

# The MOUNTAIN VIEW MAGAZINE

FROM BUSINESS  
EXEC TO  
DEPLOYED DOCTOR  
PAGE 4

PLUS  
SIBLINGS REUNITED  
NEW MEDIC COLUMNIST



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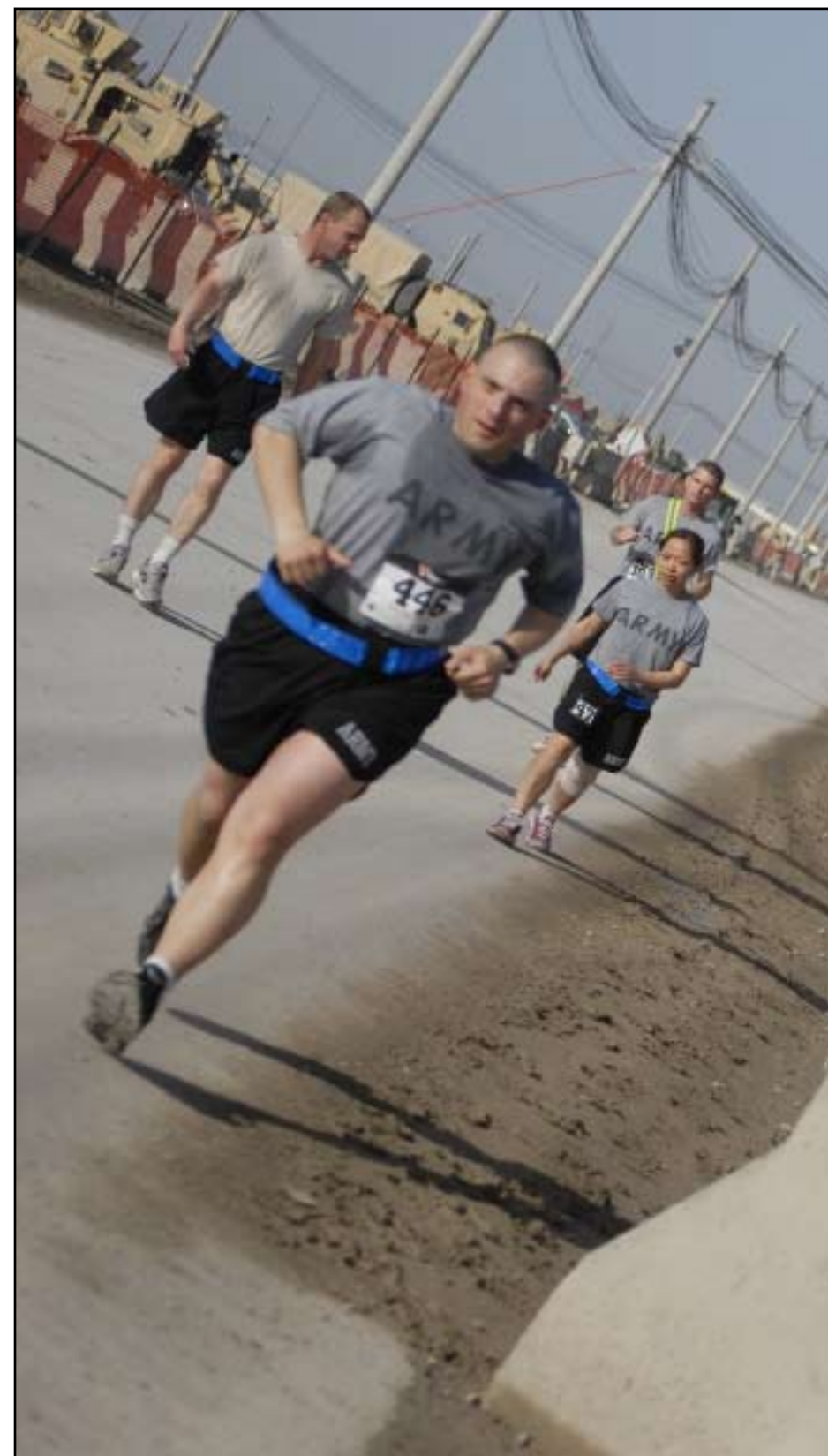
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## *In stride*



Runners on Kandahar Airfield in Kandahar, Afghanistan, participate in a 24-hour ultramarathon April 17 to 18. Participants ran to raise money for charities of their choosing. (Photo by Sgt. Matthew Diaz)

On the cover



Photo by Sgt. Breanne Pye

Capt. Douglas "Doc" Powell, brigade surgeon assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, left his job as a business executive for Burton Snowboards at the age of 40 to attend medical school and become a doctor for the U.S. Army. Powell, a native of Middlebury, Vt., is now working as a medical doctor on the front lines of Operation Enduring Freedom in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

### **The MOUNTAIN VIEW** MAGAZINE

Regional Command South  
**Commanding General**  
Maj. Gen. James L. Terry  
**Command Sergeant Major**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Greca

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TF Lightning

TF Raider

TF Spartan

TF Thunder

CT Uruzgan

CT Zabul

NTM-A

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Story and photos by Sgt. Breanne Pye  
Task Force Raider Photojournalist

# Anatomy of an old dog mastering new tricks

A COMBAT SURGEON'S JOURNEY FROM  
THE TRENCHES OF BIG BUSINESS TO THE  
FRONT LINES OF AFGHANISTAN



Capt. Douglas "Doc" Powell, brigade surgeon assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, assesses a casualty during a medical training exercise April 16, 2010 at the Joint Readiness Training Center Fort in Polk, La. Powell, a native of Middlebury, Vt., attended the training in order to prepare for his current deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Powell left his job as a business executive at Burton Snowboards at the age of 40 to attend medical school and become a doctor for the U.S. Army. He is currently serving at Camp Nathan Smith in order to oversee operations at the Troop Medical Clinic there.

CAMP NATHAN SMITH, Afghanistan -- Flip through history’s pages and you will find countless stories of men and women who have taken incredible journeys and become celebrated heroes. If you’re looking for a modern-day hero, you won’t have to look any further than a 49-year-old combat surgeon who’s known as “Doc” throughout Task Force Raider.

A former business executive for Burton Snowboards, Army Capt. (Dr.) Douglas Powell is the brigade surgeon for the 4th Infantry Division’s Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team. His mission here is quite different from that of the design team he’d led with Burton, as he serves on the front lines of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

Powell, a native of Middlebury, Vt., said his journey to becoming an Army surgeon began when he enlisted as a medic in the Vermont National Guard after graduating from college. He competed as part of the Vermont Guard’s winter biathlon team for five years, and was hired by Burton Snowboards as a project manager.

“Doug was an asset to our company,” said Jake Burton, the company’s founder. “He was a hard worker who always gave me everything he had, never quit, and always led by example.”

Though he thoroughly enjoyed his work at Burton Snowboards and the environment that kind of work provided, Powell said, he continued to feel as if something important was missing from his life.

“After eight years at Burton, I started feeling a strong desire to get away from business and start doing something that would have an impact on people’s lives,” he said. “At that point, I began volunteering at a hospital in Burlington, Vt.”

Within a month of working in the hospital’s cancer ward, Powell determined that he needed to have some form of medical service in his career.

When Powell told Burton he was leaving to pursue a career in medicine, Burton said it seemed late to be trying something so ambitious. Even so, he said, Powell’s great intentions and drive, coupled with a little stubbornness, are aspects of his personality that make him the kind of man who is capable of extraordinary things.

“Doug was never a guy to act impulsively,” Burton said. “Clearly, his decision was well thought out, so as much as I hated to see him go, I never considered talking him out of his decision.”

Powell said after working in a business environment for so long, his volunteer work in the cancer ward was one of the most trying, yet rewarding, experiences of his life. Throughout his time there, he said, he felt the call to practice medicine become stronger and more important in his life.



“While working full-time and volunteering at the hospital, I signed up for night classes to begin knocking out the pre-med classes I needed to complete before applying to medical school,” he said.

The process was arduous, he recalled, as his earlier education was in English and history, so he had to take multiple classes to qualify as a medical school applicant.

“I had a lot of ground to make up if I wanted to make it into medical school, so I set a goal for myself,” Powell said. “I would take one class, (such as) biology, and if I got an ‘A,’ I would continue taking classes.”

He maintained that standard throughout the pre-med program.

After pre-med, Powell said, he knew he had a long way to go before he could practice medicine, so he continued to work for Burton and spent all of his free time volunteering in the cancer ward.

“There were a lot of patients and experiences that began to weave the fabric of the epiphany of my wanting to practice medicine,” he said. “But there was one patient in particular who made it all happen.”

During his time as a volunteer, Powell explained, he worked with a woman who had terminal breast cancer. Every day, the woman would bring her husband and young daughter to sit with her as she went through chemotherapy. Powell said the woman never focused on the treatment she knew would not work. Instead, he said, she focused on interacting with her family and giving them memories and joy that would last a lifetime.

“There was something about the woman’s drive and passion for life that both inspired and humbled me,” Powell said. “She had the most positive attitude as she interacted with her family and doctors in the ward. Even after she died, I never stopped being affected by her enthusiasm.”

Though his first application to medical school was denied, he said, the memory of the woman and her family convinced him to continue his efforts to become a medical practitioner.

“Throughout my career, one of the best pieces of advice I ever received was from a medical colleague of mine,” Powell said. “That colleague told me, ‘Whenever you have doubt about the path you are on, go and spend time with the patients. They will always pull you through. They will always inspire you, and they will always remove doubt.’”

Powell said that advice has proven true in every stage of his medical career, and is as meaningful now as it was in the beginning. He said it wasn’t just about spending physical time with the patients, but also reflecting on his experiences with them that gave him inspiration along his journey.



Capt. Douglas “Doc” Powell, brigade surgeon assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, conducts physical fitness March 23, within the confines of Camp Nathan Smith’s walls. Powell, a native of Middlebury, Vt., is an avid outdoorsman, having competed on the U.S. Army’s winter biathlon team in Vermont, as well as the Army 10-miler team at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.



# TOP SHOTS



"TOP SHOTS" ENTRIES ARE OPEN TO ALL READERS.

ALL "TOP SHOTS" SUBMISSIONS MUST BE IN BY THE FRIDAY BEFORE PUBLICATION DATE. SEND SUBMISSIONS TO [10THMTNPAD@CMAIL.COM](mailto:10THMTNPAD@CMAIL.COM)



But the denial of his first medical school application did plant some doubt in his mind, Powell said.

“I went out to California to work for a friend of mine in the snowboard industry,” he said, “and really thought I would be continuing in the business.”

But on his way back to the East Coast for a final interview for a position in the private sector, he recalled, he ran into a woman in the airport who had a cast on her arm. He stopped to help her with her bags, and in their conversation he learned the woman was on her way to say goodbye to her best friend, who was dying of breast cancer.

On his flight, Powell said, he began reflecting on his own experience with his favorite cancer patient and her family.

“I began writing an essay about my experiences in working with and eventually (having) to say goodbye to that incredible woman,” he said. “I wrote her whole story in one take. It was one of those rare times you get the whole story out perfectly, on the very first draft.”

Powell said when he re-read the essay as he got off the plane, he knew without a doubt he would apply to medical school again.

“I used that essay as my entrance essay on the medical school application,” he said. “After an anxious wait, I was accepted into 10 different medical schools across the country.”

Powell chose to attend Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C. At the time of his post-graduate enrollment, Powell was 40 years old.

Walk through the halls of any American university and you expect to see the bright, young faces of eager students, fresh out of high school, ready to write the first solo chapter in their personal “book of life.” But as those young students prepared for their first lecture, they found themselves sitting next to a jovial, white-haired, former business executive they may have mistaken for the professor.

As he started this new stage of his journey, Powell found himself with a much different set of challenges from those his bright-eyed counterparts faced.

“What was tough, very tough, was to be thrown into medical school with young, smart students fresh out of science-based majors,” he said. “As a liberal arts major in my undergraduate degree, learning science was something new that I had to undertake to enter medicine.”

With only two years of medical classes, taken at night while volunteering and working a full-time, high-level, private-sector job, it was incredibly challenging to become comfortable with the new subject matter he was studying, Powell said.

The challenge for Powell came in trying to keep up with his classmates academically after years of navigating the

twists and turns of business. Many of his classmates were fresh out of four-year programs and had a significant amount of lab research experience.

“There were many times during my first and second year when I doubted I was smart or resilient enough to get through the next exam,” he said. “I wondered whether I should have chosen another medical school, a less arduous profession, or even if I should have continued my career in business.”

But the discrepancy leveled off when his classes transitioned from class work to working with patients.

“It was much easier to apply science to the care of patients than it was to get good grades on standardized exams,” Powell said. “But as I got better and better with the former, I continued to struggle with the latter.”

It was a battle, Powell said, but he made it through one test and then another, one class and then another, one year and then another, and finally walked across the stage at the end of his four-year program to receive his diploma as a medical doctor. He had finally made it.

“I attribute a lot of my ability to endure those trying times to my background as an aerobic athlete,” Powell said. “No matter how busy or overwhelmed I felt, I got out for a run or a long bike ride to recharge my batteries enough to face the next challenge head-on.”

The next challenge was medical residency - practicing medicine under the supervision of a fully licensed physician in a hospital or clinic. Powell chose to complete his residency in internal medicine at Madigan Army Medical Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

During his residency, Powell competed on the Army 10-miler running team made up of combat arms officers and noncommissioned officers, most who’d served on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Spending time with teammates from my 10-miler team really inspired me to want to practice medicine in a line unit,” Powell said. “Hearing their stories and experiences reignited my original passion to engage in public service. I absolutely knew, without a doubt, that I had to serve in a combat arms unit.”

Shortly after completing his residency at Madigan, Powell accepted his first assignment as a medical professional as brigade surgeon for the 4th Infantry Division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team “Raiders.”

Army Lt. Col. David Meyer, the brigade’s executive officer, said Powell is an inspiration.

“I can’t imagine having the guts and determination to change careers at 40,” he said. “I wouldn’t even know where to start.”

But Powell always knows exactly where to start, Meyer added. Whether it’s turning one career in for another or figuring out how to train hundreds of Afghan soldiers and police who can’t read to how to administer advanced medical

aid on the battlefield, Powell always figures out a way to get the job done, he said.

Figuring out how to overcome seemingly impossible odds is exactly the sort of challenge that inspires Powell to continue his journey as a medical professional in the Army.

“Being a doctor on the front lines gives me an opportunity to effect the care, well-being and medical readiness of a more diverse population of people,” he said. “It’s an incredibly rewarding, interesting and challenging job.”

The brigade has established a medical footprint throughout Afghanistan that extends across some of the most dangerous and geographically challenging terrain in the country, he added.

“To be able to deliver health care in an area that didn’t previously have an effective health care system in place gives me an incredible feeling of hope and accomplishment,” Powell said.

During his deployment he had helped to design and implement a comprehensive medical training program for the Afghan security forces that will be saving lives long after the last American boots leave Afghan soil.

When he deployed, Powell said, he realized the Afghan forces never would have access to the medical equipment U.S. forces routinely carry with them. He and his team began to put together a training manual that uses common items the Afghan forces would find on the battlefield. Because a large percentage of the Afghan population is illiterate, Powell and his team used step-by-step pictures so Afghan forces would understand it and be able to pass the training on without the help of U.S. forces.

The manual now is a standard for medical training for Afghan forces across Afghanistan.

After all the success Powell has helped bring to Raider Brigade during his time in Afghanistan, it’s hard to imagine how he could possibly find a way to challenge himself further as he transitions to the next step of his incredible journey.

In June, Powell will begin a fellowship program in critical care medicine at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

“This fellowship is an opportunity for me to learn from, and work with, some of the best trauma and burn physicians in the world,” he said. “It’s also an opportunity for me to teach new resident doctors and medical students critical care medicine.”

Meyer said Powell has an exceptional ability to teach.

“He easily identifies how people learn, and without passing judgment, is able to create an environment of knowledge for them,” he said.

In the meantime, Powell said, he doesn’t plan on slowing down his efforts to continue expanding his brigade’s medical footprint in Afghanistan any time soon.

“My goal right now is to continue to make sure

Raider Brigade is prepared for any medical contingency that might come up,” he said. “Experiencing success with the programs we’ve already implemented here only makes the last few months of this deployment vital to creating even more progress.”

Reflecting on the end of his time as a brigade surgeon and the steps it took to get there, Powell said he is just as inspired to continue his work in public service as he was when he first volunteered at the cancer ward in Vermont in 1999.

“Twelve years after I began my journey, I am still discovering and still experiencing rewards that are indescribable,” he said. “This calling is as strong and motivating to me now, as it was the day I began my work in the medical field.”

But the doctor won’t tell you his story is special or unique.

“I think when people consider taking a long journey like I have done, they see the beginning and the end,” he said. “They don’t realize there is a great amount of life experience collected along the way.”

“Each place I traveled throughout this journey has brought great friends and experiences with it,” he continued. “When I reached my destination, I looked up and I had less hair and it was all white, but I knew I had done it, without giving up life to get it done.”

Still, he added, it’s not possible to start an epic journey like this and get to the end without help.

“You make it to the first fork in the road, then up the pass and through the mountains, then down into the valley,” he said. “Ultimately, it’s about linking all the little sections together to get to the end.”



Capt. Douglas “Doc” Powell, brigade surgeon assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, looks over an X-ray March 23 at Camp Nathan Smith’s Troop Medical Clinic with Spc. Dustin Howard, X-ray technician assigned to Company C, 1st Brigade Support Battalion, 1BCT, 4th Inf. Div.





 **SpC Don W. Ellen**

# ~~The Don Says...~~ The Reynolds Report

As most of you know, the heat has arrived. With the heat comes sweating and smelling. Therefore, this month's topic is bodily hygiene. Being un-hygienic isn't only distasteful for the others around you, it can also be detrimental to your own health. Staying clean can lead to reduction in rashes, bacterial infections, and fungal growths that can take root in your body. Personal hygiene consists of taking showers, washing laundry, and cleaning your living spaces. By making personal hygiene a priority, you are making your health and your roommates' sense of smell a priority. Taking care of yourself will improve your health and keep you out of the aid station. This is Pfc. Reynolds saying, stay clean RC-South. Climb to Glory.

Pfc. Matthew P. Reynolds  
10th MTN HHBN- HSC  
RC(S) Role 1

## Cultural Considerations:

*The family is the single most important unit in the Afghan culture. Men and women's roles are much more defined along traditional lines. Women are generally responsible for household duties, where as men will be the bread winners. In the cities professional women do exist. Families commonly arrange marriages for their children. Factors such as tribe, status, network, and wealth are the major factors forming any choice. Families traditionally live together in the same walled compound, known as the kala. When a son gets married he and his wife begin their married lives in a room under the same roof.*

*As with much of the Muslim world, the family is sacred and as such, is highly protected. As a result, probing about the family is not advised.*

## SOLDIER IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Spc. Nicholas K. Pollock

**Unit:** C/1-502D INF REGT

**Hometown:** Manchester, N.H.

**Quote:** Doing what needs to be done to take care of the people of Now Ruzi!

While flying his Raven, Spc. Pollock spotted what appeared to be IED making materials. He did another pass and with his personal camera took a picture of his screen. Then he had his co-pilot show it to his chain of command. This was enough evidence to launch QRF in the area that resulted in finding bags of fertilizer, nuts and bolts, as well as other IED making materials.



COMMAND COLUMN

A short helicopter flight from Kandahar Airfield, it is clearly apparent by the greenery of the pomegranate groves and poppy fields that spring has arrived in southern Afghanistan.

Our winter operations were very successful, as we continued to gain and hold ground in areas formerly controlled by the insurgents. As insurgent fighters attempt to return to these same areas they previously controlled, Afghan and coalition forces are in these previously held positions, and it is clear that the insurgents are no longer welcome. Thanks to numerous security improvements achieved during the past several months, I am confident that collectively, we will maintain security in these areas, and thereby win the support of the local population.

The Washington Post's Rajiv Chandrasekaran noted in a recent article that, "For the first time since the war began, the Taliban is commencing a summer fighting season with less control and influence of territory in the south than it had the previous year."

The gains mentioned by Mr. Chandrasekaran simply would not have been possible without your dedication to the mission. For those of our comrades who have made the ultimate sacrifice and those who have been injured – you are constantly in my thoughts and prayers. For those living and fighting at the various SPs, COPs, and FOBs in Regional Command South, there isn't a day that goes by that I am not humbled to be your commanding general.

The Afghans continue to take a leading role in the day-to-day military operations. ANSF continue to improve, their success is what will allow us to transfer to a supporting role and will lead to eventual transition. When I visit with Afghans, I am heartened by their dedication and determination to see their country succeed. They too have sacrificed greatly and we should be proud of our partnership and collective efforts.

This is a critical time in our nation's commitment to creating peace and stability in Afghanistan. I encourage you to take time to reflect on your accomplishments as well as review your goals and objectives for the remainder of your deployment. You are helping the Afghans shape their country's history, and when you look back on this time on your life you should be proud. You should also take time to consider the sacrifices made back home by friends, family and loved ones who allow you to serve. They are the "silent soldiers," who ask for little, but give much and we should save no effort in thanking them for their contributions.

During the next few months, we will conduct several transfers of authority within our area of responsibility. I would like to thank those who have served so nobly; Task Force Strike and Task Force Destiny. And then welcome our two newest brigades; Task Force Spartan and Task Force Thunder.

I look forward to seeing you in the field.  
Climb to Glory!

Maj. Gen. Terry

## CHAPLAIN'S

### Taking up a Musical Instrument during a Deployment

By Chaplain (Maj.) Steve Cantrell

"Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!" (Psalm 150:4 NKJV)

During this deployment to Afghanistan, perhaps you've thought about learning to play an instrument. I believe that one of God's richest blessings is the gift of music and the ability to learn to play an instrument. With musical instruments, you have many options and many price ranges. I'm one of those guys who can play many musical instruments. I'd like to share with you enough to get you started on an instrument during this deployment.

Let me review a few basics. You will need an instrument to practice on. To buy an instrument online, be sure to do the Internet research, check out product reviews, and talk to musicians in your unit. Also, look at buying an instructional CD and music booklet. Ask around to see if you have someone in your unit who could show you a few pointers. Now I'll cover the harmonica and the guitar. Perhaps one of these will nab your interest.

The harmonica wins the contest for the most compact instrument. It will fit easily into your pocket. During my deployment to Iraq, my father sent me several Lee Oskar harmonicas in different keys. You can check out the Lee Oskar website and his line of harmonicas with replaceable parts. To play the harmonica you will practice blowing and drawing into the sound holes. Using an instructional booklet and CD, you will make progress. One of the most thrilling insights will be when you first learn how to bend notes to play the blues. So give the harmonica a shot. Learn to play simple tunes, folk song melodies, or even make up your own tunes.

The guitar wins the contest for the most popular deployment instrument. The USO on Kandahar Airfield has a number of Taylor guitars that you can sign out to practice on. You can usually find a guitarist around who will give you some pointers and tell you how he or she learned. Once you start learning your first tunes and playing chords and scales, you will develop sore finger tips. This is a time when folks are tempted to quit. However, the sore spots will become tough calluses over time. The nylon string classical guitar is much easier on the fingers.

Remember that the Holy Bible teaches "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJV). The same general principles of play for the guitar also apply to other stringed instruments like the bass guitar, banjo, mandolin, or ukulele. Other wind instruments like the Irish tin whistle or the ocarina may be just right for you. Whatever instrument you choose, the market is loaded with accessories, instructional materials as well as free Internet resources. "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined." – Thoreau

CLIMB TO GLORY





# Sisters reunited in Afghanistan

Story and photo by Maj. Robert Hoover  
Combined Team Zabul Public Affairs Officer

ZABUL, Afghanistan - With increased focus on supporting military families by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, our families can even be found among our service members here in Afghanistan. Two sisters had a brief, six-hour reunion at Forward Operation Base Lagman, April 18, after not seeing each other in more than four years. Maj. Veronika Reynolds and Spc. Raven Fitzgerald from Portland, Ore., said they were grateful for the time they got to spend together.

Reynolds serves as an aviation officer for Combined Team Zabul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Cavalry Regiment. She plans and coordinates all air movement in the province. Reynolds deployed from Vilseck, Germany, and was a prior enlisted Soldier in the aviation field. She fell in love with helicopters during a routine maintenance flight and went on to become a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot. This is her second deployment and first one to Afghanistan. She has been in the military for 19 years.

“I really enjoy the military and being a Blackhawk pilot. I am living the dream and having this opportunity to see my sister so many miles from home makes this reunion even more special,” said Reynolds.

Fitzgerald is in 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment as a flight operations specialist and deployed out of Fort Campbell, Ky. Fitzgerald said she enjoys her job and has to verify each pilot has an evasion action plan in case of emergencies and tracks all flight hours. Fitzgerald is based out of Tarin Kot at Camp Cole with Combined Team Uruzgan and joined the Army more than four years ago.

“This is my first deployment. I joined the Army because of my sister and you can say that she inspired me to go into the aviation field,” said Fitzgerald.

“I am really lucky to be at Tarin Kot, because it is spacious and surrounded by mountains. It is really very beautiful. I think that Lagman is pretty crowded and small. It makes me appreciate Tarin Kot more. I wasn’t expecting a room to myself and was prepared for much worse,” continued Fitzgerald.

The daughters of Phillip and Linda Huddleston, who have been married for 48 years and still live in Portland, are part of a large family of 12 with five sisters and five brothers. Their father is a retired chief warrant officer 3 meteorologist.

The sisters caught up on family and common interests such as their children. Both have sons. Reynolds has a son, Bobby, who is 19 months old and Fitzgerald has a son, Anthony, who is three years old. They also talked about their favorite NBA team, the Trailblazers. The reunion was short but a welcome reprieve from the daily operations of deployed life.

The sacrifices made by many service members doesn’t just include women sacrificing their time taking care of children, but also women deployed away from their children. Military families don’t fit into a standard mold and sometimes mothers deploy leaving their husbands to take care of the children. If both spouses are in the military, both can be deployed at the same time causing parents to create a plan to leave their loved ones with their grandparents or other family members. It is just part of the sacrifices that all military families have to make to be heroes on the home front.



Deployed sisters, Maj. Veronika Reynolds and Spc. Raven Fitzgerald are having a little fun catching up after four years at a six-hour reunion on Forward Operating Base Lagman April 18.

# KANDAHAR SAPPHIRES

Story and photos by Petty Officer 1st Class Thomas Coffman  
Regional Command South Photojournalist

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Buying precious stones or gems on the boardwalk at Kandahar Airfield can be an exciting yet daunting adventure for a deployed service member or civilian in a combat zone.

The stories of people buying gems in Afghanistan and turning over a sizable profit in the states pass around like rumors, but somebody always knows that relative in the jewelry business. But, there is also the risk of synthetics being tossed into the mix. Not to be confused with heat treatment, this is used to bring out the color in some stones such as rubies or sapphires.

A customer walks into the store for the first time and asks, “How do you know which ones are the good ones?”

“It depends on what you like,” says Ayoub, the store owner and buyer for the business.

Everybody has a different taste, that’s why there are so many shapes, sizes, cuts and colors.

A customer asks if the rubies are manmade.

“They are enhanced, by a process of heat treatment that brings out the color in the gem,” says Ayoub. “Afghanistan doesn’t have the modern facilities to cut gems as well, in comparison to Thailand and India.”

The Russian-Afghan war shifted everything to Pakistan, Ayoub said. Beginning with the Russian invasion, Afghan gem merchants left their homes, similar to Cuban cigar makers moving to South America, but Afghan gem merchants are now returning to Afghanistan.

“With 30 years of war, the gem trade, what was beginning to develop but has not had time to establish due to the invasion, still finds a way to maintain a market,” said Ayoub.

Afghan gem merchants who remain in the country run the risk of Taliban or corruption at the borders, but are aware of the reemergence of the market and want to bring back the reputation of Afghanistan as a leader in precious gems.

Ruby, emeralds, tourmaline, aquamarine, kunzite and lapis lazuli all have origins in Afghanistan, but when it comes to sapphires, they originate in the Cashmere region of India

and Sri Lanka including Thailand and Cambodia. In the U.S. the states of Montana and Minnesota are famous for their sapphire mines, according to the University of Minnesota - Duluth. Sapphires are highly sought after and marketed in Afghanistan, so they are easily mistaken to originate in Afghanistan. Sapphires are actually an aluminum oxide called corundum. In its pure state, it is colorless, but may be red, pink, blue, green, purple, black, orange or yellow. Gem quality red corundum is referred to as ruby, with all other sapphire.

For thousands of years, Afghan gems have adorned crowns or taken their place as the crown jewels of monarchs or have been reserved for royal families dating back to Alexander the Great and the Pharaohs. Lapis was at one

time limited to possession of royalty and was a criminal offense to have it in your position.

Ayoub said when he embarks on a buying trip, it may include places such as Africa, India, Pakistan and Thailand. Recently he traveled to Thailand on a week-long buying adventure to include a two-day course on new treatments for sapphires and rubies and how to identify the treatments, ranging from laser and glass fill, similar to the resin that is injected into the crack in a windshield. Ayoub says that whether you are buying gems as a business or as a consumer, you need to know what you are buying and if it has these new methods of enhancements. He said he also invested in the necessary equipment to establish a

gem lab on site and intends to employ certified gemologist.

During Ayoub’s latest trip to Thailand, after the classes and equipment buying was completed, he joined with a group of buyers he met up in Bangkok for their three-hour southeasterly trip to the border with Cambodia. Chatahuri, Thailand is considered the capital of gem buying and is where all the precious and semi-precious gem stones end up to be cut or sold in large quantities in Southeast Asia. The labor is cheap and has been the focal point for many years. The two dozen or so buyers from mostly Asian countries would have the entire trip arranged by a Bangkok dealer who would facilitate the expedition. After arriving at the hotel, the buyers prepare for a three-to-four-day marathon of meetings with hundreds of gem cutters from the region.





# THIS JUST IN!

FROM THE INTERNET



Soldier's Board

What decoration has George Washington's picture on it?

The Purple Heart

SHOUT OUTS

**Here is your chance to say hi to your friends and family. Contact the RC-South Public Affairs Office to put in your shout out request at [10thmntpao@gmail.com](mailto:10thmntpao@gmail.com)**

Beginning with a conference room in the hotel, the buyers would place signs on the front of their tables indicating what they are there to buy, then it begins. Nothing fancy, no champaign and hors d'œuvre, just business and thousands of precious and semi-precious gems, cut or rough. If they are cut, then they do not expect to pay a tariff when leaving the country, but if they are un-cut, then they expect that the gems will be cut by other gem cutters and will not generate further local income.

Ayoub described the three days as exhausting gem buying, which involves hours of peering through a loop to examine the degree of inclusions (foreign objects trapped in the gem stone), or the tiny imperfections that run like fractures through the gems. In fact they are solid crystal inclusions consisting of calcite, quartz or fluorite, but are expected because they are part of the natural process of their creation. You would expect to find these little fissures that resemble lighting bolts or feathers created under temperatures exceeding 1500 to 1800 degrees Celsius. If these are absent, then you should suspect that the gems are possibly synthetic and warrants further investigation. There is also the degree of cloudiness, which is a byproduct of heat enhancement. But some cloudiness is to be expected in a natural gem. The majority of rubies and sapphires sold today are heat treated to enhance the color and clarity.

Heat treating was implemented by the gem industry in the 1920's but has been around dating back several thousand years.

Retailers should tell a buyer if the stone is enhanced, but ultimately, the consumer needs to know something about what they are buying in direct proportion to the amount of money they are about to spend. Buying as an investment, you want to look for stones that are untreated and as clear as possible. But if you are buying for glamour, then the enhanced gems may be what you are looking for as they will present the characteristic color the public will identify with.

Ayoub recommends doing some research and have a reputable place to appraise the gems for a fee. Look for a professional who is disinterested in buying your gem or selling their gems and is providing an appraisal for a fee

only. Buy a few gems that you are interested in after you figure out what you are doing. Ayoub said to concentrate on something that has a good return.

When buying gems in Afghanistan, you are basically establishing yourself as the middle man and are cutting out the majority of the markup. The markup comes from the multiple change of hands and you are basically paying for the contact and work that goes into the gems. Gems could basically start out at a fraction of the cost you will expect to see in the west or Europe. If you are buying for pleasure or for establishing an investment portfolio, you need to look into having your gems properly certified by a company such as the Geological Institute of America. They will charge \$150 per stone evaluation and will laser etch the serial number on the edge of the stone for you. It will be certificated and placed on their website for insurance or to certify your portfolio.

Why do people buy Afghan gems? According to Ayoub that answer is twofold, "buying precious gems on deployment adds to the excitement and story value when giving as a gift to a loved one or as a conversation piece in a collection. They also believe that by buying Afghan they are essentially helping out the small businesses and economy of the Afghan people."



Mike Vrawink, a civilian pilot deployed to Kandahar Airfield, Kandahar, Afghanistan, examines precious stones and gems at a shop at the bazaar, April 16.

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