



Bagram celebrates Thanksgiving with parade

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11/27/2009 - **BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** -- Airmen witnessed a bunch of turkeys roaming around Bagram Thanksgiving Day. Also some kite flyers, a mock F-16 Fighting Falcon and even jolly ol' St. Nick.

The cast of characters were part of the first Thanksgiving Day Parade at Camp Cunningham, where the majority of Airmen stationed here live and work. Thirteen decorated vehicles stood in for the balloons and floats at the recreation of the famous annual New York City event.

The teams had four weeks to create their entry during their downtime. The 455th Air Expeditionary Wing has been breaking several mission-related records and needed a short break from the high operations tempo to "relax and recharge," said Travis Luethe, the recreation manager at Camp Cunningham.

"Everyone had a lot of fun and we had more people than we expected participate," Mr. Luethe said. "Basically, we just wanted to give everyone a little taste of home for the holiday. Looking around at all the smiles, you can see that for ten minutes, we all got to think about something other than being in a war zone."

The procession drove through the compound and briefly by the flightline so as many Airmen as possible could take a break from their day to enjoy the creativity and holiday spirit.

"While you're deployed, you really miss your family and it's easy to lose sight of the fun things in life," said Staff Sgt. Chrishana Dameron, who makes a point of watching the parade on television every year. "But we sometimes forget that we have a family here too. So this was about coming together as a family and having a little bit of fun."

Sergeant Dameron, deployed from Scott Air Force Base, Ill., led the joint 455th Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility and Task Force Mountain Warrior team. Their float, an all-terrain vehicle decorated as a giant battlefield turkey complete with Kevlar helmet and camouflage gear, won first place in the judging portion of the event.

Mr. Luethe said they will try to have a similar event during the December holidays, but next time they'll invite the entire base to participate, if possible.

As with the parade in New York, the Bagram parade ended with Santa Claus on the final float, symbolically ushering in the holiday season. Mr. Claus was escorted by the 455th AEW staff agencies float and said he was happy to be in Afghanistan before headed to his appointment in the Big Apple.

"As soon as we were done, I emailed my wife to tell her I haven't had this much fun in a while," Mr. Claus said. "I've never seen this many people this happy in an otherwise bad place, so it was my pleasure to bring a little bit of joy to the people here."

"Now if you'll excuse me," Mr. Claus continued, "I have some final list preparations to take care of."



BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- An all-terrain vehicle decorated as a combat turkey drives by the flightline as part of a Thanksgiving Day parade Nov. 26, 2009. The combat turkey float was named the first place winner in the judging portion of the parade. It was created by the joint 455th Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility and Task Force Mountain Warrior team. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski)