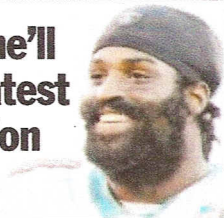


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Scene from new "United 93" film

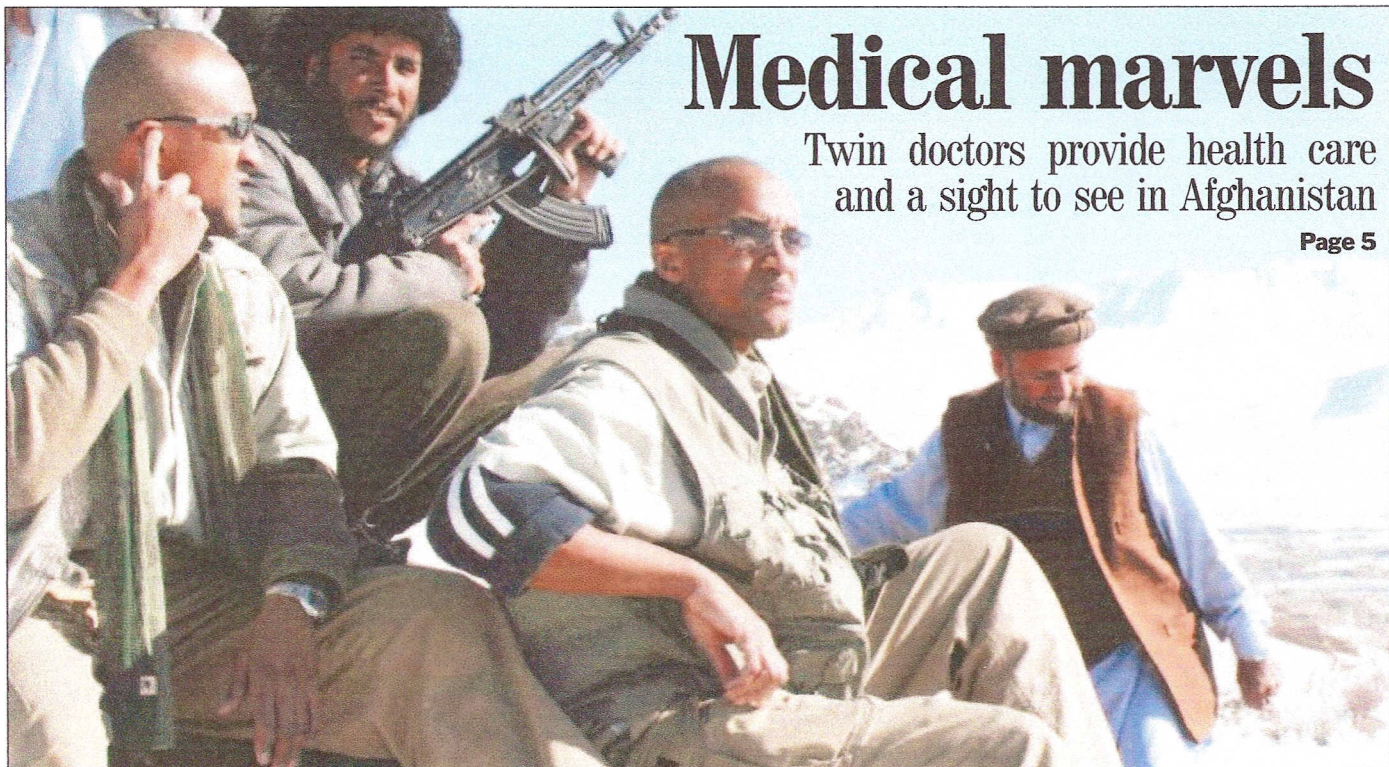
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Medical marvels

Twin doctors provide health care
and a sight to see in Afghanistan

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Courtesy of Vance and Vince Moss

Twins, doctors and majors in the Army National Guard, Vince, left, and Vance Moss recently returned from Afghanistan where they treated ailing civilians. Word quickly spread among locals about the two tall, black American doctors. Afghans called the pair "doganagi," Farsi for "same-face healers."

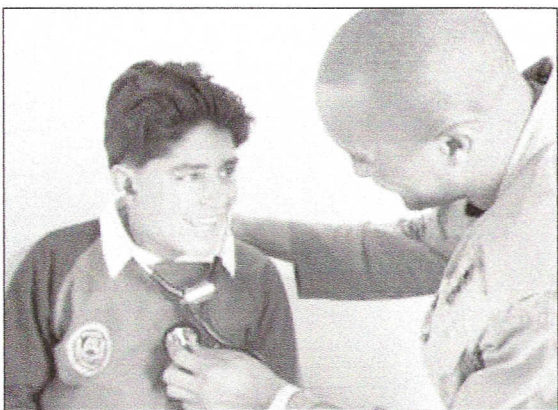


Photo courtesy of Vance and Vince Moss

Right: Vance and Vince Moss, twin doctors and majors in the Army National Guard, recently returned from a mission in Afghanistan providing medical care for civilians and Northern Coalition forces. Vance, left, and Vince Moss visit Stony Brook Hospital in Stony Brook, N.Y., as Vince makes an adjustment to his brother's uniform on April 19.

Above: Dr. Vance Moss jokes with an unidentified Afghan boy who was successfully operated on for hypospadias, a condition in which the urinary opening is not at the tip of the penis.



PATRICK OEHLE/Newsday

Twin doctors do double duty in Afghanistan

BY JAMIE TALAN
Newsday

Word spread quickly through the war-torn city of Kabul and nearby villages that two tall, black American surgeons were performing operations in Afghanistan. Everywhere, people stared from one face to the other, some whispering a single word, as if in prayer.

"Doganagi," they would chant in Farsi. "Doganagi."

It didn't take long for the identical twins, Drs. Vince and Vance Moss, to figure out its meaning: same-face healers.

The 34-year-old doctors from Manhattan were on a special mission to Kabul to perform needed surgery on as many locals as possible. Army reservists since they were 20, the Temple University School of Medicine grads conducted this mission as they have many other endeavors: together.

"This is the first time we worked together as surgeons," said Vance Moss, a fellow in transplantation medicine at Stony Brook University Hospital. A board-certified urologist, he wants to specialize in kidney transplantation. His brother Vince specializes in cardio-thoracic surgery and is starting a practice in New Jersey. They live together in Manhattan.

In 1998, they became part of the medical reserve corps. This summer, the brothers were activated for duty. Soon after, Col. Gary Davis, working with American troops in Afghanistan, requested their help. Their tour of duty there lasted from September to February. It wasn't the usual mission. There would be no U.S. guards watching over them as they maneuvered the risky terrain. Nor did the U.S. Embassy offer protection.



Photo courtesy of Vance and Vince Moss

Dr. Vince Moss befriends an Afghan boy. He and his twin brother, Vance, say the work in Afghanistan is not done. If the doctors return, for safety reasons it will remain a secret.

"We were filling a void," said Vance Moss. The two were there in a civilian capacity with resources from the U.S. Army. The doctors, dressed as civilians when not operating, were watched over by Afghan special forces. In the heart of al-Qaida territory, they performed under suboptimal surgical conditions. They often worked by flashlight. The operating room at the Afghan Army National Hospital, where they did most of their surgeries, was fitted with two small light boxes and two small steel sinks where a week's worth of hot water

would soak the surgical tools. They scrubbed in with cold water. There were days when there was no oxygen to deliver anesthesia.

As word spread of the *doganagi*'s work, more locals showed up. Ten of the operations were on boys with a congenital anomaly called hypospadias, in which the urinary opening is not at the tip of the penis. The condition is considered shameful in Afghanistan's male-dominated culture.

It was Davis' affection for a 13-year-old orphan who lost his legs in a mine blast

**"We are big and black
and we had
no weapons."**

Dr. Vince Moss

on why the reservist twin surgeons, who were in Afghanistan in a civilian capacity, changed location frequently to remain safe

that inspired the mission. The boy also had hypospadias, and that was more of an issue for him than his missing legs. The operation was a success.

"This was not a mission for anyone who was not military-trained," said Vince Moss. To remain safe, they moved around a lot. "We are big and black and we had no weapons," Vince Moss said.

Dodging sniper fire now and again, the brothers said it became immediately clear that war was front and center. "There were checkpoints every five miles," Vince Moss said. "We were stopped several times."

In February, when controversy spread over the publication in Denmark of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, the brothers received an e-mail from the U.S. Embassy urging them to return home. "We are fortunate that we got in and out," they said.

The brothers conducted grand rounds at Stony Brook recently. They presented three Patriot Awards from the Department of Defense to Drs. Wayne Waltzer, Frank Darras and Dave Bekofsky, who as Moss' bosses, supported the mission.

"The work in Afghanistan is not done," Vance Moss said.

If they do return, for safety reasons it will remain a secret.

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