago, but, again, the Zags have won the regular-season championship of the No. 10 conference. They also scheduled an insane non-conference road tour in response to last season’s disappointing No. 6 seed. These Bulldogs are also in.

Southern Illinois is even hotter right now than Butler and Gonzaga. The Salukis also hold a one-game lead on Creighton with only a visit to Illinois State standing between them and the regular-season Missouri Valley title. Win that one, and SIU can relax heading into its conference playoffs.

Wisconsin, Illinois will settle mess

ESPN — The Big Ten didn’t schedule Illinois-Wisconsin on the final Wednesday of the regular season thinking it would decide the conference title.

NCAA Division 1: ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll



Team	Record
1. Arizona	23-2
2. Kentucky	24-3
3. Florida	24-4
4. Texas	20-5
5. Oklahoma	20-5
6. Kansas	22-6
7. Pittsburgh	21-4
8. Marquette	22-4
9. Duke	20-5
10. Wake Forest	21-4
11. Xavier	22-4
12. Syracuse	21-4

Team	Record
13. Maryland	19-7
14. Illinois	20-5
15. Louisville	20-5
16. Notre Dame	21-7
17. Stanford	22-7
18. Oklahoma State	20-7
19. Creighton	25-4
20. California	20-6
21. Mississippi St.	18-7
22. Dayton	21-5
23. Utah	21-5
24. Wisconsin	21-6
25. Georgia	17-8



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Considering the conference's unbalanced schedule, there was a chance the two wouldn't have played each other this season. Then again, considering where the Illini and Badgers have finished in the standings the past few years, it's a good thing the game showed up somewhere on the 2002-03 schedule.

"This is pretty rare," Illinois coach Bill Self said. "The last two years we've had a piece of the title, but we didn't get it with a head-to-head matchup. This is rare but this is good, really good for the league."

Like Illinois, Wisconsin was one of four teams that shared the 2001-02 regular season title. But, also like Illinois, the Badgers weren't expected to be in this position. Illinois had one of the best returning players in Brian Cook, but the rest of the lineup was dominated by underclassmen. Wisconsin was simply Kirk Penney and everyone else. At least that was the national perception.

The preseason favorites? That honor went to Michigan State or Indiana. Both can be found on the bubble.

Instead, the Illini and the Badgers emerged as the two title contenders from a muddled Big Ten. The pair are two games better entering the final week of the regular season than Purdue, Michigan and Minnesota.

"There's no way I would have thought in November this would have happened, at least for us," Wisconsin coach Bo Ryan said. "Maybe you would have thought Illinois because of Brian Cook. But we had such a young squad."

The difference has been the play of freshmen guards on both squads.

Illinois' point guard Dee Brown emerged as one of the top scoring guards in the country, regardless of class. Wisconsin, meanwhile, entered the season needing more athleticism on the wing, maybe a bit more flash from the perimeter. The Badgers received both with Alando Tucker.

RI to look into alleged NCAA violations

ESPN — The University of Rhode Island confirmed Monday it is conducting an internal investigation into alleged NCAA violations of its basketball program that involve former head coach Jim Harrick Sr. and former assistant Jim Harrick Jr.

URI spokesperson Linda Acciaro told ESPN that "we are currently examining allegations of NCAA violations involving both Coach Harrick and his son while they were associated with this university."

The news comes after the University of Georgia began an investigation last week into alleged NCAA violations by its basketball program under Harrick and his son. The Georgia allegations were first made by former Georgia player Tony Cole in a story by ESPN.



The freshmen around seniors Cook and Harrington helped the Illini exceed expectations.

Last month, URI settled a sexual harassment lawsuit for \$45,000 brought against the elder Harrick by Christine King, a clerk in the athletic department. In the lawsuit, King also alleged numerous violations of NCAA rules, including cash payments to players from the coaching staff and boosters, academic fraud involving player grade changes, and that Harrick Jr. had falsified hotel and meal reports for recruits.

Bonnies to forfeit six wins

OLEAN, N.Y. — The St. Bonaventure men's basketball team must forfeit six Atlantic 10 Conference victories and is barred from the postseason tournament for using an ineligible player.

The sanctions were determined Monday after the conference's 12 presidents conducted a teleconference call.

St. Bonaventure's games have been in question since last week when the school declared junior center Jamil Terrell ineligible for failing to meet NCAA junior college transfer guidelines.

School officials, who said they were petitioning the A-10 to have Terrell reinstated, declined to say what guidelines he might have failed to meet.

St. Bonaventure coach Jan Van Breda Kolff told reporters Monday he couldn't discuss Terrell's case.

"We should be arriving in about five minutes. There's a slight chance of enemy ground fire, so please exit quickly from the rear door. Thanks again for flying with us, and have a nice day."



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support