

Gardez preps to welcome refugees

By Pfc. Christina Carde
11th Public Affairs Detachment

GARDEZ, Afghanistan – After 23 years of invasion, oppression and internal wars, Afghan refugees are ready to return to their country in an attempt to live the rest of their lives in peace.

To welcome these weary travelers home, a refugee camp is being established outside the city of Gardez. This year alone, the camp is expecting a number of refugees greater than the population of most Afghan cities.

“Due to an agreement between the United Nations, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Afghan refugees living in Pakistan are expected to return here within the next month,” said Khan Mohammed, field assistant, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “By the end of this year, about 600,000 refugees are expected to return home.”

For many of the refugees, the Afghanistan they return to will be different than the one they remember.

“These people have been gone for different lengths of time,” said Mohammed. “Some people have been gone under a decade, and others will be returning to their country for the first time in 23 years.”

According to Mohammed, war was not the only thing that drove these people away from their homes.

“The invasion of the Russians and the rule of the Taliban were only part of the reason most of the refugees fled,” said Mohammed. “Famine, drought, poverty and warlords also contributed greatly to the flight of many Afghans to Pakistan.”

As the refugees prepare to begin their journey from Pakistan, Afghans back home are busy making sure they have something to come back to.



Photo by Pfc. Christina Carde

Planet caravan...

Along with the arrival of warmer weather comes the camel caravans traveling back to Afghanistan for the summer. The merchants who run these caravans depart to other countries during the winter months, and return with the warm weather to sell their merchandise.

‘Devils’ make ‘valiant’ return

By Spc. John Slosser
CJTF-180 Public Affairs Office

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Last weekend marked the completion of Operation Valiant Strike with hundreds of 82nd Airborne Division soldiers returning from their mission in the Sami Ghar mountains.

The operation ran more than eight days and pitted soldiers from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment against southern Afghanistan’s rough terrain and elements. Their goal was to seek out enemy forces, weapons and tactical intelligence.

“The mission was an overall success,”

said Lt. Col. Charlie Flynn, 2-504th PIR “White Devils” commander. “We’ve continued to disrupt and deny any enemy activity and have not allowed them to plan and coordinate attacks against our larger bases.”

Operation Valiant Strike wasn’t the first time these soldiers have been sent out into the Afghan mountains; they’ve participated in Viper and Mongoose, improving their abilities with each operation.

“We get better with every operation because we know more about ourselves and more about our enemies,” Flynn said. “This type of operation shows our resolve for Afghanistan’s government and the Afghan

World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



Smoke billows from a building hit Monday during coalition airstrikes in Baghdad.

U.S.: We will destroy Iraqi troops in our way

CNN — A relentless air assault on Iraqi positions by coalition aircraft continued Monday, targeting Republican Guard divisions defending Baghdad, the headquarters of the Fedayeen Saddam paramilitary group and a presidential compound on the southwest edge of the Iraqi capital.

More than 3,000 precision-guided munitions have been dropped in the past three days alone, bringing the total to 8,000 for the entire 12 days of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Pentagon said Monday.

Officials made it clear that the bulk of those bombs were aimed at the elite Republican Guard.

There are maneuvers under way “to try to destroy the divisions that stand in our way,” said Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, vice director for operations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

U.S. soldiers fire on van carrying women and children

DOHA, Qatar — U.S. soldiers fired on a van carrying 13 women and children when it failed to stop at a military checkpoint in southern Iraq, killing seven people and wounding two others, U.S. Central Command said Monday in a written statement.

Four passengers were unhurt, the statement said. An investigation is under way.

The incident occurred around 4:30 p.m.

(8:30 a.m. ET) when soldiers from the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division — manning a checkpoint on Route 9 near Najaf — motioned for an approaching van to stop, but were ignored by the driver, the statement said.

The soldiers fired warning shots into the air which also were ignored and then shot at the vehicle’s engine, “but it continued moving toward the checkpoint,” the statement said.

Soldiers were unable to see into the van, a spokesman for Central Command said.

“As a last resort, the soldiers fired into the passenger compartment of the vehicle,” the statement said. The spokesman said the soldiers responded in accordance with rules of engagement, based on initial reports.

Marines hunt for ‘Chemical Ali’

NASIRIYA, Iraq — U.S. Marines staged early raids Monday in southern Iraq for Gen. Ali Hassan al Majeed, President Saddam Hussein’s cousin, a military source said.

Al Majeed, the commander of Iraqi forces in southern Iraq, is widely known as “Chemical Ali” for ordering Iraqi forces to use chemical weapons on Kurds in northern Iraq in 1988.

“He was spotted, but he hasn’t been caught,” a U.S. military source familiar with the operation said.

Elite Marine reconnaissance units equipped with light armored vehicles and aided by close air support will conduct lightning raids on suspected Baath Party headquarters and hideouts in Shatra, 30 miles north of Nasiriya, the source said.

The Baath Party, led by Saddam Hussein, controls Iraq’s political, military and police institutions.

Peter Arnett hired by U.K. paper

LONDON — Britain’s Daily Mirror hired veteran war correspondent Peter Arnett Tuesday, less than 24 hours after he was fired by NBC and National Geographic for saying on Iraqi TV the U.S. war plan has “failed.”

The tabloid’s banner headline Tuesday said: “Fired by America for telling the truth ...

hired by Daily Mirror to carry on telling it.”

Piers Morgan, an editor for the Daily Mirror, told CNN, “Peter is one of the most respected journalists in the world, and we are delighted he is joining us to expose the truth about a war increasingly dominated by propaganda.”

Arnett, 68, was quoted in the tabloid as saying, “I report the truth of what is happening here in Baghdad and will not apologize for it. I have always admired your newspaper and am proud to be working for it.”



A senior military official said Rivera was expelled because he sketched a future military operation.

Confusion surrounds Rivera’s expulsion from Iraq

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military said Monday that Fox News Channel Correspondent Geraldo Rivera was being expelled from Iraq for divulging details of a future military operation, though later in the day a Central Command spokesman said he was not sure whether the newsman would be forced out.

“My initial report was that he had been asked to leave his unit and subsequently the country, but since then I’ve heard different reports,” Lt. Cmdr. Charles Owens at Central Command said.

“Frankly, we have bigger and more important things to do.” He urged a reporter to call Fox News to learn Rivera’s fate.

John Stack, vice president of newsgathering for Fox News Channel, said Rivera “has not been told to leave” and that nobody from the U.S. military had contacted the network to say that Rivera is being removed.

'Tis the season for snakes

By Pvt. 2 Terri Rorke
11th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – After hibernating all winter long, snakes around the world are waking up to spring, which is the beginning of snakebite season.

Although it is rare to come across a snake at Bagram, and the hospital hasn't had any recent snakebite cases, troops must still be alert.

"Assume all snakes are poisonous," said Maj. Douglas Sommers, chief of emergency medicine, 48th Combat Support Hospital. This is something to assume since two of the most deadly snakes in the world are known to slither in this area. Bagram is home to the Asian cobra and the Russell's viper snake.

According to Sommers, 60 percent of those bitten by either of these snake dies.

Another sited snake of the area is the Common Krait, the deadliest snake in the world, according to www.wildlifeofpakistan.com Its venom is said to be 15 times more virulent than vipers and cobras.

If someone sees a snake, they should leave it alone, said Capt. Cory Campora, pre-

ventive medicine commander, 791st Preventive Medicine Reserve component, Stanton, Calif.

Campora said he has only seen two non-venomous snakes since his arrival in September, but servicemembers should still know what to do in case they come across one.

"Don't leave your clothes laying around. Shake out your sleeping bag before you climb in (it)," he said.

Even with taking these precautions, getting bit is a possibility.

There is currently immune serum against snake venom and antivenin on order for the hospital, but Sommers currently has 20 vials, which can treat a severe case. "It's an anti-polyvalent, which is for five different types of snake bites. Only 20 percent of people bit need antivenin," said Sommers.

Snakes bite in an act of defense, said Sommers. Usually baby snakes will strike worst, because they can't control the secretion of the venom.

In the case of most snakes, "You don't mess with it, it won't mess with you," said Sommers.

Here are some guidelines to follow in the



The nocturnal Russell's viper or Vipera Russellii's venom can deliver two to three times the lethal venom dose and causes most of the snakebite deaths in its surroundings.

case of a snake encounter:

- Always keep on paths avoiding tall grass, weeds and underbrush
- Walk heavily to let the snake know you are coming
- Always check carefully for snakes concealed under rocks or around stumps
- Wear protective foot and leg wear
- Stay calm. Don't do anything that will threaten the snake
- Don't handle freshly killed snakes or snake heads – you may still be bitten
- Care should be taken at night when snakes are more active, for the chance of stepping on a snake is greater

Expansion...

An Afghan prepares the ground for the expansion of the North Dining Facility. The facility is scheduled to be increased by 40 feet and a kitchen area will be built behind the building within 60 working days. The structure will also be upgraded by replacing the roof system, replacing the exterior walls, installing insulation and upgrading the electrical and plumbing systems. The renovations are being performed to support the projected growth of Bagram. The dining facility will not be closed during the renovation. (Photo by Pfc. Debralee P. Crankshaw)



REFUGEES, from Page 1

“The site being used for the refugee camp was originally cleared for a university,” said Mohammed. “Once the area was cleared of mines, the plans changed due to controversy in the local villages about what the area should be used for. They decided instead to build a place to welcome back the refugees.”

Even though the camp will not consist of much, it will meet its required goal.

“The camp will have tents, food and water supplied by UNHCR, enough to sustain the refugees for a few days,” said Mohammed. “They will also be screened for blindness and other illnesses and inoculated before they are allowed to enter any cities. We will then try our best to help them return to their place of origin, to find jobs and build their lives over again.”

With the Russians gone and the Taliban defeated, the refugees can expect to return to a country focused less on war and more on rebuilding.

“Afghanistan has come a long way in the past year with the help of the American forces and United Nations,” said Mohammed. “Afghan citizens should look forward to returning because the danger is over.”



Photo by Pfc. Christina Carde

Contractors begin the foundation for the new refugee camp outside the city of Gardez. The camp is scheduled to begin receiving Afghan refugees from Pakistan in late April.

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

1530Z at the MWR building, “The Four Feathers.” A British officer resigns his post just before battle and subsequently receives four white feathers from his friends and fiancée as symbols of what they believe to be his cowardice.



Tomorrow's movie will be “Deliverance.”

Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	<i>Today</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
Bagram:	<i>Scattered t-storms</i> H: 64F L: 43F	<i>Rain</i> H: 61F L: 39F
Kandahar:	<i>Scattered t-storms</i> H: 81F L: 50F	<i>Scattered t-storms</i> H: 82F L: 55F
Kabul:	<i>Scattered t-storms</i> H: 66F L: 41F	<i>Rain</i> H: 57F L: 41F
Uzbekistan:	<i>Partly cloudy</i> H: 58F L: 34F	<i>Mostly cloudy</i> H: 62F L: 33F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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RETURN, from Page 1

people. It shows that we will not stop; we will continue supporting Afghanistan.”

The “Devils” were able to clear the Sami Ghar mountains of a significant amount of weapons and explosives. They found caches covered with hay, buried in orchards, hidden in wells and in piles of manure.

“One compound was like a maze,” said Pfc. Erick Guevara, B Company, 2-504th PIR. “We had to leave pieces of paper in certain rooms to designate for everyone the areas we had already cleared, but the Afghans kept picking up the papers we were leaving behind.”

The international mix of weapons and explosives gleaned from the Sami Ghar mountains reflected Afghanistan’s history of wars and conflicts. The operation removed more than 170 rocket-propelled grenades, 180 land mines, 20 automatic rifles and machine guns, and tons of rockets, rifles, launchers with a full range of accessories. Such stockpiles resulted in a handful of Afghans being taken into custody for questioning.

“We found something major every day,” said Capt. Andrew Zieseniss, B Company, 2-504th PIR commander. “There were compounds that resembled arms rooms on the inside — full of explosives and weapons systems.”

“Our battalion actually got its largest find



Photo by Spc. Jim Wagner, 109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C., empty a room of rocket-propelled grenades and take inventory. According to officials, “literally tons” of munitions and weapons were confiscated during Operation Valiant Strike, which ended Sunday.

since we’ve been in country — four truckloads worth in one cache alone,” said Zieseniss.

“Most of the locals seemed extremely pleased when we cleared their village or detained any of the bad guys. They seemed relieved — like they felt safer,” he added.

B Company’s fire support officer also reinforced the importance of ridding the re-

gion of so many weapons.

“Finding all the caches made the walking worth while; we had our (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) guys take care of all the mines and ordnance we found,” said 1st Lt. Jeff Pickler, B Company, 2-504th PIR, fire support officer.

“They had some pretty big booms out there, but I’ll remember Valiant Strike more than any other operation I’ve been on for its positive feedback. The villagers were out waving and smiling in the streets at us and saying ‘hi.’ It’s a good feeling. That is definitely one of our main reasons for being here,” said Pickler.

The soldiers returning from Valiant Strike were eager to enjoy some warm chow and catch up on a little rest, but one squad automatic weapon gunner was quick to emphasize the importance of continuing operations like Valiant Strike.

“We’re always ready to go out; we know it’s serious every time we leave the wire. It’s our job,” said Spc. Robert Monroe, B Company, 3-504th PIR. “I believe our mission (in Afghanistan) is very important, we are not only taking out the terrorist threat to those around the world, we are making the country better, we are sharing our democracy and helping to improve their way of life.”

Patrolling in perspective

By Spc. John Slosser
CJTF-180 Public Affairs Office

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan - Although Operation Valiant Strike utilized a series of helicopter air assaults, the meticulous searching and clearing of villages required the paratroopers to do a grueling amount of good-old-fashioned ruckmarching.

Several of the soldiers mentioned some of the conditions that contributed to the total experience while patrolling through the Sami Ghar mountain range.

“The days were pretty warm but the nights kept getting colder and colder,” said

1st Sgt. Brian Severino, B Company, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment first sergeant. “We always say ‘travel light, freeze at night.’”

“Well, we froze those last few nights,” he added with a laugh.

“I was starting to smell pretty bad, especially at night while I was trying to sleep in my bivey sack” said one paratrooper after explaining how much he sweated during the operation.

“It’s the weight on your back and the rocks you walk up and around,” said Pfc. Erick Guevara, B Company, 2-504th PIR.

— See **PERSPECTIVE**, Page 7



Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from ESPN.com)

Jayhawks make sense as champs

ESPN — Kansas is looking a lot more like Maryland every day — which is precisely why the Jayhawks enter the Final Four as the favorite.

Whether they like it or not — and they probably won't — the Jayhawks have emerged out of this balanced pack as the team to beat in the Final Four.

The reason? Seniors. Sure, the veterans at Arizona, Pittsburgh, Kentucky, Oklahoma and even Maryland weren't able to get to the Final Four. But only the latter two had the experience of being there just a season ago.

Kansas' veteran pair of Nick Collison and Kirk Hinrich got to the national semifinals a year ago before losing to Maryland.

Kansas found a way to win the Big 12 regular season title — edging out Texas and Oklahoma in the process — despite having sophomore forward Wayne Simien (14.8 ppg, 8.2 rpg) for only 16 games because of a separated shoulder. Granted, the Jayhawks did benefit from an easier Big 12 schedule (two games against the likes of Iowa State, Kansas State and Nebraska) and they got Texas at home. And, yes, they did lose at Oklahoma.

But Kansas still won the regular season by leaning heavily on Collison and Hinrich, the two senior starters who have willed this team back to the Final Four with regional wins over Duke and Arizona last weekend in Anaheim.



Kirk Hinrich and Kansas avenged their regular-season loss to Arizona.

No. 1 Sooners lose their way in 2-3 zone



Syracuse's 2-3 zone left little room for De'Angelo Alexander and the Sooners to operate.

ALBANY, N.Y. — Kelvin Sampson has been around long enough to know hyperbole when he hears it. The Oklahoma coach also knows a nation watched Syracuse's 2-3 zone smother his No. 1-seeded Sooners.

It was, make no mistake, a big factor in the No. 3 seeded Orangemen's 63-47 victory and Final Four berth.

As for any further analysis? Sampson tried to provide the antidote.

"That 2-3 zone is good. But let's

not make it out to be Godzilla," Sampson said.

Nice try. Sampson can try to minimize the zone's impact, but

Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim's standby for most of his 27-year tenure was, on this Sunday in Pepsi Arena — The Thing That Swallowed Time.

The Sooners were outscored 14-3 in the final 8:56 of the first half. Oklahoma led only briefly, 17-16, while Syracuse built a 30-20 lead by halftime on the shuffling-arms and electric-sliding feet of Carmelo Anthony, Hakim Warrick, Kueth Duany and any other Orangeman summoned off the bench. Syracuse increased the lead to 38-20 by pitching a shutout for the first 5:01 of the second half.

By then, Syracuse had built a rabbit-proof fence from sideline to sideline. And all that followed were wild shots and misguided passes from All-American guard Hollis Price (eight points), backcourt mate Quannas White and the rest of the shaky Sooners. Oklahoma shot a woeful 31 percent from the floor and committed 19 turnovers.

"It's obvious that our defense was the difference," said Boeheim, who will lead his charges against South Region champion Texas in one national semifinal in New Orleans on Saturday. "We did a great job of sliding and adjusting to what Oklahoma was doing."

Seniors deserve 'winning' title

ESPN — Arizona's flight home Saturday night from Anaheim to Tucson was understandably quiet. Seniors Jason Gardner, Luke Walton and Ricky Anderson were among those still stunned over losing to Kansas in the Elite Eight.

The Wildcats spent a year only talking about winning the national title, beginning with last May's trip to Australia. That's right, not the Pac-10 title or a Final Four berth. Arizona's only discussions about March centered around winning the national title.

Oklahoma may not have been as single-minded as Arizona, but Hollis Price and Quannas White certainly saw a homecoming week ahead — not the end of the season Sunday. And that's what made it so hard to watch the seniors lose before New Orleans.

Saturday's loss to Marquette was also especially tough on Kentucky's Keith Bogans and Jules Camara, while Pittsburgh's Brandin Knight and Donatas Zavackas are done playing college basketball. Maryland's Steve Blake, Drew Nicholas and Tahj Holden won a national title last season, so not getting back to the Final Four isn't as heartbreaking, but still would have certainly been a significant story.

And, before we get into what could have been, this class of seniors should be commended for what they accomplished over a four and in some cases five years in school.

Too often, we discuss the underclassmen as they relate to the NBA draft, or the simple week-by-week buzz about freshmen like Dajuan Wagner last season or Carmelo Anthony this season.

SPORTS, from Page 6

But it's the seniors who all fell a game or two short of the Final Four who were the poster players for what is right with the sport. Each of the seniors who lost this weekend got better each season, and only two tried to leave early for the NBA. But Gardner and Bogans were smart enough two years ago to realize they weren't ready when they declared for the draft after their sophomore seasons.

Each showed tremendous leadership in their programs, helping underclassmen and junior college transfers become better players. Some won awards for being the best players in the game over the past two seasons, but all proved that hard work and determination can equal success.

Howland first to interview for UCLA

ESPN — Pittsburgh coach Ben Howland met with his players on Monday, but gave no indication if he was in line to take over at UCLA.

Howland, who called UCLA his "dream job" last week, declined to speak with reporters after meeting with his team. Julius Page, a junior guard, said "No comment" as he and teammates rushed away from the meeting looking glum-faced.

Several players said previously that Howland's loss would be devastating to the basketball program.

Howland met over the weekend with UCLA athletics director Dan Guerrero, but did not say if he was offered the job. He is believed to be the Bruins' top candidate.

Howland, a Southern California native, was rumored to be interested in UCLA even before Steve Lavin was fired last month. Howland said last week, even before Pitt was eliminated from the NCAA Tournament, that he hoped to be considered by UCLA.



Photo by Spc. Jim Wagner, 109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Paratroopers catch a rare break during a compound search.

PERSPECTIVE, from Page 5

"The first day was nothing more than crossing rivers and rucking with wet feet, with your knee pads falling down because they were so soaked. You're constantly drinking to stay hydrated, but always a little thirsty because you're trying to conserve water."

Despite the uncomfortable conditions, Guevara mentioned the lighter side of combat patrols.

"When we're hiking through the valleys you can hear so much in the distance," Guevara said. "Funny stuff like donkeys yelling and kids playing. It was the nicest right after it rained out there, when the clouds started to lift and there was no dust and the mountains were all clear and visible."

The soldiers had a few interesting encounters with Sami Ghar's people.

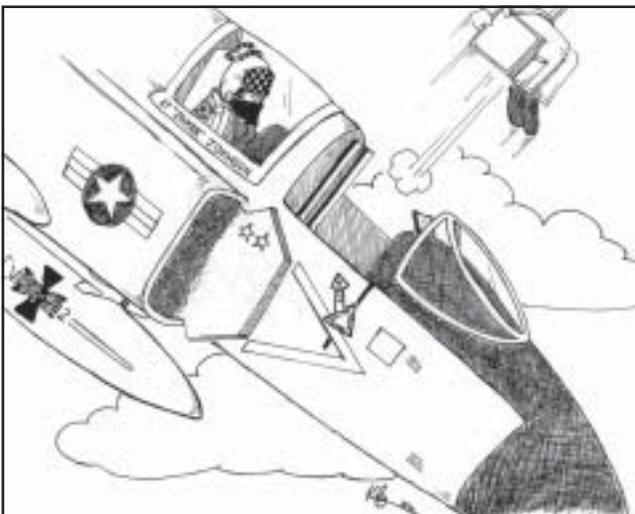
"We jokingly asked a bunch of the local kids if they were headed off to school and a small boy turned to us and surprised all of us by saying 'yes, I am going to school,'" said Capt. Andrew Zieseniss, B Co. 2-504 PIR commander. "The soldiers inquired 'well, uh, aren't you going to be late' and the boy casually replied, 'no, I have time' and continued on his way to class," said Zieseniss.

Many of the soldiers commented on the how friendly the villagers were, citing examples of warm greetings and how the locals were constantly offering tea to the men.

All in all the "Devils" seem to look back on the operation with a little optimism.

"I think we were pretty successful out there," said Zieseniss. "We found more stuff than I thought we would find and, up to this date, we're lucky — no one in our unit got hurt."

"April fools, captain ... captain?"



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support