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FOCUS Pa.'s expanding bald eagle population is coming to Allegheny

SUNDAY COUPONS WORTH \$107 (IN MOST AREAS)

SPORTS Pens ship Ryan Malone, Gary Roberts to Tampa for draft pick B1

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Transit, union in standoff

The contract expires Monday night amid a financial crisis. A strike doesn't seem imminent.

BY JIM RITCHIE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Port Authority of Allegheny County and its 2,100-member drivers union agree the agency must find ways to contain spending to keep buses rolling. They just disagree on how to do it.

Meanwhile, the agency finished the year with more than a \$20 million shortfall because county Chief Executive Dan Onorato is withholding a \$27 million transit subsidy as leverage to influence the talks.

SEE STANDOFF • A13

High court ends term with venom

Gun, Gimo and death penalty cases bring out the ideological divide.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — For most of the term, Supreme Court justices showed remarkable restraint. They displayed broad agreement even in some volatile areas and refrained from angry dissents.

Then they decided the tough cases. The court, in its three most important cases, declared a constitutional right to have guns at home for self-defense, granted some constitutional protections to foreign prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and outlawed the death penalty for people who rape children.

SEE COURT • A13

"We're kind of like uninvited guests, you know, every time we come here. ... We can't let them know we are coming. We can't trust them. They could have the Taliban waiting on us."



Pfc. Santos Moreno, 21, of San Antonio, a member of the Army's 101st Airborne Division's 1st Platoon, Gulf Company, 4th Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, stands watch during a mission in the village of Kutyan in Afghanistan's Khost Province.

THE BATTLE FOR AFGHANISTAN

Soldiers mount perilous patrols as Taliban, al-Qaida lurk

STORY BY BETSY HIEL • PHOTOS BY JUSTIN MERRIMAN

DURAGI, Afghanistan Early morning, and 14 U.S. soldiers stand in a semi-circle for a mission briefing. Four Humvees, engines running, rumble beside them. "We're going to Warshallah today," Army Capt. Sam Karr, 28, of Manhattan, Kan., tells his platoon. "I guess it has, like, 200 bad guys in it. That's nothing, dudes — we've got 14, so we're good."

Their destination is a rugged Afghan mountain range a mile from North Waziristan, a lawless region of Pakistan and a haven for Taliban fighters and al-Qaida terrorists.

"The route is very rocky, very rough, very narrow. A lot of wadis — a riverbed, usually dry — and a lot of ups and downs. Great places for an ambush, all of it," Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Horn tells the soldiers, who are sweating under up to 90 pounds of gear.



A boy watches as 101st Airborne soldiers patrol in Kutyan.

"You pull into a small wadi that has no exit except for a narrow trail," says Horn, 35, of Granite Village, Ill. "So be thinking about that the whole time. "Be thinking about the medevac plan. What would you do if your battle buddy got hit? How would you treat them? "If we get hit, you are going to kill and suppress the enemy."

SEE AFGHANISTAN • A9

Bush, EU turn up heat on Mugabe

The president wants more sanctions in the wake of Zimbabwe's violence-stained ballot.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARARE, Zimbabwe came of further sanctions today as President United States in new ways to punish leader Robert Mugabe after the announced presidential election.

Earlier yesterday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the United States plans to introduce a U.N. resolution as early as this week, seeking tough measures against Zimbabwe.

"We will press for strong action by the United Nations, including an arms embargo against Zimbabwe and regime officials," a statement issued last week by David president Maryland.

The European would not rule out sanctions against "those responsible for the recent months," at EU presidency.

Friday's round widely condemn and other world gabe was the of and observers said babweans who polls did so only.

According to groups, at least and some 200,000 from their home violence was blamed soldiers and Muj. There were reports being beaten for is mutilated. W targets could no alive — elderly siblings — were.

"The internationality has condemned the Mugabe regime's ruthless campaign of politically motivated violence and intimidation with a strong and unified voice that makes clear that yesterday's election was in no way free and fair," Bush said.

SEE MUGABE • A8

BATTLE FOR AFGHANISTAN

A collage of images and text related to the battle in Afghanistan, including a soldier, a boy, and a map.

Restive land continues to challenge those trying to master it

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A couple of thunderstorms today; a thunderstorm tonight. A14

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Pakistan attacks Taliban strongholds. A3

Al-Qaida claims responsibility for a bombing that killed more than 20 people. A6

Sports

The Steelers release running back Najeh Davenport. B1

Organizers hope the Tour of Pennsylvania becomes an annual event. B1

City & Region

Many suburban communities will celebrate the Fourth of July on alternate days. C1

Opinion

The Supreme Court's gun ruling helps Barack Obama, says George F. Will, while the court's campaign-finance ruling hurts John McCain. D1

Business

Signs of a mortgage crisis were surfacing in early 2006. E1

Living

The Westmoreland Museum of American Art reflects on wartime Carnegie exhibitions. F1

Food

International ingredients flavor Isabela's inventive menu. G1

A baseball milestone

Baseball's biggest hit, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," is 100 years old. Find out how a great song was born. F1



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PHOTOS BY JUSTIN MERRIMAN

Pfc. Santos Moreno, 21, of San Antonio, a member of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, stands watch during a mission in the village of Kutyan in Afghanistan's Khost Province.

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"Be thinking about the medevac plan. What would you do if your battle buddy got hit? How would you treat them?"

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A lunar-like landscape

This is Tani District Center, an American combat outpost in Afghanistan's Khost Province, about 12 miles from the border with Pakistan.

Since March, it's been home to the 101st

Airborne Division's 1st Platoon, Gulf Company, 4th Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment — a conglomeration of truck drivers, mechanics, welders, fuelers and cooks, all combat-support roles. With the Army stretched thin, however, they've trained for combat.

Most of their sergeants and officers are on their third war-zone tour, here or in Iraq.

These men joined the Army for many reasons. Some come from military families; others wanted to escape small towns, to find jobs or direction in their lives.

Pfc. Paul Betz, 26, of Myrtle Beach, S.C., joined, in part, because a cousin was killed in the Sept. 11 attacks.

"She died in the north tower," he says. "I felt like maybe if I came here, I could get a



A boy watches as 101st Airborne soldiers patrol in Kutyan.

bit of vengeance.”

Sgt. Kendriad Brown, 25, of Thomasville, Ga., is on his third deployment, following two tours in Iraq. He joined to serve his country and is “good for anything.”

Like many here, he prefers the close quarters of a combat outpost over a bigger base, because “you get to grow together as a family.”

The platoon’s task is to secure 160 square miles of lunar-like landscapes, rough dirt trails and rugged cliffs inhabited by tribes and sub-tribes whose complicated affiliations might baffle the most seasoned Afghan expert.

This summer, Taliban and other militants are crossing from Pakistan into Tani to attack Afghan, U.S. and NATO forces. The violence has escalated from the occasional firefight to full-scale battles in the past week.

Going ‘outside the wire’

Six days a week, the Americans in Tani go “outside the wire” to the district’s villages.

The seventh day is not one for rest. It’s for refitting equipment at the much-bigger Forward Operating Base Salerno, a half-hour’s drive away.

Today’s mission is to deliver humanitarian aid — flour, rice, beans, cooking oil, tea — to a village on the mountainous border while gathering

intelligence about a populace known to have supported Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Taliban ally.

The 14 soldiers, accompanied by an Afghan interpreter and two truckloads of Afghan police, head off on one of the rocky, dusty, potholed routes the soldiers nickname for American cities.

As Sgt. Ryan Bauman, 25, of Great Mills, Md., says, roads here are “anything that’s been traveled on before.”

In villages of sun-baked mud-brick houses, Afghan children run alongside the trucks, waving thumbs-up. The boys wear blue, white or brown shalwar khameez (loose trousers and tunic shirts) and brimless caps; the girls, long dresses and colorful scarves.

The talk in the platoon’s headsets turns serious.

Gunner Scott Melvin, 23, an Army private from Weaubleau, Miss., says he saw a Humvee that had been gutted by a roadside bomb, killing three soldiers and wounding two. “Hey, Sgt. Horn, last night did you get a chance to go look at that truck?”

“What truck?” asks Horn, a former drill sergeant.

“The one that got blown up ... I heard it was pretty tough ... the whole one side of it was peeled off.” The gunner survived only “because he got blown up out the turret,” Melvin says.

Horn, tersely: “You better keep your

eyeballs peeled today, there, Melvin.”

“Yep,” says Melvin with a gulp.

‘A good time to get shot’

The Humvees turn onto a mountainside that grows more densely wooded as the narrow dirt switchback rises. Gears grind, brakes squeal, under the strain.

Mud-and-stone houses and caves cling to the cliffs. Golden wheat fields shimmer in stone terraces; goats, sheep, cows and donkeys graze nearby.

“We’re going to be in Pakistan soon,” the platoon’s medic, Spec. Philip Zwart, 23, of Acton, Calif., jokes.

“We’re kind of like uninvited guests, you know, every time we come here,” Horn says of the village ahead. “It’s too bad, though, we can’t let them know we are coming. We can’t trust them. They could have the Taliban waiting on us.”

“Fourteen against 200 — I like the odds,” Melvin jokes.

“I’m staying in the truck,” Pfc. Blake Rogers, 22, of Garden Grove, Calif., the Humvee’s driver, says with a laugh.

Nearing 9,000 feet, the convoy stops so the engines can cool. Horn spots a soldier with his door open.

“Hey — you can’t leave your door open!” he says. “It’s a good time to get shot. Then again, every time we dismount, it’s a good time to get shot.”

At nearly 10,000 feet and just under a mile from Pakistan, the convoy reaches



Spc. Robert Burcham, 23, of Kenosha, Wis., stands guard at the Tani District Center in Khost Province.

Bakhi, a village of 800. The Afghan police begin handing out sacks of food to surprised villagers, who have little or no government contact. The Americans take up positions providing the best cover. Some of them scan the nearby ridges.

U.S. helicopters fly protectively overhead. This close to the border, a Taliban or al-Qaida attack is a very real threat.

'I am here to help you'

In the war on terror, a soldier's mission is part-fighter, part-diplomat, part-aid worker.

Capt. Karr squats on the ground and, through his interpreter, talks with the bearded villagers: "Do they have any security problems?"

The men, wood-cutters and farmers who grow potatoes, wheat, barley, shake their heads no.

"There are, like, 200 Taliban who are reportedly living here," Karr says.

"We haven't even seen one Taliban," says Gul Zaddeen, a farmer who begins speaking for the villagers.

"Yeah, right." Karr does not believe it. "Well, anyways, if you do see them, I just want you guys to know the things that they tell you, they are lies. Americans aren't like what they say.

"I am here to help you. I am not here to take away your religion. I am not here to convert you to Christianity — I don't want

anything to do with that. Islam is a good religion. ... We just want to make sure that your country is secure and you can take care of yourselves."

"That is good, but there aren't any Taliban and we don't have any problem," Zaddeen says.

"If they do come here, you've got to give me or the chief of police or the sub-governor a call, so we can get them out of here for you," Karr says. "As long as they are here, your country is never going to be secure."

The conversation turns to construction projects. The villagers would like a good road, a school, a clinic. With no school, the men say, their children study only the Koran in one of three village mosques.

Some of the elderly men admit they fought with the warlord Hekmatyar during the 1980s and early '90s but say they now support the Afghan government.

They have problems with other tribes, they say, including Waziris across the border in Pakistan.

"The Waziri people don't like us because the (Afghan) army is patrolling and the Waziris say, 'Why aren't you attacking them? Why are you working with them?' That is why they don't like us, and we don't like them, either," Mir Khaib, a farmer, says.

Before departing, Karr passes out shoes and a few hand-crank radios. He tells the villagers that information about weapons

caches or Taliban activity could earn a reward.

The villagers thank the soldiers and watch them leave.

The bone-crunching drive back to the combat outpost winds through a wet wadi, soaring mountain passes and towering rock formations flecked with gold.

A narrow, steep-walled gorge raises everyone's alert level.

Horseshoes and hand grenades

Despite rising at 5 a.m. and returning in late afternoon, the soldiers' day is not over.

Sgt. Felipe Vega, 33, of New York City has defrosted and prepared food for the men. Capt. Karr must write a report on the day's mission for his superiors.

The platoon has been on blackout for days — cell phones confiscated, Internet access denied — to make sure news of American casualties is given to families first.

"Everyone, call your mother before we go on blackout again," Staff Sgt. James Terrell, 36, of Locust Fork, Ala., announces in his distinctive Southern twang.

Terrell is an avid reader of history and politics, a "biker" and a onetime Pentecostal preacher. The younger soldiers constantly tease him, mimicking his accent and calling him the "old man of wisdom." With 18 years in the Army, he directs outpost operations, including



A 101st Airborne mission attracts excited children as the unit patrols Seneky, a village in Khost Province.

keeping the water running and fixing broken generators.

For now, generator problems have left the platoon without running water and only partial electricity. So the soldiers grab six-packs of bottled water from large stacks lining an outpost wall to use for showers, toilet-flushing and the daily battle to stay hydrated.

A couple of bottles — chilly in the morning, boiling in the afternoon — barely wash off a bit of the grime.

Melvin and Rogers lift the squad automatic weapon, or SAW, a M249 light machine gun, from its Humvee turret mount for a thorough cleaning.

Sgt. Horn sits by a gravel pit, cleaning his M4 assault rifle, as Pvt. Mike Kehm of Allentown pitches horseshoes with Pfc. Santos Moreno, 21, of San Antonio.

“Oh! That was close!” shouts Kehm, a wiry 19-year-old whose favorite part of being in Afghanistan is driving a Humvee.

“Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades,” Terrell drawls.

Some of the men — including Sgt. Jason Lynch, 23, of Killeen, Texas, and Pfc. Juan Ortiz, 19, of Arlington, Texas — head to a makeshift tent-gym to lift weights.

The banter between everyone is friendly; most laugh when they are the butt of jokes.

Melvin, who has lost 20 pounds on Horn’s “diet” plan, loves food references: “It’s hotter ‘n’ a baked potato out here.”

As night falls, the men take two-hour turns on gate or guard-tower duty. The

Afghan police, deployed beside the platoon, fire the occasional red flare, enlivening the dark hours.

Security is no laughing matter, though. In March, a suicide truck-bomber hit the front gate, killing an Afghan soldier.

Waking to ‘Bad to the Bone’

Kehm sings “Bad to the Bone” as the other soldiers awaken and grab breakfasts of defrosted scrambled eggs, bacon, fresh biscuits and gravy.

To pass time, some of the men toss a Steelers football, wrestle or compete at pull-ups.

Kehm drops a camel spider, a hideous insect as big as a lemon, into a Styrofoam cup to spook “Tito” Ortiz, nicknamed for a popular ultimate fighter.

Once a week, the men travel to Forward Operating Base Salerno — “the FOB” — to refit their well-traveled Humvees and to collect potable water.

As the Humvees enter the FOB, the platoon jokes about the wimp-factor of “fobbitts” — soldiers on the big base who don’t go “outside the wire.” They echo a soldier’s rap song on YouTube that pokes fun at “fobbitts.”

Many in the platoon drop dirty uniforms at the FOB’s laundry, while others take a hot shower. All of them go for hot food at the chow hall.

“Wow, running water! What a novelty!” Kehm says, washing his hands.

The platoon picks up care packages and mail, including a package from a

Greensburg Scout troop.

While Horn and Sgt. Ben McKandles, 29, of Midland, Texas, work on one of the Humvees, the soldiers waiting at Gulf Company headquarters decide to see who can reassemble their M4 assault rifles fastest. Pfc. Irving Jordan, 21, of Washington and Terrell face off to cheers. Irving — a six-foot-fiver who confesses he can’t play basketball — does a little dance after beating Terrell in 56 seconds.

Spc. Robert Burcham, 23, of Kenosha, Wis., and Lynch face off to more cheers.

The challenges are a respite from talk of recent attacks: the deadly IED blast that shredded a Humvee; a car bomb in Khost that killed its terrorist-driver; rockets lobbed at FOB Salerno from the direction of the Pakistani border.

As dusk falls, the platoon prepares to head back to its outpost, wary of the dangers.

“I generally feel safer in town than I do in the wadi,” Horn says as they pass through Khost City toward the pitch-black countryside, where an ambush-perfect wadi waits.

Driving the lead Humvee, Spc. Troy Boutin, 28, of Milledgeville, Ill., honks the horn to warn Afghans to yield and weaves to avoid traffic.

Only one thing slows him tonight — a tiny puppy hobbling across the street.

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