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SPECIAL DELIVERY



Troops in Pacific play Santa as part of world's longest-running humanitarian mission

CARLIN LESLIE/Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Above: C-130 loadmasters from the 36th Airlift Squadron, from Yokota Air Base, Japan, begin airdrop delivery of a pallet over Micronesia on Wednesday as part of Operation Christmas Drop 2012. Below: The Operation Christmas Drop 2012 patch.

By CHARLIE REED
Stars and Stripes

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam
P laying Santa in a C-130 is tricky. The sleigh can break down. And the presents, if not delivered just right, either go to the sharks or go splat right in front of their intended recipients.

Those are the pitfalls that Air Force elves face during Operation Christmas Drop, an eight-day humanitarian mission over Micronesia and Palau. Crews with the 36th Airlift Squadron from Yokota Air Base in Japan deliver food, medicine, other essen-



CHARLIE REED/Stars and Stripes

tial supplies and a few toys from the back of the venerable cargo plane by parachute.

"Santa's got his problems, and we've got ours," said Col. David Gould, commander of the 374th Operations Group at Yokota, who piloted the first Christmas Drop sortie out of Andersen Air Force Base on Tuesday. The drop encountered more than its fair share of glitches.

Just as the crew was preparing to take off with a cabin full of reporters and the U.S. ambassador to Micronesia, the nearly 40-year-old C-130 broke down. The same mechanical hiccup had kept the crew at Yokota an extra day en route to Guam.

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US, Afghans hold talks on jurisdiction over troops

By DAVID ZUCCHINO
Los Angeles Times

KABUL — In a second round of negotiations here between the United States and Afghanistan on the presence of American forces beyond 2014, the two sides have held preliminary talks on legal jurisdiction over the troops, the lead U.S. negotiator said Saturday.

The U.S. has insisted that any troops serving in Afghanistan after combat forces withdraw at the end of 2014 be subject to the American, not Afghan, legal justice system, said James B. Warlick, the U.S. deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The contentious question of legal jurisdiction wrecked similar security negotiations with Iraq last year after Iraqi officials insisted that American troops be subject to Iraqi law. The issue is expected to be a central element in the Kabul negotiations.

"I can assure you that we will require the protections necessary for our men and women in uniform and our civilian component," Warlick said in comments to several American reporters at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. "The Afghans understand that this is important."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who has criticized the conduct of U.S. troops and has spoken of subjecting them to Afghan justice after 2014, recently softened his position. In comments Dec. 8, Karzai said U.S. troops might remain under American legal jurisdiction if the U.S. recognizes Afghanistan's sovereignty and respects Afghan laws.

"Once those conditions are fulfilled by the United States with us, Afghanistan is willing to consider (legal) immunity for them," Karzai said.

Warlick said the bilateral security agreement under negotiation will recognize Afghanistan's sovereignty and the U.S. will respect Afghan laws. The negotiations will determine the scope and role of any U.S. military personnel in the country after combat troops withdraw by the end of 2014.

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