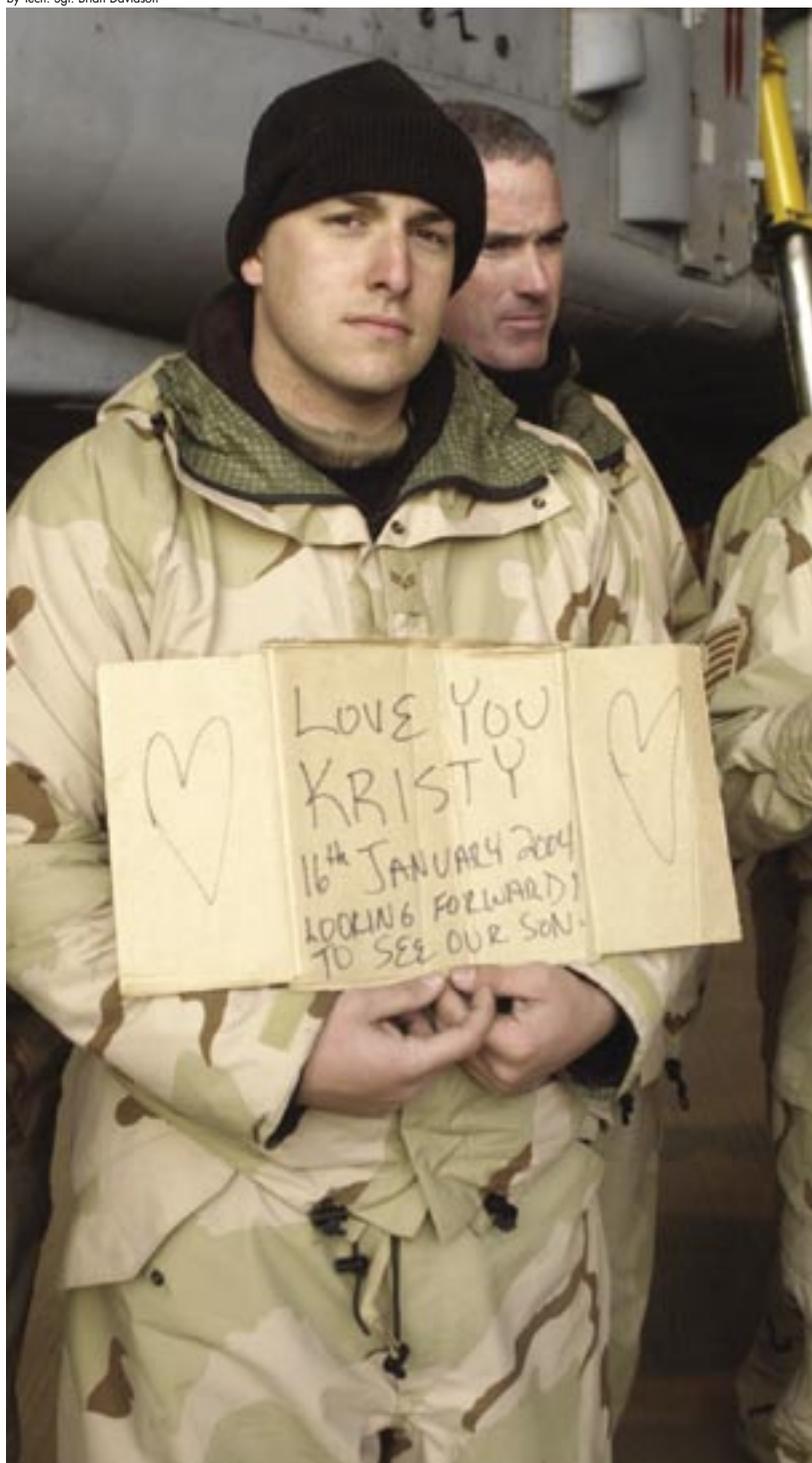


by Tech. Sgt. Brian Davidson



A message home

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Senior Airman **Patrick Blevins** sends a message to his wife, **Kristy**, and his unborn son during a national television news broadcast in November. The baby's birth was expected in January. The soon-to-be dad deployed from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., for Operation Enduring Freedom. He is assigned to the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron's ammo flight.

Prior-service airmen receive SKT exemptions

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — Prior-service airmen who don't hold the minimum required primary Air Force specialty skill level commensurate with their grade will automatically receive a two-year exemption from taking the specialty knowledge test during promotion fitness exams.

The change takes effect with the next staff, technical and master sergeant promotion cycles and will bring promotion consideration for all prior-service members in line with current procedures used for retrainees, said Chief Master Sgt. **Mark Billingsley**, chief of the enlisted promotions branch at the Air Force Personnel Center here.

The change now treats people coming into the Air Force from a "sister service" — or returning to active duty in a different specialty after a break in Air Force service — as retrainees.

Those retraining without any break in service are given an SKT exemption for two years. Until now, when it came to prior-service folks returning to active duty, there was no such 'grace period' built into the system, the chief said.

"We've fixed the inequity by giving both groups the opportunity to learn a skill before it becomes part of the promotion equation for them," Chief Billingsley said.

For the 2004 promotion cycles, any prior-service airman who entered active duty Jan. 1, 2002, or later and doesn't have the minimum required skill level commensurate with his or her grade will be eligible for the exemption. The change is expected to affect about 1,000 people per year.

— Master Sgt. Randy Mitchell
Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs