

In the badlands of Afghanistan, USAF airmen and their allies continue Operation Enduring Freedom.

Afghan Duty

Photography by USAF combat camera photographers



Air Hub. An Air Force C-130 approaches touchdown at Bagram Airfield, a remote outpost packed with coalition aircraft such as these Army and Marine attack helicopters. The war in Afghanistan began Oct. 7, 2001. In November 2001, US forces began using Bagram, a former Soviet base, as the center of air operations. About 15,000 troops continue to prosecute the war in Afghanistan, and troops in the landlocked, mountainous war zone require continuous resupply by air.



Bare Bones. *Bagram's military encampment, reminiscent of a Wild West town, is home to many of Operation Enduring Freedom's airmen and other forces. The austere base also houses troops from Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, and South Korea. They are routinely engaged in action throughout Afghanistan.*



USAF photo by SSgt. Derrick C. Goode

US Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Joe Belcher



US Army photo by Sgt. Martin K. Newton

On-Call Airmen. *At Bagram, hard by the soaring mountains of Afghanistan, the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command are ever-present. Pictured at left is an AFRC C-130 being tended by Bagram ground personnel. Above: A C-130 brings out patients injured in a bomb blast in Kandahar.*

Warthog War. *The Air Force's A-10 close air support aircraft have been workhorses in Afghanistan. Because of their age, they require steady upkeep. Here, an unidentified Air Force crew chief puts an A-10 engine through its 400-hour maintenance routine.*



US Army photo by Spc. Gul A. Alisan



On Expedition. *The durable A-10 is ideally suited for action in the extreme conditions of Afghanistan. Above, Warthogs with the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron sit on the flight line at Bagram. These aircraft were deployed from Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz. At right, an A-10 departs for yet another mission against Taliban and al Qaeda fighters.*



Hard Duty. *Large numbers of airmen have cycled through Bagram over the past three years. Far left, A1C Nicholas W. Canankamp, weapons loader, readies weapons for an A-10 in 2002. In 2004, Capt. Michael C. Harrell, A-10 pilot (at left), goes through his preflight checklist.*

USAF photo by SSgt. Cherie A. Thurby



Allies. A Norwegian F-16 (top) goes into action over Afghanistan. Airmen from Norway have provided air cover for the cargo aircraft operating out of Bagram. At right, USAF Maj. Beau Rogers displayed an American flag while refueling his Dutch F-16 in 2003. Rogers was an exchange pilot serving with the Royal Netherlands Air Force.



USAF photo by Capt. Allen Heritage

USAF photo by 2nd Lt. Rebecca Garland



US Army photo by Spc. Jory C. Randall

Eyes and Ears. USAF's battlefield airmen play an especially prominent role in Afghanistan. At far left, Capt. Danny Stout, a B-52 pilot serving as an air liaison officer, looks up as he guides an A-10 to a target. Stout is serving a two-year tour with Army units.

SSgt. Jason Hoover (above, foreground), a tactical air control party airman, is on patrol near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Hoover, part of the 20th Air Support Operations Squadron, was attached to the Army's 10th Mountain Division.



Lifeline. Now about to enter its fourth year, the war in Afghanistan shows no signs of ending any time soon. C-17 transports (such as the one shown above, arriving from Charleston AFB, S.C.) have proved invaluable because of their range, payload, and ability to operate from rough airfields. In the photo at right, US airmen and soldiers prepare a C-130 for the first airdrop of heavy equipment to forces in a combat zone since the Vietnam War. The 2003 airdrop was requested by Army forces operating in a remote, nearly inaccessible area of Afghanistan. The photo below shows one of the C-130s that delivered more than 49,000 pounds of materiel in that effort.



War Continues. At left, a C-130 delivers fuel, ammunition, and supplies to ground forces by low-altitude airdrop. Largely out of the public's eye, airmen in Afghanistan continue to mount effective operations in the Global War on Terror, and they will for some time to come. ■