



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

Index of Articles

Note: Topics below are now bookmarked! Click on the underlined topic below to link to the pages on that topic.

READINESS.....4

Illinois National Guard Still Prepared to Offer Disaster Aid

DEPLOYMENT.....5

Guardsmen Undaunted

Camp Shelby to Become Mobilization Platform

Huge Guard Deployment Changes Face of Front Line

Guam National Guard Unit Readies for Deployment to Africa

Some Homecomings, but Many Departures

Idahoans Get Ready for a Trip to the War Zone; 'It's Not Just Preparing for What You'll Do, but What You'll Leave Behind'

A Proper Send-off; If You're Sending Care Packages to Soldiers Overseas, Be Sure to Know the Rules

Local Soldier Braces for Change

REUNION.....19

Guard Unit Returns from Iraq

Soldiers Expected Home Soon; Mobridge-Based Guard Members' Families Reflect on War's First Anniversary

Guardsmen Come Home from Iraq

Marching Home/ A Delayed Military Homecoming Raises Fears, But Response Adds Hope

National Guard Couple Returns from Iraq; N.D. Soldiers Weathered Trials of War Together

GUARD IN IRAQ.....26

105th Unit to Leave Iraq in Early May

Area Soldier Killed in Iraq	
Changed by War, Proud They Served	
2 Million Miles, Makeshift Armor And No Fatalities; A Virginia Guard Unit Survives Iraq's Dangers	
Chicago Loses Its 2nd GI to Year-Old War in Iraq; He Called Home Days Before Blast	
New Guard Role on Front Lines	
<u>GUARD IN AFGHANISTAN</u>	39
Danger Second Nature To Md. Civilian Soldiers	
<u>HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT</u>	42
Triumphs, Fears Also Felt at Home	
In Kansas Burden is Heavy on Reservists, Guardsmen	
With Parents in Baghdad, Daughter Still Soldiers On; 11-Year-Old Making Do After More Than a Year	
Employers Adapt When Workers Are Called to Duty	
<u>HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH AFTERMATH</u>	51
Returning Home: Soldier Struggles with War's Aftermath	
Lucky to be Alive, but Living in Pain	
Home for Good Tired of Absences, Guard Member Will Leave Military	
Anatomy of a Wounded Soldier; After 2 Wars, Decorated with 6 Purple Hearts and Layers of Scars, He's Still Ready for Battle	
Hundreds Mourn Soldier; Spc. Joce Carrasquillo, the First N.C. Guardsman Killed in Iraq, is Buried	
Returning U.S. Armed Services Personnel Take Time to Adjust Back to Life	
Bomb Survivors Recall Experience	
<u>BENEFITS</u>	69
DoD Temporarily Extends TRICARE Eligibility Following Active Duty to 180 Days	
Troops' Pay Supplement Pushed	
State Proposal Would Maintain Benefits to Soldiers Overseas	
Stateside "Space A" Travel Test Extended	
<u>GENERAL</u>	73
Military Recruiters Filling Spots	

ANG Woman Wing Commander Doesn't See Herself as Pioneer
Guard Bureau Honors Heroes of Water Taxi Tragedy
Schwarzenegger 'Pumps Up' Deploying Guard

Websites:

National Guard Family Program
Online Communities for families and
youth:

<http://www.guardfamily.org/>
<http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org/>

TRICARE website for information on health
benefits:

<http://www.tricare.osd.mil/>

Have an article, announcement, or website that you'd like to share with the
National Guard Family Program Community? Send your suggestions in an e-mail
to Richard.Flynn@ngb.ang.af.mil.

The Quad-City Times (IL)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 18, 2004

Illinois National Guard Still Prepared to Offer Disaster Aid

By Matt Adrian

SPRINGFIELD — The **Illinois National Guard's** role in Operation Iraqi Freedom has not taxed the state's defense force, an official said.

National Guard spokesman Tim Franklin said the ongoing war on terrorism has not hurt, for example, the Guard's ability to provide disaster relief assistance during the annual flooding of the Mississippi River.

Franklin estimates that 13,500 Illinois residents are members of either the Army National Guard or Air National Guard. Franklin said at any given time at least 1,000 Guard members are deployed, whether they are providing airport security or taking part in Operation Iraqi Freedom. This leaves more than 10,000 citizen-soldiers available to provide help, he said.

He said the real challenge is faced by family members left behind, who must struggle to pay bills and care for children.

"It's a challenge for all the families that have loved ones who are mobilized," he said.

While only a fraction of Illinois National Guardsmen have been sent overseas, the agency has experienced its share of casualties. Of the 21 Illinois soldiers killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom, two have been members of the Illinois National Guard.

National Guard Spc. Brandon Ramsey, 21, of Calumet City, was killed after the vehicle he was traveling in rolled over while chasing a suspicious vehicle in Tallil, Iraq. Ramsey was assigned to the Chicago-based 933rd Military Police Company.

On Nov. 2 2003, 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas' Chinook helicopter was shot down near Fallujah, Iraq. Slavenas was a member of the Peoria-based Company F, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation.

The Illinois National Guard estimates that 2,300 Army and Air Guard personnel have taken an active role in Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. For Guard members and U.S. Army reservists that are serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and other related combat operations, Illinois politicians have stepped up to provide support.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn and Rep. Mike Boland, D-East Moline, launched the Military Family Relief Act, which sets up a fund for donations to help affected families pay expenses such as rent or utility bills. Taxpayers can donate to the program through a check-off box on their state tax forms.

To get the fund started, the state deposited \$5 million into the program and received \$83,000 in charitable contributions. Quinn estimates that 1,800 families have received \$1,041,500 from the fund.

Earlier this month, Quinn visited Rhode Island to promote the fund.

“The Military Family Relief Fund is a voluntary and direct way for people to show their appreciation to the men and women in the National Guard and reserves who have answered the call of duty,” he said in a press release.

South Carolina and California are pushing similar measures.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich also signed legislation requiring all full-time employees of local governments or school districts be granted leaves of absences for military service. Affected employees would continue to accrue seniority and benefits while serving in the military. State employees already receive this protection.

The Illinois Army National Guard oversees 53 armories, 43 vehicle storage/maintenance buildings through out the state. The Illinois Air National Guard maintains two large bases at civilian airports.

DEPLOYMENT

Fayetteville (NC) Observer

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 17, 2004

Guardsmen Undaunted

By Kevin Maurer, Staff Writer

North Carolina National Guard soldiers leaving for Iraq Tuesday said they are not afraid to deploy days after the guard lost its first soldier there.

Spc. Jocelyn Luis Carrasquillo, 28, of Wrightsville Beach, was killed Saturday near Baghdad when a roadside bomb exploded near his vehicle.

Carrasquillo was a unit supply specialist assigned to the 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment which is based in Wilmington.

He was the first soldier from the North Carolina National Guard's 30th Heavy Separate Brigade to die in Iraq.

More than 200 guardsmen assigned to the 30th were at Pope Air Force Base's Green Ramp on Tuesday preparing to leave for a one-year deployment to Iraq.

The brigade, which is headquartered in Clinton, is made up of close to 5,000 soldiers. More than 3,000 of them are from North Carolina.

The brigade is attached to the 1st Infantry Division, which is replacing the 4th Infantry Division. The guardsmen will be based in several forward operating bases north of Baghdad, said Capt. Robert Carver, a spokesman for the North Carolina National Guard.

News of Carrasquillo's death came as a shock to most of the soldiers and their family members.

Spc. Pearl Maynard, 38, of Dunn, said she feels sorry for Carrasquillo's family. And even though the news was in the back of her mind, she was anxious to board the plane.

"I just want to get over there so I can come back home," Maynard said.

Her sister, Marla Wilson, said the news made her more nervous. She worries about her sister's safety.

"I just want her to come back safely, not just Pearl, but everyone," she said.

While the soldiers said they mourn the death of their comrade, some of them said they weren't focusing on the bad news.

'Faith in God'

Staff Sgt. Dwayne Hunt, 33, of Pembroke, said he is not afraid to go to Iraq. "I put my faith in God. Things happen for a reason. If you have faith in Christ, you can get through anything," he said.

Hunt is a vehicle mechanic assigned to the 230th Support Battalion. This is his first deployment. Hunt's wife, Carol, and their three children were at Green Ramp to see him off.

The Hunts said they draw strength from their faith. "I'm not nervous. I am just going to miss him," Carol Hunt said.

Spc. Lee Janney, 23, and his wife, Lynelle, are expecting their first child. The couple has been married six months.

Janney said he was trying to put Carrasquillo's death out of his mind.

"That's what happens over there, but I am not dwelling on it," said Janney, who is from Cameron.

His wife said she is trying to keep a positive attitude. "I know not to dwell on the negative things because that will make it all that much harder," she said. "I just know he will come home."

The majority of the 30th Heavy Separate Brigade left for Iraq in February as part of a deployment of fresh troops to Iraq, the largest movement of troops since World War II.

"The families were already apprehensive and concerned about their loved ones," said Capt. Sherrell Murray, the **North Carolina National Guard's** state family program coordinator.

She said Carrasquillo's death brings the dangers of Iraq closer to home.

The National Guard has assistance centers in Fayetteville, Raleigh, Charlotte and other locations to help families deal with deployment.

Murray said the centers have had an increase in calls since Saturday.

Associated Press

March 17, 2004

Camp Shelby to Become Mobilization Platform

By LYNDA EDWARDS, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: JACKSON, Miss.

It was hard work by the Mississippi **National Guard** and not political arm twisting that landed Camp Shelby a designation as a Department of Defense mobilization center for troops heading to Iraq and other points, Gov. Haley Barbour said Tuesday.

About 6,500 troops from Tennessee and New York will report to Camp Shelby over five months, beginning with several hundred in May, for training, classification and deployment.

Word of the selection was first made public on Monday.

About 17,000 **National Guard** and reserve troops normally train at Camp Shelby each year, and many of these units will now shift to other facilities, including the Guard's Camp McCain near Grenada.

Barbour, a longtime Washington insider who brought big name Republicans down for his successful gubernatorial race last year, said he could not take credit for the coup.

Mississippi contracts a lobbyist in Washington, D.C. to represent Mississippi's military bases threatened with closure, but Barbour said the lobbyist had no part in negotiations with the Department of Defense with regard to the **National Guard** owned Camp Shelby.

"When I was elected, I promised to lift the **National Guard** above politics; I think that's been a problem in other administrations," Barbour said. "The **National Guard** gets all the credit for winning mobilization status by modernizing the facility."

Barbour described the state's military training camps as the "economic jewels" of Mississippi because they generated jobs and revenue for nearby towns.

Brandi Brown, Grenada's director of tourism, said she received a call Monday from a local **National Guard** commander telling her to expect "a big economic impact for Grenada from 400 to 1,200 extra soldiers who would train at Camp McCain from May through August."

Camp McCain employs 125 people and has an annual economic impact of \$8 million on Grenada, according to Grenada Chamber of Commerce executive director Phillip Heard.

Guard Brig. Gen. James "Ike" Pylant said a spinoff for Fort McCain will be a dramatically larger training force. He said 600-900 trainers will relocate to the Grenada area to help with the increased work load.

"Although Camp McCain is a training facility, we were concerned when we heard last year it was under consideration for closure due to budget cuts," Heard said.

Camp Shelby is scheduled to complete a \$24 million range complex next month where tanks and helicopters can test artillery.

Pylant said the 1st Army contacted him in January about making Camp Shelby a mobilization center.

"We put together a feasibility study; we're very surprised and happy things happened this fast," Pylant said.

He said Camp Roberts near San Luis Obispo, Calif., had also been in the running for the designation.

Camp Shelby opened in 1917 and was named for Isaac Shelby, the first governor of Kentucky, by the 38th Division. The camp was closed after World War I and was reactivated in 1940.

The camp, which fans out over 134,000 acres in the tall pine forests of south Mississippi near Hattiesburg, served as a mobilization facility in past wars and conflicts, including both world wars and Desert Storm in 1991.

While the facility will serve as a federal mobilization facility, Camp Shelby will still be operated by the Mississippi **National Guard**.

Three National Guardsmen who led a heroic action in Afghanistan after training in Mississippi camps shared the stage with Barbour.

Sgt. 1st Class Ashley Evans of Brandon, and Sgt. Maj. Edwin Tudor and Spc. Chad Nix, both from Pearl, helped seize the biggest cache of enemy weapons recorded during the Afghan conflict. The Guardsmen stood at parade rest during Barbour's speech which included praise for Free File Alliance, an organization that donates tax preparation software to low income and active military families.

Seattle Times

March 18, 2004

Huge Guard Deployment Changes Face of Front Line

By Ray Rivera

FORT IRWIN, Calif. The two soldiers standing guard could almost be father and son.

Staff Sgt. James Bowen is a 53-year-old Vietnam vet. He was in a foxhole long before his 26-year-old buddy, Spc. Carlos Arellano, was born.

Bowen works at a seed company; Arellano is an aspiring rapper.

When Bowen thinks of family, it's four children, three stepchildren, seven grandchildren, four marriages and an 83-year-old dad. For Arellano, it's his parents and eight siblings.

Bowen and Arellano have recently left this desert training base for Baghdad. As soldiers in the **National Guard's** 81st Armored Brigade they are part of the largest call-up of citizen soldiers since the Korean War.

"My son tells me if something happens to me he's going to kick my butt," Bowen says. "He doesn't want to raise his children without their grandpa."

The 4,500-member 81st _ mostly from the Northwest _ is part of a massive troop rotation that is critically needed as the United States begins its second year of occupying Iraq.

By spring, some 40 percent of the roughly 110,000 U.S. soldiers heading into Iraq will be from the **National Guard** and Reserves.

The growing dependence on these citizen soldiers is making for a military force of vastly different ages, education and backgrounds: high-school teachers and college students, ministers and police officers, grandfathers and newlyweds, wrinkles and acne.

Military officials say the mix of maturity and skills will give these soldiers an edge in dealing with civil unrest in Iraq as the United States prepares to turn over power to a new governing council.

But critics worry the part-time soldiers are not as well trained as their active-duty counterparts, less physically fit, more prone to health problems and more likely to carry with them the emotional worry of the lives they left behind: children, spouses, jobs and mortgages.

"The Army is stretched to the breaking point and is under tremendous pressure right now to put numbers onto the battlefield," says retired Col. David Hackworth, a military analyst. "Ready or not."

As the members of the 81st have prepared over the last several months _ moving from Fort Lewis to Yakima to California _ the transition from home life to soldiering has been a physical and psychological challenge for some.

During a two-mile training run, every senior sergeant in one company failed to finish, said Hackworth, a decorated veteran who has been monitoring the training of the 81st.

Along with complaints of equipment shortages, the 81st has had the added burden of having to convert from an armored brigade of tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles to a mechanized infantry brigade reliant primarily on Humvees.

"That's like taking a basketball team and making them a football team and telling them they're going to play in the Super Bowl," Hackworth says. "And this is a lethal Super Bowl."

Lt. Col. Christopher Fowler, a Seattle police officer who commands a battalion of about 400 infantry troops in the brigade, dismisses such concerns.

"These guys are getting the best training and equipment money can buy," Fowler, 39, says. "They're well-led, they're motivated, and I think their maturity and life experiences make them more adaptable to different situations."

As a Seattle police officer, Fowler is an example of the type of soldier who brings a wealth of professional experience to the field. Once in Iraq, the battalion will be working in and around Baghdad, involved in a wide range of duties, including security escorts and patrols.

"We have teachers, doctors, people who work at waste- and water-treatment facilities," he says. "Can you imagine how useful these skills will be to a country rebuilding?"

Sgt. 1st Class Mike Alfred, a high-school teacher from Redmond, Wash., says the life experiences in the brigade can only help. "You get a wide gamut of society, so you have 8,000 ways to look at a problem," says Alfred, 34, a Gulf War veteran. "It works out well; you're not in that brainwashed military mentality."

Problem solving has been a focus of their training. On a recent afternoon at Fort Irwin, mock demonstrators lined a fence at Fowler's compound, demanding the United States live up to promises of food, water and electricity.

Most of the demonstrators were Fort Irwin soldiers who specialize in playing the enemy during war games. Adding to the realism, the crowd was laced with about 100 Arabic-speaking Iraqi Americans hired by the Army to assist in the training.

Lt. Wade Aubin, 34, had to work through an interpreter as he tried to calm them, a challenge as tensions grew.

"It went from 'Give us food or our families will die,' to 'Give us food or your families will die,'" says Aubin, a Desert Storm veteran who in civilian life is a geologist, a husband and father of two from Albion, Whitman County. "I had to tell them we didn't have any food to give them but that the U.N. would be setting up a food-distribution center in the next 24 to 48 hours."

The crowd was not satisfied, and that night mortars rattled the training compound.

"I'd never been through anything like this," Aubin says. "In the back of your mind, you know it's just training, but I also tried to see where they were coming from."

Lt. Gen. Edward Soriano, Fort Lewis commander, was responsible for ensuring the 81st was ready for Iraq. "What we've taken are all the lessons learned in Iraq over the last year and applied them here in these scenarios," Soriano says.

"I've watched them go through physically and mentally demanding scenarios in a very stressful environment," says Soriano, a three-star general, "and I've got to tell you, it was stressful, and they held up great."

While the 81st troops have trained in the dead of winter, they'll arrive just as the temperatures in Iraq begin to soar, hitting up to 110 by summer.

But there are bigger challenges. The soldiers are well aware that of the more than 550 U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, more than three-fourths have died since May 1, when President Bush declared that major combat had ended.

"You've got to be a fool to say you're not scared," says Ky Ha, 25, of Renton, Wash. "People are bombing you and you're fighting an enemy that's mixed in with civilians. You can't see them."

At his guard post one drizzly morning, Bowen _ the grandpa of seven _ says he has held up fine so far. Bowen is among a handful of Vietnam veterans in the unit.

He spent "11 months, three weeks and three days" as an artillery soldier there. He drives supply and fuel trucks for the Guard now and is confident his age won't be a hindrance on convoys and foot patrols his unit will perform in and around Baghdad.

Arellano, the aspiring rap artist from Concord, Calif., says he doesn't worry that the man in the foxhole next to him has children older than him. "I trust him," Arellano says. "He's been there when bombs and bullets are flying."

Both say they feel duty-bound to go to Iraq _ not to their leaders as much as to fellow soldiers.

"I've got a lot of friends here ... ," Bowen says. "I wouldn't feel right not going."

Adds Arellano: "It's a confusing war. They haven't found weapons of mass destruction, but our guys are out there and I know if I'd been there for a year, I'd want to be replaced."

When the soldiers are troubled, they turn to another of the unit's 50-somethings: Sgt. Charles Yost. The 52-year-old pastor left his church in Colville, Wash., to serve as a chaplain's assistant. He's spoken of with reverence for another reason: his past in Vietnam.

Washington **National Guard** members of the 81st Armored Brigade provide security during an exercise at Fort Irwin as the brigade undergoes training for its deployment to Iraq.

Part of a secretive special-operations unit, Yost ran deep reconnaissance missions into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam to disrupt enemy supply lines. For years after, he would awake in the middle of the night curled in the fetal position, soaked with sweat. Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and using drugs, Yost says, he "was a mess." The nightmares continued until one evening a friend coaxed him into attending a church service. "It sounds weird, but I had an experience, and I never had another attack."

Since then, Yost has counseled other veterans _ most recently, his oldest son, a member of the 82nd Airborne who was in on the invasion of Iraq one year ago. "After he came back, he was angry, sick of everything," Yost says. "The thing he felt worst about was that he didn't feel worse about killing people."

It was emotional territory Yost knows well.

"War lowers your inhibition to taking human life, and it takes a while to return to normal."

Yost has been kept busy since the unit was activated. Most soldiers come to him with family issues or problems with a superior or other soldiers. Surprisingly, he says, few have come to him with expressions of fear.

"Everybody has some anxiety of the unknown, but honestly, they'll mention it in passing, but it isn't their primary concern."

While some might expect the younger soldiers in the unit to be more gung-ho or as soldiers today call it, "hoo-rah" in this unit it's a mixed bag of those who are eager to go and those who would rather be somewhere else.

Spc. Edward Wright, 27, of Seattle, is one of a handful of former Marines in the unit. He says he enjoys the military, but for someone with an 8-month-old son at home and hopes of joining the Border Patrol after a series of odd jobs, this deployment came at a bad time.

"It actually took me and my wife by surprise," Wright says. "We just barely had a baby and everything. It really kind of turned our world upside down."

The timing was right for 2nd Lt. Nicholas Miller. A member of the active Army, the 24-year-old Texas native volunteered fresh out of infantry school to join the 81st for a chance to go to Iraq.

"You meet officers and enlisted soldiers who've been in for years and never gotten to deploy somewhere," he says. "Who knows when you'll get another chance. ... And how am I going to lead these guys when I'm a captain or a major if they've all been there and I haven't?"

For Cpl. Justin Maddox, 48, and Master Sgt. Elmo McLean, 43, it's not a chance to boost their part-time Guard careers, but to put a cap on them.

Sitting at a table after chow, the two old friends gab about their wives, who are also friends. Maddox, a medical technician in Spokane, is a battalion medic. McLean, a construction worker from Springville, Stevens County, is an operations sergeant. Between them, they have 40 years of military experience, but this will be the first time either has gone into hostile territory.

"I've done Mount St. Helens, I've done the floods, done the fires," says McLean. "This'll be my chance to do the real federal mission. It'll be a good career wrapper."

Maddox, who like McLean has four children, echoes his friend's sentiments: "Don't get me wrong, I'd rather be home tucking in my kids, but it's an honor thing."

The two men figure their age and experience _ including the experience of having raised children will help them in watching over younger soldiers and in lending a sympathetic ear to Iraqis trying to feed their families and rebuild their cities.

"For us," says McLean, "it's a different kind of hoo-rah."

KUAM News (TV-Guam)

March 19, 2004

Guam National Guard Unit Readies for Deployment to Africa

Supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and the war on terrorism, more than 100 Guam soldiers will be deployed to Djibouti, Africa later this month. **Guam Army National Guard** Public Affairs Officer Captain John Guerrero says the unit is expected to be deployed up to 18 months, with at least a year in the Horn of Africa.

150 soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 294th Infantry will be mobilized at the end of this month, expected to leave to Hawaii for training for a couple of months in mid-April. The deployment is part of the Combined Joint Task Force as U.S. military forces provide force protection to create a lasting and peaceful end to the global war on terrorism. Brigadier General Robert Cockey says the unit is poised and ready for the challenge.

This is the second unit to be mobilized from the Guam National Guard in the past six months.

San Jose Mercury News (California)

March 21, 2004 Sunday MO1 EDITION

Some Homecomings, but Many Departures

By Dana Hull; Mercury News

One year after the United States invaded Iraq, many of the soldiers who spent months patrolling the villages around Baghdad are heading home.

But the relief their return brings to loved ones also signals a new wave of anxiety for other families whose sons and daughters, mothers and fathers are needed to replace them.

With major combat officially over but the occupation moving into a second year, U.S. armed forces are in the midst of their largest troop rotation since World War II. Nearly 120,000 people are essentially trading places.

"We're sending people, Humvees, weapons, trucks," said Col. Terry Knight of the California National Guard. "It's unbelievable how much stuff is going and coming. We have about 1,500 guardsmen there now, and a lot of them are scheduled to come home within the next few months. But we also have about 900 people going over."

Families such as the Sullivans of Gilroy are caught in the logistical churn. Marine Lance Cpl. David Sullivan, 21, is among the second wave of Bay Area soldiers who are back-filling for returning troops. Sullivan, a graduate of Valley Christian High School in San Jose, arrived in Iraq late last month.

Hallie Sullivan finds some peace of mind in knowing that her son's deployment brings comfort to another military mother.

"They sent him over there so that other people could come home," said Hallie Sullivan, "and that makes us feel good."

David Sullivan expects to be deployed for about seven months, although nothing is certain. Until then, the Sullivan family is relying on his e-mails, digital photos and telephone calls from his base near the western Iraqi town of Hit.

"Thank God for e-mail and digital photos," Hallie Sullivan said. "As a mother it's so heartening to see the pictures. I can't imagine how parents did it in World War II."

For the Sullivans, the anxiety is new. But for other military families, such as the Johns of Granite Bay, the anguish is all too familiar. Lance Cpl. William Johns, a 20-year-old Marine based at Camp Pendleton, was in Kuwait and then Iraq from February to July 2003. A few weeks ago, he was sent back to Iraq for a second tour of duty. He will be gone nine to 14 months.

"It's not any easier this time around," said his mother, Deborah Johns. "None of them wanted to go back. I cried for four days straight."

Deborah Johns said she has found support groups helpful and was planning to join other Marine Moms who were gathering Saturday at a Sacramento restaurant.

"They are sending back 20,000 more Marines," she said. "But if you watch the news all you ever hear is that three more soldiers were killed today. You don't want to be the one who gets home from work and there is a white car in front of your driveway."

The Greenfield family of Reno, Nev., also is dealing with a second tour of anxiety.

Marine Cpl. Stuart Greenfield was in Iraq last year from January to May. He came home on Memorial Day weekend for 30 days, and then headed back to Camp Pendleton. He left for his second tour of duty in Iraq on Feb. 28.

"You got him back the first time and you say: 'Thank You Lord,' " said his mother, Marge Greenfield. "And then you have to send him back to a place where there is still a lot of unrest."

Lance Cpl. O.J. Santa Maria of Daly City knows better than most the dangers of being part of an invading force in a foreign land.

Santa Maria's upper right arm was shattered by shrapnel during a gunfight in the southern Iraqi city of An-Nasiriyah a year ago. Several surgeries later -- first in Spain and then at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda -- he is recovering.

In Afghanistan.

Santa Maria, who became a national hero when President Bush stood next to him as he received his citizenship papers, decided that he wanted to return to the Middle East.

"He was getting bored being at home," said his father, Robert Santa Maria. "He wants to be with his unit and his buddies."

Santa Maria, who is doing mostly administrative work, is supposed to return home the last week in May.

"We're nervous and proud and worried all at once," said his mother, Marybel Santa Maria. "But we were more worried when he was in Iraq. At least now we know he won't be in the battle."

The Idaho Statesman

March 20, 2004 Saturday

Idahoans Get Ready for a Trip to the War Zone; 'It's Not Just Preparing for What You'll Do, but What You'll Leave Behind'

Chereen Langrill

Ask Staff Sgt. James Mace how he feels about possible deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan and he says he's "leaning forward in the saddle."

It's an old cavalry expression, he says, that means anticipating what lies ahead and being prepared. The 28-year-old Meridian man is one of 2,600 Idaho Army National Guard soldiers with the 116th Cavalry Brigade who received an alert order on Feb. 29. He knows he could be deployed any time in the coming months, and he's ready to go.

"We try to stay on top of it anyway, because we want to be ready," Mace said.

And there's a lot to do.

Sgt. Gregory Brown of Emmett completed a will shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"I anticipated something would go and that we could be deployed anytime," he said.

Brown, 49, hasn't been deployed in his 18 years of military service. When he was put on alert three weeks ago, he talked to his wife about the bills so she would make all the necessary payments each month.

Then he talked to his four children, ages 12 to 17.

"The first thing I did was identify all their support groups," Brown said.

His children know to call certain friends, aunts, uncles and other relatives if they are scared, need help or just want to talk, he said.

Dental records must be up-to-date before soldiers are mobilized. Outstanding medical issues must be resolved. Soldiers must designate someone to pay their bills while they are gone. Parents who could be deployed must have a plan to ensure their children will be cared for while they're away. All soldiers must submit a list of people who should be contacted if they are killed or injured. Mace's list includes his parents and his girlfriend.

Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP) will be held next month to ensure all these issues are handled, Lt. Col. Tim Marsano said. During the SRP, soldiers make sure their equipment works correctly, verify that identification is current, ensure a family care plan is in place and handle other matters relating to health, finances and family.

"It's not just preparing for what you'll do, but what you'll leave behind," Mace said.

Mace was nearly deployed to Bosnia two years ago, he said. Five days before he was scheduled to leave Idaho, doctors took an x-ray to rule out an ear infection. Instead, they discovered a brain tumor. It wasn't cancer, but the tumor had to be removed because it would have spread and caused serious health problems. He had to stay home until he could return to active duty in Idaho seven months later, he said.

Mace, a bodybuilder, is mapping out a plan to help him maintain his fitness level if he's deployed.

He lifts weights for 90 minutes five days a week and runs or does other cardiovascular work for up to 45 minutes three or four days a week. Now he's working with other body builders in his unit to craft a fitness regimen they can follow if they are mobilized. They'll make their own pull-up bars and other strength-building equipment, he said.

"We're only limited by our own creativity," he said.

Soldiers try to prepare for the physically demanding conditions they could face if deployed by challenging themselves during routine exercises, Mace said. When his unit is walking to the rifle range, for example, they wear all of their gear, he said. Soldiers in combat situations can wear an estimated 60 pounds of gear while walking miles in the desert.

In May, soldiers from the 116th Cavalry Brigade throughout Idaho will travel to Boise's Gowen Field for their annual two-week training. It's usually held sometime between June and August, but this year, soldiers will complete training earlier, Marsano said.

"We're looking to get our soldiers as trained as possible in case a mobility order does come down," Marsano said.

During training, soldiers live in a desertlike environment designed to simulate a combat situation. They eat the standard-issue Meals, Ready to Eat (MREs) that soldiers receive after they are deployed. They drive tanks. They complete drills to demonstrate they can quickly get into a chemical protection suit. It's all designed to ensure the soldiers can spring into action when called to duty.

Brown said he considers the preparation for deployment just another part of the job .

"To me it's just something I've got to do," Brown said. "I chose this."

Bangor Daily News (Maine)

March 20, 2004 Saturday

All Editions

A Proper Send-off; If You're Sending Care Packages to Soldiers Overseas, Be Sure to Know the Rules

ARDEANA HAMLIN OF THE NEWS STAFF

Janice Ouellette of Bradford knows what to send her son Army Sgt. John Ouellette, who is stationed in Iraq: "Anything that lets him think about home is what he wants," she said. Most recently he wanted an electric razor, which she sent packed in 100 "hot balls," an individually wrapped hard candy. But what he likes best of all, she said, is homemade cookies.

She freezes cookies and vacuum-packs them with a home sealing device she bought at a local department store. "That way they stay fresh. His buddies were all fighting for those cookies," she said, laughing.

Her son also has asked for recent family photos and recently he e-mailed a request for light bulbs. "They can't get them fast enough through military channels," Ouellette said. "He said his platoon would chip in to help pay for the light bulbs."

But before anyone sends anything to a soldier in Iraq, she suggested talking to the soldier to make sure the item is OK to send. Certain food items contrary to Islamic dietary laws are not allowed.

The parcels Ouellette sends her son usually cost about \$10 to send by priority mail. The packages are sent to an APO address and cannot include her son's military rank. It took 16 days for the electric razor packed in hot balls to reach her son.

"Anything any of us here can do has got to help them [over there]," she said.

When Sgt. 1st Class Rory Eldridge was in Iraq, his mother, Suzanne Morrison of Orono, sent him homemade trail mix containing peanuts, almonds, cashews, dried fruits, coconut and raisins, which she packed in small bags containing a half-cup each. She said her package took eight to 10 weeks to reach her son, who finished his tour of duty in Iraq and is now stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky.

Those who send packages to Maine soldiers serving in Iraq need to observe the rules, said 1st Sgt. Barbara Claudel of the Maine Army National Guard's Family Support Services office.

The first rule is that one may no longer send a package addressed to "Any Soldier." For security reasons, a soldier's name and address must be on the package. The Maine Army National Guard cannot give out the names of soldiers serving in Iraq. If you know a soldier serving in Iraq, it's a good idea to contact the soldier to discuss what items to send and to receive permission to do so.

The second rule is to make sure the packaging is durable. It takes two to six weeks for a package to arrive in Iraq. But it could take longer.

The third rule is to follow U.S. postal regulations which state that one may not send obscene articles, bulk quantities of religious materials contrary to the Islamic faith, pork or pork byproducts, weapons, drugs or tobacco.

First Sgt. Carroll Payne spent six months in Iraq, from March to September 2003, with the Maine Army National Guard 112th Medical Co. Air Ambulance unit.

"They're doing a bang-up job," he said, "medevacing Iraqi children, Iraqi prisoners of war, U.S. soldiers with all types of injuries and victims of burns."

"Don't send chocolate," he said. "It arrives melted." Temperatures in Iraq can exceed 100 degrees F. He suggested sending hand cream, trail mix and books. Maine soldiers also like to get spices with which to "doctor up their mess hall food"; LED flashlights that you squeeze to turn on - "It's very dark in the desert"; and Maine souvenir items, such as postcards and lobster magnets. Small packages are better than large ones because units often are on the move.

Maine soldiers in Iraq sometimes bring with them personal laptop computers.

"We found out real quick that the floppy disks we went with got destroyed by the sand," Payne said. CDs, zip disks and memory sticks are appreciated.

Soldiers in Iraq, Payne said, sometimes stand in line three or four hours to use a phone. Phone cards from home containing 240 minutes will yield only 24 minutes in Iraq. A better way, he said, is for family members to purchase phone cards to use to call soldiers serving in Iraq. That way, they get to use the full number of minutes on the card.

Claudel suggests sending these items to soldiers in Iraq - Wet Ones baby wipes, lip balm, international phone cards, disposable cameras, travel-size toiletry items such as shampoo, deodorant and talcum powder, playing cards, AA and D batteries, and cribbage boards.

Currently, Claudel said, Maine has 1,100 soldiers deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait and Cuba.

"Thousands of Mainers are directly affected by a soldier's absence," Claudel said, and they need support, too.

Guard families have a number they may call when they need help. Those wishing to provide services, either free or discounted, to soldiers' families, may call toll-free (888) FMLYCTR. When a call for assistance is received, a family will be matched with the appropriate service.

Services needed include general home repairs, plowing, shoveling snow, electrical and plumbing.

Several Maine National Guard funds are available to aid Guard families. Donations to those funds are welcome, Claudel said, as are donations of international phone cards.

Gift certificates earmarked for Guard families also are appreciated.

To learn more about how to assist Guard families, call Linda Newbegin, Maine Army National Guard Family Readiness, at 650-2796, or e-mail <mailto:Newbeginme@pivot.net>.

Ardeana Hamlin can be reached at 990-8153 or <mailto:ahamlin@bangordailynews.net>.

Idaho Falls Post Register (Idaho Falls, Idaho)

March 20, 2004 Saturday

Local Soldier Braces for Change

NICOLE STRICKER, Post Register

EDITOR'S NOTE: A year after the war in Iraq began, the nation is still struggling to rebuild itself. Some of your friends and neighbors are in Iraq, helping rebuild that country or keeping it safe. This week's series continues with more of their stories.

The National Guard only recently alerted Idaho soldiers they may be mobilized and sent to Iraq, but Spc. Scott Mackowiak has been mentally preparing for 12 years.

Now the Idaho Falls man is making concrete plans for a potential 18-month deployment. Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Defense notified his unit, the Army National

Guard 116th Cavalry Brigade, that it might replace soldiers returning from the Iraq occupation and the war, which started one year ago.

About 2,600 Idaho Army National Guard soldiers were put on alert. A National Guard spokesman said he could not say when the guardsmen might be called to serve. If and when they are called, they would spend a couple of months in training before going overseas, Lt. Col. Tim Marsano said.

This is the closest Mackowiak, who specializes in combat engineering, has ever come to being deployed.

During his childhood in Firth, Mackowiak, 30, said he had visions of being an Air Force pilot. He ended up enlisting in the National Guard when he was 18.

"I graduated from basic training the day we invaded Iraq the first time," Mackowiak said. When his initial eight-year contract ended in 1999, he did not re-enlist. But the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks triggered a change of heart.

"I said, 'You know what, I'm going to get back in,'" Mackowiak said, noting, "I've got a wife and four kids so there's a lot more at stake this time."

Mackowiak said his kids - a 6-year-old girl and three boys ages 5, 2 and 2 months - are not yet old enough to understand why he might leave. But his wife, Carrie, grasps what's in store.

"Obviously the fact that's she's going to have to wear both hats for however long worries her," Mackowiak said.

The couple has been trying to anticipate how his absence would impact their lives. Mackowiak has put their legal and financial affairs in order and familiarized his wife with the location of key computer files, warranties and car maintenance information, he said. He also set up e-mail accounts so his wife and children can write him.

The Mackowiaks also have planned for holidays - "who's going to put up the Christmas tree?" Carrie wondered - and key family milestones.

"My daughter will turn 8 and will be able to be baptized," Mackowiak said. "If I'm gone when she turns 8, who's going to do it? She's got grandfathers and a myriad of uncles so I asked her, 'Who do you want to do this?'"

As the family has prepared for Mackowiak's possible mobilization, they are grateful for their extensive support system, including their families in Firth and Preston and the ward of their church. The National Guard also has a Family Assistance Center and a Family Support Group, which is composed mostly of soldiers' wives.

"That's an asset that's available to her and I think she'll be smart enough to use it," Mackowiak said.

REUNION

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 21, 2004, Sunday, BC cycle

Guard Unit Returns from Iraq

DATELINE: SIOUX FALLS, S.D.

The first South Dakotans called to support Operation Enduring Freedom are back on U.S. soil.

Members of the 727th Transportation Company of the Army National Guard landed in Colorado Saturday night after spending more than a year away from home.

"We've got three busloads and a lot of smiles on a lot of faces," said Capt. Robert DeJong, the unit's commander. "It's just a good feeling to be back in the United States."

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Bekaert said he's happy to be back, but he's also proud of the work his team accomplished.

Soldiers hailing from Elk Point, Brookings and Watertown spent long, hot days completing missions throughout Kuwait and Iraq. Their efforts helped the 727th earn the Presidential Navy Citation.

"It's a highly decorated award," Bekaert said. "There's not too many Army units that wear a Navy or Marine Corps Presidential Citation, so it's a pretty good award for the South Dakota National Guard."

Bekaert said the 727th has helped give South Dakota a good name overseas.

"I think the South Dakota pride is going to be heard all over Camp Pendleton," he said. "It has our name on a plaque with our unit from the state of South Dakota."

The unit should be back in South Dakota in about five days. Then they'll get 60 days off to spend with family and friends.

DeJong said his soldiers have appreciated all the support from back home.

"I just want to take a little time to thank everyone from South Dakota and the neighboring states for their continued support," he said.

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)

March 20, 2004 Saturday

Soldiers Expected Home Soon; Mobridge-Based Guard Members' Families Reflect on War's First Anniversary

By Russ Keen; American News Writer

Bitterly cold winds froze tears as they ran down cheeks in Mobridge 421 days ago today.

Thirty-nine men and women from a South Dakota National Guard detachment based in Mobridge boarded huge Guard trucks that climbed the steep hill east of Mobridge to depart for the sands of Kuwait and Iraq. That was Jan. 25, 2003.

Today - the first day of spring and the first anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq - the Mobridge area is filled with hope these same Army-green vehicles will descend that very same hill when its clothed in green grass a few weeks down the road, bringing the soldiers home.

Some were injured, even critically. But all 179 members the 200th Engineer Co. of the South Dakota National Guard are alive and well; Detachment 2 of the 200th is based in Mobridge.

Similar to the hills east of town, life since the departure has been "a roller coaster," said Bonnie Thorstenson of Selby, mother of Sgt. Shane Thorstenson, 23, of the 200th. "It has been real stressful. But we've always been hopeful. Prayer is powerful."

The 200th, which built bridges during the war, is currently in Kuwait preparing its equipment to be loaded on a ship for the trip home, said Roger Thorstenson, the sergeant's father.

Yvonne Helm of Java, the mother of Spc. Jonathan Helm, 29, of Detachment 2, said she has hopes she might see her son by Easter. Sgt. Tom Forbes, the recruiting officer stationed at the Mobridge National Guard Armory, had this much to say about the date of the return: "It's getting down to the wire."

It can't come too soon, he and others said. The war time has crept by slowly, according to those left behind. "They say every year has 365 days," Forbes said. "But this time I'd have to say they lied to me."

Yvonne said she has written 236 letters to her son since he left. "I would stay up until 3 a.m. if necessary to get a letter off," she said. "I never have gotten much sleep since he left. It has been tough. Sometimes I would just be sitting in the living room and burst out crying."

Yvonne sacrificed attending her 35th high school class reunion in California, her native state, to send care packages to Jonathan. "I saved \$1,000 over three years to go to that reunion, but I spent it all on Jonathan," she said. Bug spray, beef jerky and sunflower seeds were among the items she regularly shipped to her soldier.

No huge party is being planned for the homecoming, at least not for the moment they step off the bus. That's because soldiers have indicated what they want most at first is quiet time with their families.

"So we should just let them rest and do their thing," Yvonne said.

Some waits just beginning: For many area military families, loved ones have only begun their time in Iraq.

"We figure about this time next year our sons will be coming home," said Mary Ann Osborn of Redfield. She and her husband, F. James Osborn, are the parents of Sgt. 1st Class Jack Osborn, 39, and Sgt. Scott Osborn, 36. Both are members of the 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, South Dakota National Guard. The 2nd has units based in Aberdeen, Miller, Redfield, Sisseton, Webster and Watertown.

Mary Ann and F. James have been saying goodbye and welcome home to soldier sons for more than two decades - ever since their oldest son Chuck, 41, joined the Guard at age 18.

"That was probably the worst time, seeing that bus leave Redfield with Chuck on it," Mary Ann said. "This is nothing new for us, so this war is probably not as traumatic for us as it is to some." The absence of loved ones is probably hardest on Jack's two teen-aged sons and Scott's boys, ages 5 and 3, Mary Ann said.

Sons Chuck, Jack, Scott and Tim were all Marines. Chuck served overseas in Desert Storm, and Jack was also in the Persian Gulf at the time - a time more difficult than now because staying in touch was tougher, Mary Ann said.

"We didn't know where Chuck was, and we didn't hear from him. There was no contact for a long time," she said. The widespread prevalence of e-mail and chat rooms makes the current situation easier than Desert Storm, she said.

Some families have yet to learn when and if loved ones will serve in Iraq. The Aberdeen-based 452nd Ordnance Co. of the Army Reserve was placed on alert in early November. Officials with the Army's 96th Regional Readiness Command in Salt Lake City said late last year the 452nd could be activated in January or February. That didn't happen.

But the outfit is still on alert "to my knowledge," said Chief Warrant Officer Aaron Donat of the 452nd.

For some, wait is over: Then there are families who have already experienced the joy of embracing a loved one home safely from the war that started a year ago.

"I'm pretty proud of her," said Gene Parrow of Britton, father of Spc. Shannon Parrow. She returned home last week with some other members of the 142nd Engineer Combat Battalion of the North Dakota National Guard.

"She went over there, got her job done and came home in one piece," Gene said. Shannon was gone 14 months, and is now busy sprucing up a house she bought in Havana, N.D., since her return.

"I counted the days," said Lisa Petersen, soon to become Gene's wife and Shannon's stepmother. "The hardest part was not knowing whether she was safe."

Though the Thorstensions of Selby anticipate welcoming their son home this spring, that will not and should not be the end of concern, Bonnie said.

"We all should continue to pray for those still serving," she said.

Biloxi Sun Herald

March 20, 2004 Saturday

Guardsmen Come Home from Iraq

BYLINE: By TRACY DASH

Cheers erupted Friday night as a bus carrying two dozen members of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 890th Engineer Battalion rolled into the parking lot at the armory in Wiggins.

For many guardsmen, it was the first time they have seen their families in more than a year.

Yellow bows, American flags and giant "Welcome Home" posters made by elementary students adorned a chain-link fence and the outside wall of the armory.

The troops were deployed to Iraq in February 2003. They returned stateside last week, going to Fort Stewart, Ga., in the first phase of the demobilization process.

Six hundred troops deployed; 599 are returning. Spc. James Chance III, 25, of Kokomo, is not among them. He died Nov. 6 when he stepped on a land mine.

The battalion was deployed primarily in the tumultuous Sunni Triangle, rebuilding roads, schools and public buildings damaged or destroyed during last spring's war.

They arrived home at 9 p.m., about 12 hours after their initial expected arrival time. Family and friends kept busy talking to each other, channeling restlessness into conversation.

They gathered in the parking lot, dressed in patriotic clothes and waiving American flags, when the soldiers arrived.

Some relatives, including Ruth Taylor, began their armory vigil at mid-afternoon.

"I'm so excited I can hardly stand it," said Taylor, who was waiting to see her 32-year-old son, Spc. Ronnie Dale Taylor.

Ronnie Dale Taylor, who works for the Wiggins Fire Department, joined the Army National Guard shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

His mother said she and her only son talked on the telephone a few times while he was in Iraq but mostly communicated by mail.

Buffalo News (New York)

March 20, 2004 Saturday, FINAL EDITION

Marching Home/ A Delayed Military Homecoming Raises Fears, But Response Adds Hope/

While any delay simply extends worry, there is reason for relief in the most recent news that Buffalo's 105th Military Police Company faces only an extra three weeks in Iraq, and not an extended stay.

That should come as immediate relief for the families of the Army National Guard unit's members, who had earlier been hit with a Pentagon announcement that traded "shock and awe" for "shock and dismay."

Activated in February 2003, sent to Iraq last May and told they would be coming home in mid-April, the soldiers -- and their families -- more recently were told they had to stay indefinitely because the unit that is supposed to replace them wasn't yet ready.

The Pentagon, in other words, was asking these troops to suffer for the worst of military reasons: poor planning.

Clarification came after the families planned and announced an unprecedented protest rally to be held in front of the unit's home headquarters, the Masten Avenue Armory. Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton were told Wednesday that the unit would leave Iraq around May 4 and then, after debriefing, would release its members from active service as previously scheduled on June 17.

The protest may now become a celebration, but the unit is still serving an extra three weeks on the front lines. While it is most critical for morale to have a definite departure date circled on the calendar, Iraq remains a dangerous place.

About 170 citizen-soldiers from this area have been confronting that danger for a year now. Two of them, Sgt. Heath McMillin of Canandaigua and Spc. Michael Williams of Buffalo, were killed by roadside bombs. The 105th has shouldered a full share of the burden that is Iraq, and more.

Having made this new promise, the Army must now live up to that obligation.

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)

March 21, 2004 Sunday

National Guard Couple Returns from Iraq; N.D. soldiers Weathered Trials of War Together

By Elissa Grossell; American News Writer

The yellow ribbons at the Wall household have been replaced with a bright bunch of balloons and a banner.

That's because Erik Wall and Leah Levey have come home.

The couple, both specialists with the North Dakota National Guard's 142nd Engineer Combat Battalion, served together in Iraq for 11 months. All told, they've been away from home for 14 months.

Not many couples have weathered a war together, and they say it's made them stronger.

"I think that's probably about the hardest thing you ever have to go through," said Levey, 22, about their deployment. "We've seen each other at our worst."

And now that they're actually home, they say it's hard to believe. "It doesn't really seem real," said Wall, 24.

The approximately 630 members of the 142nd have been serving in Iraq since April 2003, spending most of their time upgrading a former Iraqi air base about 50 miles from Baghdad into what's now known as Logistical Support Area Anaconda. The 142nd is based at armories in Fargo, Wahpeton, Mayville, Oakes and Lisbon.

The outfit's troops began departing Iraq earlier this month and the entire battalion is expected to be home by mid-April. Wall got back Saturday; Levey returned Tuesday.

Levey, originally from Turtle Lake, N.D., is a medic with the battalion's headquarters in Fargo. Wall, an Aberdeen native, is with the company based in Wahpeton.

They've dated almost two years and met through mutual friends in the Guard.

Levey said she was glad to have Wall there with her in Iraq, but "it was frustrating at times." They didn't have the freedom to act like a couple, and it was also more stressful because they were constantly worrying about each other, she said.

Wall agreed. "It was really nice to have her there," he said, "but at the same time, it made it really hard."

Scorching conditions: Their experience being in Iraq is difficult to describe. "There's no way to put any of it into words," Levey said.

Temperatures averaged 120 to 130 degrees, and there was a streak when it hit 140 degree, they said. Days when it would get down to 100 degrees were considered "cool."

"But it was hot," Wall said with a smile. "There's no two ways around it."

They didn't have the luxury of air conditioning, so their bodies just climatized, they said. Plus, they drank a lot of water. "I drank 13-15 liters of water a day," Wall said.

Since they were surrounded by everything military in camp, Levey said it was easy to forget where they were. But traveling out on the road - seeing the people and the culture - was a different story.

Southern Iraq revealed primitive, almost Biblical scenes, they said. There were several shepherds, and people wore Biblical-type garb and rode donkeys and camels. Some did have cars, but they were about 20 years old.

In southern Iraq, U.S. troops would receive thumbs up and waves from civilians, the couple said.

But in northern Iraq, "some of those towns hate you, and you know it," Levey said.

Being gone so long, Wall and Levey obviously missed a lot of important events - like the birth of Wall's niece, Mariah Mae, now 8 months old. His family sent pictures overseas, but holding the smiling little girl on his lap, Wall said the photos don't compare to the real thing.

Wall also missed his uncle's and his grandmother's funerals. "It's especially hard hearing that over there," he said. Their deaths occurred when it was still considered "war time," he said. It was only later, when it was considered "peace time," that soldiers were allowed to go home for a death in the family, or receive any type of leave.

Levey got to go home on leave to see her family in November. She said it was weird - when she got home, it was like she'd never left. But when she got back to Iraq, it was like she'd never left there. And she admits it was fairly depressing to go back to Iraq.

Explosive experiences: Not surprisingly, their time in Iraq included plenty of frightening experiences.

"We got attacked by mortars quite a bit in our camp," Levey said. It started about the Fourth of July - ironically, she said, they at first thought it was fireworks - and lasted through November. At first the attacks scared her, but after a while she got used to them.

Even now, however, Wall admits loud noises like a car door slamming in the distance sometimes remind him of the attacks. "I do think twice," he said.

Attacks on convoys didn't scare them that much, Wall said. "In (a convoy) attack, you can protect yourself."

It was the thought of the unpredictable homemade bombs, which the military calls "improvised explosive devices," that were scary.

Thankfully, their battalion didn't lose any soldiers. "We were lucky," Wall said.

Their sister unit based in Bismarck, N.D., however, wasn't so fortunate. Three of the soldiers in the 957th Multi-Role Bridge Company were killed.

Surreal return: Every day for more than a year now, all they thought about was going home, Levey said. Now that they are home, it's a weird feeling, she said, like there's nothing more to want.

But they've basically slid right back into the lives they left behind.

They plan to live in Fargo. Wall will finish school at North Dakota State University, and Levey will work full-time for the Guard for now.

And they plan to enjoy the freedom to do whatever they want whenever they want.

Their homecoming, they admit, has been a bit surreal and overwhelming. But that doesn't mean they'd take it back.

"It's awesome," said Wall, grinning.

GUARD IN IRAQ

Buffalo News

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 19, 2004

105th Unit to Leave Iraq in Early May

By Jerry Zremski News Washington Bureau

3/18/2004 WASHINGTON - The **Army National Guard's** 105th Military Police Company will leave Iraq in early May and complete its tour of duty June 17, top Army officials told Sens. Charles E. Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday.

The news came a day after families of the troops in the Buffalo-based unit announced plans for a rally Sunday to press for the soldiers' quick return.

"We are thrilled," said Melissa Kreiger of North Tonawanda, whose husband, Spc. Christopher Kreiger, serves in the 105th. "We had no idea this would happen."

Actually, the last orders the unit received extended its tour of duty until June 17. But when the unit got word that it would not leave Iraq in mid-April as originally planned, family members became concerned that the 105th could end up in Iraq indefinitely.

The Army decided to extend the 105th's stay beyond mid-April because its replacement unit would not be ready by that time.

But Schumer said Brig. Gen. Guy Swan, chief of legislative liaison for the Army, told him that the 105th would leave Iraq around May 4.

The unit will then be debriefed and demobilized, and then released from active service June 17, Schumer and Clinton said they were told.

"I'm glad they now have a specific date that they and their families can plan around," said Schumer, D-N.Y. "I'm encouraged that the Army has responded and look forward to hearing that the 105th is on its way home," Clinton, D-N.Y., said through spokeswoman Jennifer Hanley.

About 170 members of the 105th were activated in February 2003 and arrived in Iraq in May.

Two of the unit's troops have died in roadside bombings. Sgt. Heath A. McMillin, 29, of Canandaigua, a former Marine and star high school athlete, was killed on the highway south of Baghdad on July 27.

And on Oct. 17, Spc. Michael L. Williams, 46, of Buffalo, an investigator for the state prison system, was killed near Baghdad.

The uncertainty led family members to organize Sunday's rally in front of the Masten Avenue Armory. John Goheen, spokesman for the National Guard Association of the United States, said it was highly unusual for family members to stage such an event to press for the troops' return.

Now, though, it looks like there won't be anything unusual about it at all.

"We're thinking of changing the rally to a celebration," Kreiger said.

Area Soldier Killed in Iraq

Guardsman lived in Wrightsville Beach

By Sam Scott

Staff Writer

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH - Luis Carrasquillo figured his younger brother had a good chance of staying out of harm's way in Iraq.

Spc. Jocelyn "Joce" Carrasquillo was trained for supply work such as distributing water and uniforms, an assignment that reassured his family as the Wilmington-based 120th Infantry Division headed off to Kuwait last month.

"Being in supply, we thought he'd be pretty safe," his older brother said.

But early afternoon Sunday, the family received the news that the 28-year-old **National Guardsman** and Wrightsville Beach resident had been killed in combat, just three weeks after deploying. The details of Spc. Carrasquillo's death were unclear Sunday.

Luis Carrasquillo said the family had been told little other than his brother's convoy had been hit some time in the previous 24 hours. He did not know whether other soldiers were injured.

According to the Los Angeles Times, a newly arrived National Guard soldier was killed by an explosive Sunday morning.

Capt. Robert Carver, the public affairs officer for the **N.C. National Guard**, said he could not yet confirm Spc. Carrasquillo's death, which would be the 120th Division's first casualty in Iraq.

The death stunned Spc. Carrasquillo's friends. Like Spc. Carrasquillo, many of them spent time in the Goldsboro area before moving to Wilmington.

Chad Clark, who shared a Wrightsville Beach apartment with Spc. Carrasquillo, remembered his friend as a joker and a dancer, with a relentlessly upbeat attitude.

"The world could be falling apart and he'd find something positive about it," said Mr. Clark, standing in his friend's bedroom Sunday.

"We were like a family," said Shawn Smith, a Wilmington Police officer. Like Mr. Clark, he met Spc. Carrasquillo when they attended Wayne Community College in Goldsboro in the early 1990s.

"I don't really believe it yet," he said.

Mr. Clark said Spc. Carrasquillo called him last week to tell him he had been assigned to work as a gunner in a convoy - surprise news to those he was close to who thought he was going to be a supply officer.

"It was a shock to us," said Luis Carrasquillo, who only just found out about his brother's job as a gunner. "If we had known that, I'm sure we would already have been worried."

Described by friends as something of a ladies' man and a magnet on the dance floor, Spc. Carrasquillo's No. 1 woman seemed to be his mother, Isabel. The two had just spoken two days before his death.

"He loved his mom," Luis Carrasquillo said. "He looked after his mother. He pretty much refinanced her house before he left."

Spc. Carrasquillo, who worked at Sam's Club before leaving, was in the **National Guard** to earn money for school, Luis Carrasquillo said. He had three brothers, including a twin, Ronald, who has been in Iraq for more than a year with the Army Reserves.

Lexington Herald Leader (Kentucky)

March 21, 2004 Sunday

Changed by War, Proud They Served

By Jim Warren; HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

At dawn on March 23, 2003, Marine Sgts. Tim Vickery and Jason Maguire were perched on top of their huge M-1A1 Abrams tank as it rumbled toward Nasiriyah, Iraq.

Suddenly, angry puffs of smoke began to pop from the ground on both sides.

"We kind of looked at each other and said, 'What is that?'" Vickery recalled. "We'd never been under fire; we'd never seen anything like that. And then I said, 'I think they're shooting at us.'"

Thus did Vickery, who now lives in Nicholasville, get his baptism of fire in the Iraqi war. He was one of many.

Kentuckians from virtually every walk of life answered the call to duty in the war, which began one year ago this weekend. They carried rifles, drove trucks, cooked food, repaired equipment and did all the countless jobs, large and small, that made victory possible.

Now, many are back home. Some remain in uniform; others have returned to civilian life. A few might have to return to Iraq.

All have been changed.

Every Kentuckian who served has a story. Here are a few.

The advance on Baghdad might have seemed like a smooth-running machine, rolling over every obstacle without a hitch, but the front line was plagued with breakdowns, snafus and holdups.

Tim Vickery, a Marine reservist with Alpha Company, 8th Tank Battalion out of Fort Knox, missed much of the fighting at Nasiriyah because his company commander's tank broke down. The officer took over Vickery's tank, leaving Vickery behind while the officer led the rest of the company into battle.

Later in the war, Vickery's own tank broke down, its tracks shredded from too many miles on paved roads. "Parts were hard to get. We had to beg and borrow," Vickery recalled. "It was very frustrating."

Once, some of the company's tanks cut across a field in an attempt to avoid a dangerous spot called "ambush alley." Iraqis had flooded the field, and several tanks bogged down in the mud.

However, the company made its mark. One of its platoons escorted the Special Forces units that rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch. Once, during the fighting at Ambush Alley, one of Alpha Company's tanks was firing on enemy positions when one of its own 120mm shells jammed in the gun. Staff Sgt. Sam Swain of Texas and Lance Cpl. Patrick Hisel had to climb out of the tank, under fire, and clear the blockage.

"We had rounds clanging off the back of the tank and landing around us," said Hisel, who is from Georgetown. "Some of them were pretty close, but I was too busy to look. We had to clear the gun so we could keep firing."

"I wrote to my mother and said, 'I took 33 guys over, and I'm bringing 33 back,'" Sgt. 1st Class Tony Simpson says. "But I didn't get that mission accomplished ... because we lost Darrin Potter."

Sgt. Darrin Potter and Simpson went to Iraq as members of the Kentucky National Guard's 223rd Military Police Company. They had served together on peacekeeping duty in Bosnia, played softball together, become good friends. They were in the same platoon, although Potter was temporarily working with another unit at the time of his death. The story still haunts Simpson, 30, who lives in Burgin.

Potter was in a Humvee with other troops, responding to a night mortar attack in Baghdad, when the vehicle plunged into a canal and sank. Simpson, who was at Basra at the time, received the report that Potter was missing.

"We sat around a radio and waited for word," Simpson said. "I remember that we kind of joked around, trying to keep our spirits up, that Potter was lucky and he had probably washed up on shore somewhere, and some Iraqi female was taking care of him. Then around midnight we heard that they found his body. We all kept thinking, 'If we had been there, it wouldn't have been like that,'" he said.

Potter, who was 24 and from Louisville, was the Kentucky National Guard's first combat fatality since Vietnam. His loss was Simpson's bitterest memory of the war.

But Simpson, whose unit returned home last September, says he isn't irritated by debates about whether the U.S. invasion was justified.

"As far as I'm concerned, that's why we were over there fighting -- so that everybody can have their own opinion. I went over there for them to have the right to say that. Before we went, the people over there couldn't speak their mind."

For Army Pfc. Michael Pettit of Lexington, the war really began when he found himself repairing bullet holes in helicopters.

"I remember this one that had a hole through the tail where an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) had hit without going off," Pettit said. "It just missed the hydraulic system. If it had hit that, it would have exploded."

Later, Pettit, now 19, would be a target himself.

He went to Iraq as a helicopter mechanic with the 101st Airborne Division, working on the Chinook helicopters. He worked nights -- escaping the 120-degree daytime heat -- going almost non-stop after the shooting began. Frequently, Pettit had to ride with truck convoys that, while picking up or delivering helicopter parts, became handy targets for Iraqi guerrillas.

"We got shot at a few times," he said. "Usually, you wouldn't see where the shots were coming from. You'd just keep trucking and try to get away from it."

"Once, we went through this town, and just as we were leaving, there was an explosion behind us. We heard later that a car bomb had gone off at a checkpoint we'd just gone through."

Pettit came home last month and is now on leave. Last week, he married his fiancée, Crystal Lovelace. He isn't sure whether he'll stay in the Army, but he has no doubts about his service.

"When we were in Kuwait, I had no clue. I couldn't see it. But once we moved into Iraq and I saw all the oppression and poverty, I knew why we were over there. I don't feel bad about it."

Three days after 9/11, Lexington's Angela Falkenstine shed tears at a memorial service on the University of Kentucky campus. Eighteen months later, she was an Army private first class serving in Iraq.

Falkenstine, now 21, worked as a cook in the 101st Airborne Division. Cooks usually don't get into harm's way, but Iraq was different. Traveling Iraq's roads in a truck convoy, no one was safe. Whether driving, or as a passenger, Falkenstine kept a loaded weapon at her side.

"You had to be constantly alert," she said. "You even had to be suspicious of little kids. I love kids, but at the same time I had to look at them as if they could hurt us."

Falkenstine remembers getting up at 5:30 a.m. to start cooking for up to 500 soldiers at a time. When there was a break, she would collapse. "It was so hot, all you wanted to do was lay on your cot. It was so draining."

The high point, she recalls, was spending three months in an area occupied by Kurds.

"We went to an orphanage there and took clothes donated from back home," she said. "The people were so grateful, warm and wonderful. I'll look back on that as a totally great experience."

The 101st Airborne returned to Fort Campbell last month. Falkenstine, who has about two years left on her enlistment, says she probably will go to college when it is over. She says she is glad to have served.

"I hear people say there were no weapons of mass destruction. But we did capture Saddam Hussein, and we liberated millions of people from decades and decades of oppression. That's something we can always be proud of."

Marine Sgt. Maria Ramirez remembers the little boys along the roadsides in Iraq, begging for handouts.

"One day it occurred to me: These kids aren't much bigger than my own boys," she said. "I felt really bad for them, and anything I had I would give to them."

Ramirez, 24, went to Iraq in February 2003 with Lexington's Marine Corps Reserve Military Police Company A, leaving behind her two sons, Michael, 4, and Dylan, who turns 2 next week. Since she worked in administration, Ramirez seldom went into combat areas, but her work had its own stresses.

One of her duties was pulling the records of Marines wounded or killed. She was offered the job of opening body bags and helping to identify remains, but declined it.

"I remember this one particular Marine -- I pulled his next-of-kin information -- and they said that when they opened his body bag he was clutching an American flag. Two of the corpsmen who opened the bag said they would remember it the rest of their lives."

The unit returned to Lexington last September. Though glad to be home, Ramirez says, she has had some struggles.

"I don't like to be in crowds now," she said. "Some kinds of sirens bother me. I don't like any kind of unexpected loud noises. It's kind of a surprise, because I never felt that way before."

Ramirez's younger brother, Alex, 20, recently joined the Marines and says he might volunteer for service in Iraq. She isn't comfortable with the idea.

"I'm very proud of him ... but I'm like, 'Alex, please don't.'"

Ramirez could end up back in Iraq herself. Her unit could be recalled this summer to relieve units now serving there, she says.

"I have mixed feelings. I have the urge to go, but there are my children to think about.

"I'm very proud, and I want my children to know that I am proud, to have gone over there and been part of that operation. But sometimes when I think about what happened over there, and the people who died ... sometimes I just want to cry."

The Washington Post

March 21, 2004 Sunday

2 Million Miles, Makeshift Armor And No Fatalities; A Virginia Guard Unit Survives Iraq's Dangers

Karl Vick, Washington Post Foreign Service

DATELINE: BALAD, Iraq

Of the many perilous things an American can do in Iraq, the most perilous of all is driving a U.S. military vehicle in a line of other U.S. military vehicles, up and down a highway, day after day.

The men and women of the 1032nd Transportation Company, a unit of the Virginia National Guard, have been doing just that for almost a year, logging more miles than any other unit in Iraq -- about 2.3 million so far, almost all of them on the potholed asphalt of the region north and west of Baghdad known as the Sunni Triangle.

That the 1032nd came through the past 12 months without a fatality is regarded as exceptional good fortune by its members, a motley, good-natured group that includes truckers, students and at least one police officer, one iron worker, one cell biologist and one bartender.

"We get outside the gate, we keep it to the floor," said Spec. Jeff Combs of Jonesville, in far southwest Virginia, near the Kentucky and Tennessee lines. "So far we've been really, really fortunate."

The absence of fatalities is all the more remarkable, the truckers say, because for the first three-quarters of their tour, the drivers, gunners and mechanics routinely traversed the deadliest sections of Iraq without bulletproof vests.

When a gunman in a speeding black BMW fired an AK-47 assault rifle into the chest of Spec. Nathan Williams, the slug was stopped by a steel plate Williams had purchased with his own money and then fitted into a Kevlar vest designed to stop only shrapnel. Otherwise, the high-velocity slug would have entered his heart.

"They were \$3 apiece," said Capt. Joe Breeding, hefting one of the crudely cut, quarter-inch-thick steel plates a colleague had sent from a workshop in Virginia. The shortage of body armor for U.S. troops recently emerged as an issue in the presidential campaign. Sen. John F. Kerry of Massachusetts, the presumptive Democratic nominee, has cited the shortage as evidence that President Bush cares too little about the welfare of the troops. Bush TV ads, in turn, have accused Kerry of casting a vote that would have deprived combat troops of body armor.

But it has been a matter of lively discussion for almost a year in Iraq, especially among the Guard and Reserve units that were called up to play support roles but found themselves in the thick of a guerrilla war.

"It was disappointing to me to see units that just got here had vests, and we had been here six months doing without proper protection," said Spec. Rodney Pilson from Stewart. "Something like that makes you feel kind of segregated."

Breeding, the unit's commanding officer, said the 1032nd arrived in Kuwait last year largely ignorant of the state of the art in personal protection. The Kevlar vests they carried from Virginia were designed to stop shrapnel or a low-velocity slug from a handgun. But they lacked the specially designed boron carbide ceramic plates that can absorb a bullet from an assault rifle.

Too few had been ordered before the war, senior commanders told Congress last fall, and first priority was given to dismounted infantry, the foot soldiers most vulnerable in a battlefield setting.

But within weeks, war turned to occupation, and the most basic assumptions were flipped upside down. "When we got here, it wasn't as bad. The war was still going on," said Spec. Cliff Vance, the bartender, from Wise.

An enemy that seldom chose to stand and fight preyed mostly on military vehicles, employing booby traps and ambushes using small arms. Transportation outfits such as the 1032nd, which made two runs a day through Baghdad to and from Nasiriyah, found themselves on the new front line with equipment designed for the rear.

"We realize they had a limited number" of ceramic-equipped vests, Breeding said. "One thing I didn't think they realized is how the transporters are on the front line, too."

Some things the truckers could change themselves. Makeshift armor was cut from steel plates at the machine shops in the sprawling base set up on a former Iraqi airfield outside Balad, about 40 miles north of Baghdad. Driver-side doors got steel plating, later replaced by sheets of an alloy called Armox. Kevlar-coated ballistic blankets were laid on cab floors. Cargo Humvees became battle wagons, their back ends enclosed in steel that protected the soldier manning the .50-caliber machine gun mounted in the rear.

"You came here and basically you took care of yourself," said Spec. David Howard.

The improvised armor made the company, which is due to leave Iraq this month, the envy of incoming units.

Sgt. 1st Class Kelvin Davenport, who will return to work as a sniper on the police SWAT team in Bristol, said the newcomers ask, "When are you leaving? Can we get your vehicles?"

There was a limit, however, to how much the truckers could do to armor their own bodies. The Kevlar vests had no ceramic plates, and there was no space between layers of Kevlar to slip in an improvised plate.

Vests with slots to accommodate plates arrived in June, but the boron carbide ceramic plates did not begin making their way to the unit until November. The entire company was finally outfitted in January.

"We got that stuff after we got off the road," said Sam Stone, a mechanic and part-time driver, shaking her head.

The unit was in fact still driving in January, but by then much of the military transport was being handled by a civilian firm, Kellogg Brown & Root Inc., a subsidiary of Halliburton. The 1032nd provided the armed escort, sending its makeshift battle wagons ahead to scout for roadside bombs -- Davenport spotted more than 30 himself -- and bringing up the rear, still the most dangerous position.

"KBR was better equipped than we were," said Stone, a student from Chatham. "We used to joke about that. All their drivers had actual bulletproof vests."

Many of the unit's 105 drivers recount close calls. More than a dozen of their trucks were damaged by roadside explosives. But only five people were wounded, and all five returned to duty.

Two of the wounded were hit not by roadside bombs but by mortar attacks around the 1032nd's original quarters at the corner of Texas and David Letterman Drive on the Balad base. "I think that was scarier than driving," said Pilson, idling with his fellow drivers in the shade of a eucalyptus the other day. "You wake up in the night to a boom, your heart stops, man. You're supposed to feel safe here."

The men beside him nodded and chuckled. National Guard units grapple with a reputation as the military's second-class citizens, frequently accorded less respect than reservists. But the sense of family so often found in shared adversity has a more familiar feeling in a unit where the youngest member is 19 and the oldest 59. The only death in the 1032nd this year was from cancer. It killed a man who had survived Vietnam.

"We've been lucky," said Spec. Michael Bauman, 40, a construction worker from Hillsville. "I mean, you consider over 2 million miles in this area, we've been lucky.

"It's the heat that kills you."

Chicago Tribune

March 20, 2004 Saturday

Chicago Final Edition

Chicago Loses Its 2nd GI to Year-Old War in Iraq; He Called Home Days Before Blast

By Nikki Usher and Gina Kim, Tribune staff reporters.

Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps wanted to talk to his 5-month-old son Sunday when he called from Kuwait. So his fiance put Elijah on the phone and watched their infant son gurgle with glee.

"Whatever he said to the baby, it obviously had him excited and it brightened his day," said Phipps' fiance, LaToya Ragsdale, 30, of Chicago. "And once the baby got to making his sounds, I didn't want to snatch the phone from him."

During the three minutes of the 10-minute phone call, Phipps told his fiance he loved her and was headed to Iraq.

Phipps, 44, a driver for the 1544th Transportation Company of the Illinois Army National Guard in Downstate Paris, died Wednesday in a mortar attack at a U.S. supply base in Baghdad, said Maj. Tim Franklin, an Illinois National Guard spokesman.

He was the second Chicagoan and 22nd Illinois resident to die in the conflict. He was the third in the Illinois National Guard to die in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Pfc. Cheryl Walker, 36, of Urbana also was wounded in the attack but has been released back to her unit, Franklin said.

Phipps, who grew up on Chicago's West Side, was the youngest of eight children and a mama's boy, said his sister, Flora Greggs. His siblings called him "Squealy" because he always threatened to tell on them unless they paid him, his sister said.

An industrious child, he delivered newspapers, shined shoes and bagged groceries after school. He also loved the military, and played with his bags of green plastic Army men and watched war movies on television, his siblings said.

After graduating from Crane High School in 1978, he enlisted in the National Guard and served off and on for 15 years. He was in Iraq for the first Persian Gulf War and then re-enlisted in February 2003 to put in a full 20 years for retirement, Ragsdale said.

He spent most of his life working as a driver for Federal Express and UPS. Most recently, he worked for Budget Rent a Car cleaning cars, said his brother, Albert. He was told in April that he would be going to Iraq, but was able to delay his departure until after Elijah's birth, Ragsdale said.

The family said Phipps will have a full military funeral. Services will be held March 27 in Bethlehem Healing Temple, 12 S. Oakley Blvd., Chicago.

Hartford Courant (Connecticut)

March 20, 2004 Saturday, 6-7

New Guard Role on Front Lines

JESSE HAMILTON; Courant Staff Writer

Staff Sgt. John Noone was approaching a quarter-century in the National Guard, and in that long stretch had never been sent overseas.

Retirement drew nearer, and he would soon be just John Noone, Danbury train mechanic.

Then the orders came.

Noone, 42, was one of 130,000 troops sent to fight a war in Iraq that began a year ago today.

It was a year of sacrifice for all, but especially for members of the National Guard, who had long been accustomed to the sidelines. They found themselves doing the same jobs as the professional soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines beside them -- and dying the same deaths.

The first year in Iraq rewrote some of the basic tenets of the National Guard, America's oldest fighting force. The weekend warriors were suddenly working around the clock, in a transformation of the U.S. military in need of part-time troops.

About 40 percent of the troops now in Iraq are from the National Guard or reserves, according to the Pentagon.

"They were intended to be reserves -- the backup," said Rep. John Larson, D-1st District. "That has not been the case."

Noone, with a unit of Connecticut helicopter mechanics, has watched the transformation. More than ever, the force is an international guard facing a new reality: Being in the Guard won't keep you from a combat zone, and once there, it will probably be for an extended stay.

For that reason, Noone thinks the Guard may lose members. For many, the new Guard is not the duty they signed up for.

Military's New Look

The U.S. military is rebuilding itself as smaller, faster, busier. The missions are many, so the military leans harder on its backup -- reserve components that include the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Forces Reserve and Air Force Reserve.

But the National Guard has a special responsibility that sets it apart. The 460,000-member Guard is less a single body than a collection of parts with two heads -- federal and state. Federal officials can order the Guard overseas, but at the same time, each state's Guard must be available to its governor in case of fire, flood, storm or civil unrest.

During the war in Iraq, some states saw more than half their Guard members called for duty. At the peak, Connecticut had about 44 percent under federal deployment around the country or overseas, with many units assigned to the Middle East.

In California, more than a quarter of the state's Guard was mobilized elsewhere when wildfires began sweeping through the state's forests and towns. Helicopters that would have been called to fight fires were overseas, said spokesman Lt. Col. Terry Knight.

"Our Black Hawks were in Afghanistan. Our Chinooks were in Iraq," he said. But remaining forces and help from other states made up for it, he said.

The lack of units may not have led to a crisis in California, but governors still get nervous watching thousands of their emergency forces getting on airplanes. Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, the federal administrative office of the Guard, has heard their concerns.

"Governors have asked that we ensure they have sufficient forces in the state," he told the National Governors Association last month.

"Our Guard force structure is not properly balanced," he said. It's not just an imbalance between states, but also between regular and reserve forces, he said.

His goal: At least half of each state's Guard will be ready for a governor's call at any time. No more than a quarter will be deployed overseas and another quarter will be training.

Predictability is the watchword. In the new system, every Army National Guard member should expect a major deployment every five or six years. Everybody in the Air National Guard, which typically deploys more often for shorter spans, should count on going somewhere every 15 months.

Longer Deployments

Getting called up isn't the problem for many. It's the length of the call that's tough.

In their infrequent activations, guardsmen in the past were put on short assignments, and usually not particularly dangerous ones. They would fill in for a few months on jobs left behind by active-duty troops heading for battlefields. They might help run a clinic, guard a base at the rear, or move supplies. A few, like Connecticut's 103rd Fighter Wing, would serve in combat, but usually for a relatively short stint.

When units started getting called up for tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, they thought they'd be looking at five or six months, like older members did in the Persian Gulf War. Their orders said to expect a year's service, but that's what the orders always said.

Several months after arriving in Southwest Asia, the soldiers and airmen got news: Not only would their deployment be a year, but the "one year" meant 12 months in the war zone and didn't include the weeks or months they would spend training, mobilizing and then processing back out.

"I think that is going to hurt the Guard a lot," said Noone, whose unit was frustrated. "None of us joined the regular Army."

Larson, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, thinks President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld have been too stubborn to admit they didn't have a large enough regular Army to handle Iraq. .

Rumsfeld's answer last month: "The real problem is not the size of the force, per se, but rather the way the force has been managed." Though citizen-soldiers may be deploying longer, less than 40 percent of the overall reserve force has been called up since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Rumsfeld noted. And since 1990, fewer than 8 percent has been called up twice.

If the National Guard has been leaned on too heavily, it may be because it harbors the exact kinds of units -- such as military police and civil affairs specialists -- that are so necessary to stability in the chaos of a rebuilding nation. Connecticut's 143rd Military Police Company from Hartford, for instance, has been in Baghdad for its year. All 13 soldiers wounded in action from the state's Guard were from that group.

Rumsfeld has promised to shift more of those duties to the active forces and pass to the reserves some of the duties in less demand. In another measure, outdated artillery units are being retrained as military police, and jobs that can be done by civilians are being contracted, leaving more soldiers for roles like intelligence analysis. Rumsfeld has said he doesn't want to hit the Guard and reserves so hard.

The Connecticut National Guard is preparing for changes, too. Like the Guard in other states, Connecticut's is under orders to streamline. The number of troops -- about 5,000 -- will remain the same, but the number of units will be reduced and some armories will probably be closed. Maj. Gen. William Cugno, who leads Connecticut's Guard, said he expects to have a consolidation plan ready by April.

"We keep getting smaller and smaller," Cugno said. "We're going to do it again."

Guard Transformed

Noone recalled the Guard he joined 25 years ago.

"It was a different Army back then," he said. "The guys back then were in it for the love of it." It wasn't about the benefits, he said.

But the Guard had a public relations problem. Years before Noone joined up, the Guard was known as a place to dodge front-line service in Vietnam.

After Vietnam, changes were made to make the Guard a more integral part of the military. Essential specialties were moved into the reserve forces to make sure that the units would be called up. The idea was to tie local communities to the wars being fought by uncles, daughters and brothers.

Still, even though more than 200,000 reservists were called up for the first gulf war, the force's load has generally been light. Guard members got used to the recruiting pitch, "one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer." For that, they got a paycheck and benefits that included help paying for college.

Sgt. Jeffrey Arnold of Glastonbury graduated from Eastern Connecticut State University in 2000 with help from his Guard benefits. He works as an account executive for a health care company and fulfilled his contract with the Guard last year. But when his separation date came up in July, he couldn't have walked away if he wanted to. He was already in Iraq with the 248th Engineer Company.

When he gets home, his wife said, he is getting out of the Guard.

That's exactly what the military fears. There are three groups the National Guard counts on to maintain its numbers: new recruits, people moving over from active service and existing members who re-enlist.

The Department of Defense has acknowledged its retention of troops has been weak lately. Capt. Robert Brafford, who is in charge of recruiting and retention for Connecticut's Guard, said it's difficult to say how many soldiers and airmen will leave after Iraq.

"The bottom line is, I don't think anybody really knows yet," he said.

Considering that a commitment to the Guard lasts eight years, Brafford said, new recruits and their families are wary customers. At first glance, the national recruiting numbers look great. According to the National Guard Bureau's statistics for last Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, the goals were met for almost all branches of the Guard and reserves.

But a comparison for the same period of 2002 shows most of the current goals were set far lower than before.

Although Cugno sees Connecticut recruitment numbers as "soft," at about 60 percent of the goal, he's not worried.

"The Guard is in for the long haul," he said, pointing to its origin in 1636. And he thinks members will like a more active Guard.

"They want to be worked. They want to participate," he said. "Our soldiers join because they want to be a part of it."

Cugno hates the term "weekend warrior." He tirelessly points out that his people have the same training and capabilities as the regular forces, even if they don't get some of the latest equipment. And he sees what his guardsmen have that many regular troops don't: experience.

Noone headed to Kuwait last March with his unit of highly specialized helicopter technicians. They arrived, to find no tools and while they waited, Noone met a civil affairs officer who had a problem. She worked for the unit that had to get Iraq's dilapidated rail system back on track.

Noone is a mechanic and train inspector for Metro-North Railroad. It's his job to keep trains in shape for the run between New York and Connecticut.

Noone left his unit for two months and became one of the first Americans to start rebuilding Iraq as chief of a gruff band of Iraqi railroad workers. His job was to get trains running out of the port city of Um Qasr. He had few tools and little money, so he appealed to his crew's patriotism. "You're doing this for your own country," he told them.

"By the time I left, we had a train a day going north," he said.

Opting For Retirement

Lt. Col. Chris Rodney, an Army spokesman at the Pentagon, said the Army has 330,000 soldiers in 120 countries. Almost a third of that number is expected to be in Iraq for another year, and almost half of those will be members of the Guard and reserves.

In the war's first year, the Pentagon reported, 78 reservists were killed. The rest are now coming home in one of the largest troop movements in U.S. history. Noone was among the first to return to Connecticut, and says he will probably opt for retirement before he gets shipped out again. His wife doesn't want to go through it a second time.

"She would like to see me never do this again," he said.

So with others making decisions like Noone's, the health of the Guard may be decided in coming months. The answer will come across recruiters' desks and in the number of soldiers and airmen willing to face much more than one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer.

GUARD IN AFGHANISTAN

Baltimore Sun

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 21, 2004

Danger Second Nature To Md. Civilian Soldiers

Life has flip-flopped for Maryland National Guardsmen sent to Afghanistan. With their extended duty, home is now part time.

By Douglas Birch, Sun Foreign Staff

KABUL, Afghanistan - The August night when three Maryland National Guard military police units arrived in Afghanistan, several rockets shrieked into the neighborhood near their Kabul base.

The MPs raced through their mazelike compound, not far from the U.S. Embassy. They sealed the gates, conducted a hurried headcount and checked for damage. The missiles went wide, but the assault made a big impression on the Guardsmen.

"That night was completely chaotic," recalled Spc. Michael Morehouse, 26, a Baltimore native who lives in Bowie, as he sat in the scraggly shade of a tree a few days ago. "We thought: 'Oh, we're not in the States anymore.'"

Last weekend, when missiles were fired toward the Presidential Palace, the MPs knew exactly what to do. "Now, it's second nature," Morehouse said.

Life for these part-time soldiers, who in quieter times could expect two weeks of training a year, has been turned upside down. It's their civilian life that seems to be a part-time thing now. And because they stand near the shadowy front line of a hard-to-define war, each day they face a mixture of tedium and tension.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the 290th MP Company, based in Parkville; the 200th, based in Salisbury; and the 115th, based in both locations, were activated and told to report for duty at the Pentagon.

For weeks, the Maryland-based military police - many of them police officers in civilian life - helped FBI investigators hunt for evidence and retrieve human remains there, and they stood guard as construction workers rebuilt the shattered structure.

In June, the three units were called up for deployment to Afghanistan. They arrived in early August, the night of the rocket attacks.

Since then, more rockets, a suicide bombing and other blasts have hit Kabul. Scores of Afghans and foreigners have died across the country in a resurgence of violence blamed on al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Most of the MPs work at the Combined Forces Command Afghanistan, headquarters of Lt. Gen. David Barnow, who directs the 13,500 U.S.-led coalition troops in Afghanistan.

The MPs are in charge of sentry posts spaced along the walls of the sprawling complex. They patrol its perimeter in Humvees and stand guard at the gates. The work might not be exciting. But if foes of the coalition decide to attack in the Afghan capital, the Combined Forces Command would make a tempting target.

Capt. Robert Estes, a police officer from suburban Richmond, Va., commands the Maryland MP units. He praised his men for their hard work and professionalism. But no matter how vigilant, he acknowledged, they can't guarantee that they will thwart every attack, especially by suicide bombers. "There's just no way to protect against it," he said.

The headquarters compound consists of several square blocks of a residential section of downtown Kabul, where the streets have been blocked off. Outside, it looks like a fortress. Masonry walls are protected by huge, sand-filled boxes. On top of the walls, the military has

placed corrugated metal sheets, presumably to keep snipers from peering inside. And the perimeter is ringed with razor wire to stop people from climbing in.

The interior is a small city-within-a-city, much of it off limits to civilians. Streets are lined with two-story masonry villas - converted to military uses - and courtyards landscaped with grass, geraniums and pomegranate trees.

The compound swarms with heavily armed men and women. Visitors are escorted everywhere by rifle-carrying guards. Journalists are required to sign pledges not to disclose details of the compound's defenses.

Wearing full body armor and carrying his assault rifle, Staff Sgt. Ronald Vega, 48, of Parkville - a big, broad-shouldered man with a gentle manner - strolled through the headquarters compound on a recent night, moving from sentry post to sentry post. It was his job this evening to keep moving among the posts, making sure that each one was ready to respond to any assault.

The New York native spent 10 years on the Baltimore police force, then joined the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission police in 1990.

After Sept. 11, Vega worked at the Pentagon hunting for victims and their personal effects as part of a mortuary unit. In the weeks after the attack, he watched from a distance as honor guards performed a half-dozen burials a day at Arlington National Cemetery across the road. "It's something you'll never forget."

Compassion for Afghans

Like most Americans, he said, he wanted to "get even" for the attacks. But he has nothing but compassion, it seems, for the plight of most Afghans.

Outside the compound walls, widows in grimy burqas, the head-to-toe veils once required by the Taliban, beg for enough money to eat. Toddlers sit and splash in gutters with their orange-tinted hair, a symptom of malnutrition. Children fight over scraps from garbage heaps.

The MP units help support two Kabul orphanages. Once a month, the Guardsmen bring each a load of pens, paper, sewing kits and other scarce supplies donated by family support groups. Some of the MPs said they were surprised by the friendliness and generosity of the people.

"They have so little," said Morehouse. "But they will share with you everything, at any time. You don't see some guy eating in McDonald's ask you to come over and eat with him. Here, if a guy goes out and gets something, he asks you to share it with him."

Despite the hospitality, the MPs say they want to go home. Some have spent almost two of the past three years on active duty. They don't have a fixed date for returning. And only about a third have been granted seven-day home leaves.

They have missed birthdays, school performances and graduations. Spc. Jason Metz, 21, of Edgewood left when his son was a few months old. "Now he says 'hi' and 'hot dog'" on the phone, he said.

1st Lt. Shawn Keller, a young Delaware state trooper who lives in Delmarva, Del., also has a toddler at home. "I've missed the time when he started walking, and the first teeth," he said.

Long assignments

Estes worries that many will wind up leaving the Guard rather than risk another long overseas assignments. "In 1980, when I first got into the National Guard, the chances of getting activated were, like, zero," he said. "There might be a flood or a national disaster. But that was about it. Now? It's not a question of if you're going to get deployed, but when."

Several Guardsmen are said to be in financial straits because of the loss of their civilian income.

Morehouse was training to be a police officer in Washington's Metro transit system in September 2001, but his two Guard deployments interrupted his training. He has spent a total of a week on the job.

Others are feeling the pressure, too.

"You've got people who want to contribute," said 1st Sgt. Aaron Henderson of Richmond, Va., part of the 115th MP Company. "But it gets to a certain point where they say, 'I like the Guard, and I like the military, but I can't afford to be deployed again.'"

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

Lexington Herald Leader (Kentucky)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 18, 2004 Thursday

Triumphs, Fears Also Felt at Home

WAR WITH IRAQ: ONE YEAR LATER

By Andy Mead; Herald-Leader Staff Writer

It's been a tough 12 months for Anne McCullough, going on with her life in Lexington while her heart was 6,500 miles away.

Two of her three sons, David, 25, and John, 23, spent part of the year in Iraq with their Marine Corps units.

"During the war itself, I was glued to the TV, absolutely glued," she said this week. "As time went on I let it go a bit, but I had to check on it every day. I had to know. Where are these units now? Where are my sons?"

McCullough was, of course, not alone.

The fighting that began a year ago Saturday, and the violence that continues today, has affected the lives of uncounted thousands of Kentuckians.

The anniversary brings a presidential visit, protests, and reflections.

Brett Bell is reflecting.

He didn't watch much television after returning from Iraq to his job teaching computer networking and repair at Central Kentucky Technical College.

But lately, he said this week, he's been watching anniversary programs on television.

Bell is a member of the Kentucky **National Guard**, and was called up in 1991 for the first Iraq war, spending time in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

He joked with friends then about going back some day, and did. His military police unit was activated in December 2002 and, on March 31, 2003, entered Iraq. He got back home just before Thanksgiving.

The first time he was single. This time he had a wife and two children.

"They did a lot of stuff on their own," Bell said. "There was a lot of support though."

The year has brought many changes for Margaret Harper, one of several students suspended from Lafayette High School after 77 walked out of the Lexington school last March to protest the war.

That suspension led to an escalating spiral of suspensions and conflicts with school administrators, Harper said this week. Now 18, she is completing her high school education at the Martin Luther King Academy for Excellence alternative program, and talks of a career in law or politics -- and maybe running for president.

"I'm very glad I did it, although indirectly it ruined my life a little," she said. "It messed up my school plans."

(Lafayette principal Mike McKenzie, who said he couldn't verify who is or isn't enrolled at the school, disputed Harper's account. "That's just not true," he said. The protest "had nothing to do with it.")

The Kentucky **National Guard** says that, at this time last year, 2,368 of its members were "on duty supporting the war on terrorism" at home and abroad.

About 1,000 of them went to the Iraqi theater. Some still are there, including more than 300 who arrived in January.

Sgt. Darrin Potter of Louisville, a member of the 223rd MP Company, became the first Kentucky **National Guard** member to die in combat since Vietnam.

There is no certain count on how many other Kentucky soldiers have served or died in Iraq.

The list of those killed includes Army 2nd Lt. Jeffrey Graham of Lexington, killed in February; Army Cpl. Gary Brent Coleman, a former star athlete at Pikeville High School, killed in November; and Army Staff Sgt. Joey Dunigan of Fairdealing in Western Kentucky, who was killed a week ago today.

More than 20,000 troops stationed in Kentucky also spent part of the last year in Iraq. Most were members of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell. The base has lost 60 soldiers in Iraq, more than any other military installation.

To mark the anniversary of the beginning of the war, President Bush will visit Fort Campbell today.

He is scheduled to eat lunch with troops, give a speech to military personnel, and meet privately with family members of soldiers who died.

The only other public observance of the anniversary of the beginning of the war apparently will be anti-war protests in Lexington and Louisville.

People heading home for the weekend Friday afternoon probably won't be able to miss more than 250 people holding signs at 30 intersections throughout Lexington. The signs will convey a common theme: President Bush and Vice President Cheney lied about the reasons for going to war in Iraq.

Tom Herrick of Versailles, who is organizing the Lexington protest, described the idea of spreading out through the city as "mass marketing."

"I hope we get people to think a little bit," he said. "We're not going to be standing out there with multi-colored hair, jumping up and down and beating on drums. We plan to be rather stoic."

Also on Friday, peace activists in Louisville plan a vigil and march beginning at noon at the Jefferson County Courthouse.

At least 567 pairs of shoes will be on the courthouse steps, each pair representing a soldier who has died in Iraq. The names of the dead will be read.

The protest is sponsored by several Louisville peace groups. The groups' Web site says the thousand of Americans who have been wounded will be remembered, along with the tens of thousands of Iraqi dead and wounded.

"This is not meant to be a political or anti-Bush rally," the Web site says. "No Bush bashing please!"

On Saturday, the anniversary of the day the bombing of Iraq began, demonstrations are planned across the country.

In Lexington, protesters will be at Triangle Park beginning at noon. Speakers include Robert Topmiller, a University of Kentucky history professor and Vietnam veteran, poet George Ella Lyon and the Rev. Albert Pennybacker.

Don Dixon, a Lexington man who is involved in a number of veterans groups, says he knows of no rallies or other observances planned by people who support the Iraq war.

"It's an ongoing thing, so one year into it for me is, well, one year into it," he said. "We've got no conclusion. We've got nothing to celebrate or to be mad about."

Dixon is a Korean War veteran whose son has served with the Marine Corps in Iraq. Most veterans he knows support the war.

"If you talk to me the third or fourth or fifth year, you might get a different story, but right now veterans are very supportive of what's going on," he said.

Most Kentuckians apparently agree.

In September 2002, six months before the war started, a statewide poll conducted by The Courier-Journal in Louisville showed that six in 10 Kentuckians favored a strike on Iraq. About the same number approved of the job Bush was doing.

In a follow-up poll last month, a majority said the Bush administration exaggerated the evidence about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But the number who approved of the job Bush was doing was virtually unchanged.

The Wichita Eagle

March 20, 2004 Saturday MAIN EDITION

BY PHYLLIS JACOBS GRIEKSPoor; The Wichita Eagle

In Kansas Burden is Heavy on Reservists, Guardsmen

Two-year-old Ethan King hasn't quite matched the strange man in his house to the daddy in the pictures laminated on his toy box or hanging on the living room wall. "He still sometimes waves goodnight to the Daddy on the wall even when I'm holding him in my arms," said Calvin King, Ethan's father.

King, of Hays, is one of thousands of Kansans who are part of the largest call-up of National Guard and Reserve forces since World War II. They have answered the call to active duty in ever-increasing numbers since the terrorist attacks of Sept 11. The call-ups escalated after the U.S. invasion of Iraq that began one year ago today.

More than 180,000 Guard members and reservists are on active duty today. About 1,800 of them are from Kansas.

Many of the first units deployed are just now coming home. Other units are being deployed to take their place.

For some families, it has been a year they never want to relive. They plan to leave military service at the first opportunity.

For others, it has been a chance to do the job for which they've been trained.

Lt. Col. Richard Guzzetta, chief recruiting and retention officer for the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C., said the Guard treats recruiting and retention as one task.

"Our recruiters also work with soldiers on their decision to stay in or get out," he said. "We call it strength maintenance."

The Guard has done well at holding its total strength, even in the wake of large, long deployments. That's especially true in Kansas, he said, where National Guard volunteers long ago earned the state the nickname "The Soldier State."

Army Reserve officials say returning soldiers often talk about quitting when they first return from a deployment.

"It's often part of the reunion emotions," said Sgt. Kirk Hutchinson with the 89th Regional Readiness Command in Wichita. "But when the time comes to quit, they often don't follow through. They have time to think about it, and a lot of them decide to stay in."

But the wear and tear on reservists and their families is something that is increasingly in the equation as the Pentagon evaluates the structure of the military and whether changes should be made.

"Our Kansas communities have been wonderful at making sure our returning soldiers get a hero's welcome home," said Brig. Gen. Rita Broadway, vice commander of the 89th. "We try to make sure they get the decompression time they need. We do marriage retreats and family things to help them get reconnected. And we work with employers to help smooth the way back into their civilian job."

At the same time, she said, the Reserve is saying farewell to an even larger second rotation of troops headed for the Middle East and laying the groundwork for future rotations.

"We're anticipating this will continue for a long time," Broadway said.

Indeed. The total force for the first Iraqi deployment was between 20 percent and 30 percent Reserve and Guard forces, according to the Department of the Army. The second rotation will be 37 percent Guard and Reserve, mainly because the total number of all troops deployed is smaller. Meanwhile, the continuing missions in Bosnia and Kosovo are predominantly Guard and Reserve.

Tough on communities

When the Guard and Reserve go to war, it is felt keenly in the communities where they live and work.

They are teachers, police officers, doctors, nurses, public works crewmen, state troopers, sheriff's deputies, business owners, construction workers and administrative assistants. Co-workers pick up the slack. Families wait... and worry... and pray.

All over Kansas, towns are feeling the pinch.

Over the last two years, more than 100 residents in the Hays area have been deployed. In January, Great Bend deployed a 160-member unit.

Meanwhile, the tiny northeast Kansas community of Blue Rapids has 11 Army National Guard members deployed. Hiawatha has sent 18, while Concordia and Marysville each sent 10.

"I'd be surprised if there is any town in Kansas that hasn't had at least one person deployed in the last three years," said Joy Moser, a spokeswoman for the National Guard.

In El Dorado, a U.S. flag flies from the porch at the McCune house, home to Lance, Angie, Tyler and Austin. A yellow ribbon has adorned the porch since January 2002, when Lance McCune left for duty in Iraq. He is one of 18 members of an Army Reserve firefighting unit expected home this weekend.

Angie McCune said the yellow ribbon will remain until all U.S. troops are home.

McCune leads the family support group for the unit. She has nearly lost her voice from endless hours on the phone since word came that El Dorado's troops were headed home.

"Everybody wants to know where they are, what's happening, how soon we'll see them," she said.

Some of the families have held up well under the year-plus deployment, she said. Some have had a hard time.

McCune has kept busy caring for six children in her home day care. She also tackled some home improvement projects, including putting new siding on the garage, installing new windows and adding a third bedroom.

"I'm used to do-it-yourself," she said. "I'm pretty handy. And it's good to be busy."

Lance McCune has been gone longer as a reservist than he ever was as an active-duty soldier, she said.

"It's amazing," she said. "We got out of active duty because we wanted to move back here and he wanted to be home more."

Despite the long deployments, Angie McCune said her husband will stay in the Reserves.

"We've got 16 years in," she said. "No way we'd get out now."

'I never want to go back'

Calvin King, an English teacher at Russell High School, said he never wants to go back to Iraq. But the platoon leader knows he may have to.

"Don't get me wrong; we're doing some good things over there, and the country is better off now than when we got there," King said. "We've used the money confiscated from Saddam and his supporters to help the people in Iraq, and that's a good thing.

"But the stress of the situation, the worry... It's a wartime situation, and I don't want to ever be there again."

Dustin Seib feels the same way. Like King, the 25-year-old Hays resident spent most of the last two years in the Middle East, leaving just days after his fiancée, Lacy Mitchell, learned she was pregnant. He returned home just in time for his son's March 5 birth.

"I missed the whole pregnancy," Seib said. "But at least I got home in time for the delivery. I was really worried that I wouldn't."

Now, Seib just wants to settle in at his civilian job as a detention deputy at the Trego County Detention Center, get to know his son and reconnect with Lacy, whom he plans to marry Aug. 6.

When his enlistment is up in a year, he plans to quit the Reserves.

"I have a son," he said. "He needs me. His mother needs me. I don't want to leave again."

Despite the personal sacrifices, King says he's lucky.

"I came home and my family was waiting for me," he said. "My job was waiting for me. The school district has promised me tenure next year even though I've been gone for more than half the time I've worked there.

"There are a lot of people who are coming home to no family, no job."

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

March 21, 2004 Sunday FINAL EDITION

With Parents in Baghdad, Daughter Still Soldiers On; 11-Year-Old Making Do After More Than a Year

The Richmond Times-Dispatch

Jordan Moshkowski doesn't worry so much anymore, at least not every waking moment. The 11-year-old still lives in constant concern for her parents, but as the days became weeks and then months and now have stretched to more than a year, she has learned to deal with it. The constant crying has stopped, too.

"I've gotten kind of used to it, I guess," the fifth-grader said.

Iraq is a world away, and so are Jordan's parents, members of the National Guard activated and deployed to Baghdad last year. Back home, Jordan has been soldiering on, shuttling back and forth among her grandparents, outgrowing the dresses her mom left for her and blossoming into a self-assured, funny and mature young person. She has been living since October with her maternal grandmother, Pat Mason.

When it comes to war, Mason said, those in the armed forces, including Melody and Justin Moshkowski, Jordan's parents, aren't the only ones serving their country.

"It's the children left behind who are contributing, too," said Mason, a legal secretary. "They're making sacrifices as well."

Jordan is not alone.

Current numbers are hard to come by, but according to a 2001 Department of Defense demographic study, both parents in more than 30,000 families are active-duty military. In addition, more than 87,000 of the nation's 1.4 million active-duty military personnel are single parents.

No doubt lots of grandparents and other relatives had to take in children when their parents were shipped to Iraq.

Jordan last lived with her parents in Rhode Island, where her mother and father were members of the 115th Military Police Company, Rhode Island Army National Guard. Their unit was called up in February 2003 and sent to Fort Drum, N.Y., for additional training. They arrived in Kuwait in April and reached Baghdad in early May. They are scheduled to return to Fort Drum next month and hope to be reunited with Jordan in May.

"I can't even express how ready we are to come home," Melody Moshkowski wrote in e-mail to The Times-Dispatch. "It makes me tear up just thinking about it."

They keep in touch with Jordan by e-mail, phone calls and letters, as well as occasional packages containing souvenirs. Two T-shirts recently arrived in the mail. The front of one said, "My Dad Is In Iraq," while the back read, "Who's Your Baghdaddy!" The other shirt featured a map of the Middle East and said, "My Mom Is Over There." On a recent evening, Jordan was wearing an Iraqi dress her parents had bought for her.

Melody and Justin used their two-week furlough to return to the United States in January so they could celebrate Jordan's 11th birthday. For Jordan, it was a wonderful visit, but it was hard letting her mom and dad go again.

The whole experience, Jordan said, has "been really long."

She misses shopping with her mom and the snows of New England, but it hasn't been all bad. Far from it.

She has had a moveable home, spending part of the year in New York with Justin's parents and the rest here. Jordan has proved to be independent, adaptable and something a little less than shy.

While living here, Jordan has been home-schooled by a family friend and has done well; Pat recently scanned and e-mailed Jordan's interim report to her parents. But her grandmother has been perfectly baffled by the math.

"My youngest child is 23," Mason, 57, a widow who raised six children, said with a laugh, "so it's been awhile since I've done fifth-grade math."

Jordan's uncle Matthew Mason -- who along with his wife, Rhonda, and 4-month-old daughter, Elizabeth, have been living in the same house -- has handled the math issues. Family, friends and church have been a great source of support for Jordan.

"There is a big circle of people who care about her," said another uncle, Michael E. Mason, who noted he and Matthew have treated Jordan more like a little sister, meaning they make a point of giving her "a hard time" and keeping her laughing. All of which has served to make her feel welcome.

Wrote Melody Moshkowski: "Justin and I are incredibly blessed to have the families we do. Knowing how well Jordan is being taken care of ... frees us to focus on our mission. Knowing that she is happy and well-adjusted gives me the peace of mind I need. I am deeply grateful to everyone who has helped care for Jordan while we have been gone."

Missing from this story is any complaint about Melody and Justin being deployed at once. They were in the National Guard before they met. They hoped they wouldn't be sent out of the country at the same time but knew that was a possibility.

"To say that being away from Jordan ... is hard is the understatement of a lifetime," wrote Melody.

"Jordan has changed so much that I hardly know her. If I did not feel so strongly about serving my country, I don't think that I, as a mother, could do it. The reality is, however, that someone has to. Someone has to be willing to go and stand up for what is right. I would rather go and fight than see Jordan have to go ten years from now because I wasn't willing."

Other than missing her parents, how has it been for Jordan? "It's been cool!" she said.

And her parents? "I am dreaming of pink azaleas," Melody wrote.

"When is the watermelon festival? Will I make it?"

Chattanooga Times Free Press (Tennessee)

March 21, 2004 Sunday

Employers Adapt When Workers Are Called to Duty

By Brian Lazenby; Staff Writer

Tennessee has mobilized about 4,600 troops to active military duty since Sept. 11, 2001. Local employers and governments have been tasked with filling the holes left in the work force when members of the National Guard or Reserves answered the call to duty.

Todd Womack, spokesman for Chattanooga Mayor Bob Corker's office, said a sense of patriotism has eased the chore of overcoming the absences.

"We are proud they are serving their country in the way that they do," he said. "There's no doubt the co-workers of the people who have been deployed have been very supportive in picking up any extra duties while they've been gone."

According to figures provided by the city, 38 people have been activated for military duty -- most pulled from the ranks of police and fire departments.

All but 12 city employees have returned to their jobs, Mr. Womack said. Currently, seven police officers, three public works employees and two firefighters remain on military leave.

Twenty-two police officers were called to active duty, but police spokesman C.W. Joel said the department is structured in a way that allows officers to work in various areas to maintain adequate staffing levels.

"While it certainly had an impact, we were able to fill in those gaps," he said. "Everyone was willing to share the burden caused by the military call-up."

Chattanooga Fire Department spokesman Bruce Garner said the Fire Department managed to maintain sufficient staffing levels by leaving staff officer and administration positions vacant.

"Our primary concern is keeping enough firefighters assigned to (fire equipment)," he said.

Tennessee Valley Authority spokesman Gil Francis said the agency has had 25 workers activated for military service.

"We've been able to cover for those who have been called to active duty," he said. "Because it is 25 out of more than 13,000 employees, it's a relatively small number."

Hamilton County Personnel Director John Miller did not return calls seeking comment. An official from the Personnel Department said figures regarding number of employees called to active duty were not available.

Hamilton County Sheriff John Cupp said eight sheriff's department deputies were called to active duty. All but two have returned.

The absences have caused some deputies to work overtime and pull extra shifts, but everyone has been supportive and willing to fill the gaps, he said.

"I haven't heard anyone complaining," Sheriff Cupp said.

BENEFITING SOLDIERS

Federal law mandates that employers maintain health care benefits for those called to active duty for at least 30 days, but many area employers said they are going above and beyond what the law requires.

Bill Steverson, director of communications for Chattanooga-based BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, said the insurance company maintains medical coverage for all its employees while they are away on active duty and continues to accumulate vacation time for those employees.

"We go beyond the legal requirements," he said.

The U.S. Department of Labor has published on its Web site a list of employers that go far beyond what is required to accommodate National Guard and Reserve employees. The list includes Tyson Foods, Bank of America and TVA.

Mr. Francis said TVA maintains all medical benefits for its employees called to military service and financially compensates any difference in pay from what they were earning with TVA and what they receive for military pay.

Mr. Womack said "in gratitude to employees called to military service," Chattanooga pays up to \$850 a month to offset income differentials as well as maintains health benefits and continues to pay into an employee's pension plan.

Gov. Phil Bredesen renewed an executive order in February that ensures state employees continue making the same salary while on military duty. The order compensates state employees up to \$1,000 a month to offset salary decreases during military service.

Pamala Smith, spokeswoman for UnumProvident, said the insurance company maintains health benefits for up to six months for its nine employees called to active duty. If an employee is activated longer than that time, the employee can choose to pay for the company's insurance plan through COBRA.

"At this point, none have been out more than six months," she said.

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH AFTERMATH

The Associated Press

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 19, 2004

Returning Home: Soldier Struggles with War's Aftermath

By Sarah Coffey, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: Willimantic, Conn.

Army Pfc. Joshua Clark finds it odd to walk the streets of his hometown without the protection of a truck full of weapons, wondering who's trying to kill him.

Clark is a military police officer with the Connecticut **National Guard**. He still has shrapnel in his neck, leg and arm from the explosion that killed one of his friends and wounded two others on a Baghdad bridge last June.

"I'm here, but I still feel like I'm there," he said quietly, looking down at his clean, brown Army-issued boots.

It's been a year since President Bush's order began the military's march through the Iraqi desert into Baghdad. In the last 12 months seven Connecticut soldiers have lost their lives in Iraq, and three have died in Afghanistan. Of Connecticut's 2,100 **National Guard** members deployed to Iraq, 13 were seriously wounded.

Clark walked into the **National Guard** recruiting center in Willimantic three years ago. He wanted to go to college, but with four siblings and step-siblings there wasn't much money to go around. So he joined the **National Guard** for its tuition benefit.

"Around here you either go to jail or go to war," he said.

The criminal justice major got through three years at Eastern Connecticut College before being called up.

Once in Baghdad Clark's unit lived first in makeshift camps on the grounds of one of Uday Hussein's palaces and then the Ministry of Oil building. It was assigned to patrol the hostile streets.

On June 29 he and three other soldiers were in a Humvee going over a bridge when an explosive hit the vehicle. One of the soldiers was killed instantly. Clark and two others were badly wounded. Doctors told him his helmet, shredded by the blast, saved his life.

He was airlifted first to a makeshift hospital in Iraq and then to an American military base in Germany. Later he was sent to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Maryland.

"We clear for mines, and we did that day, I guess," he said.

Clark's half-brother Ernie Rivera, 19, is entering the **National Guard** just as Clark, 21, is wrapping up his service.

Rivera is worried he might get wounded like his Clark, but that didn't change his mind about joining the service. Like his half-brother, he's joining the military to help pay for school.

"I've wanted to do it for so long, ever since I was little," he said. "Just because he had to go through that trauma doesn't mean everyone's going to."

Connecticut **National Guard** spokesman Maj. John Whitford said recruitment numbers are down from last year, but it's unclear whether the war made a difference.

"You'll get those that say, 'I want to do this, I want to get in, I want to be involved.' We also have those who, for whatever reason, do not" sign up, he said.

Just under 1,000 of the state's 5,200 Guard members are now deployed, most in Iraq, Whitford said. All but 150 are expected to be sent home within the next few months, when others will be deployed.

Rivera leaves for basic training in June, around the same time Clark will be getting out of the military.

He's ready to follow in his footsteps, no matter the consequences.

"He went to war, and it was scary. But it's his duty. You've got to do it," Rivera said.

Chicago Tribune

March 17, 2004

Lucky to be Alive, but Living in Pain

Some GIs return home with debilitating wounds they wouldn't have survived in previous wars

By Dahleen Glanton, Tribune national correspondent

Staff Sgt. John Quincy Adams limped across the floor to a chair in his living room, tried to steady a cellular phone in his left hand and struggled with every word he spoke to his war buddy on the other end.

The last group of soldiers from 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry of the **Florida National Guard** had returned from Iraq, and Adams was determined to be a part of the group's final act of loyalty--going to have dog tags tattooed on their arms.

Adams, 37, who came home six months ago with shrapnel lodged in his brain, is among 3,241 U.S. military personnel wounded in Iraq, in addition to the 564 who have died.

The number of **National Guard** and reserve troops wounded has created special problems in the U.S. system of military hospitals. And the types of injuries sustained present new difficulties.

Soldiers who would have been killed in previous wars are surviving this one, in part because of advanced trauma care on the battlefield and improved body armor. But many are suffering severe injuries to their limbs, and their lives are irreparably altered.

No longer is Adams the suburban Miami lawn-care worker and weekend warrior who reported to Army duty once a month. Nor is he simply the devoted family man who loved to roughhouse with his 3- and 5-year-old sons.

That changed Aug. 29 in Ramadi, Iraq, when a roadside bomb exploded as he and two other soldiers drove by in a Humvee.

His arms are covered with red scars from metal fragments that damaged his nerves. Part of his right palm is missing. His walk is slow and unsteady. His arms are too weak to lift his children. He struggles to speak coherently. He is forgetful. And he sleeps with his head propped up on pillows to keep the metal in his brain from shifting and causing further damage or death.

It is not the life Adams and his wife, Verlorene, bargained for when he left for the Persian Gulf last year. But they harbor no anger--except at the Iraqis.

"When I joined **the National Guard** 15 years ago, I felt like I was destined to wear the Army uniform," said Adams, whose Puerto Rican parents named him after the sixth U.S. president, believing he would have better opportunity in the United States. "I looked forward to going to Iraq. I was nervous, but I did what I had to do. I still feel good being a soldier, but this has changed the way I look at life. I appreciate life a lot more now."

Numerous orthopedic injuries

The high number of orthopedic injuries is forcing the military to re-evaluate its medical programs.

"A different medical picture is being painted this time because we have more people surviving what formerly would have been a lethal experience. The body armor keeps them alive, but if fragments hit the extremities, we see more orthopedic injuries and more amputations," said Dr. Michael Kilpatrick, deputy director of deployment health support in the Department of Defense Office of Health Affairs.

"Our folks are facing a different mission in Iraq as they are dealing with guerrilla warfare, terrorist activity and urban warfare. And it is impacting the way we provide health services. They are attacking American forces any way they can, with crude explosive devices made from nail fragments and metal, set off by remote control. They can be hidden in a cardboard box, in a dead animal along the road or an innocuous paper bag. But they are extremely dangerous, and the injuries can cause problems for years," Kilpatrick said.

Verlorene Adams, 30, who has been married to John for six years, knows that better than most. Sometimes, she said, it is like having three children.

Still, she feels lucky that her husband is recovering at home. Many injured members of the National Guard and Army Reserves are forced to remain at military hospitals many miles from home. Because Adams' injuries are so severe, he is treated at a veterans medical center near his home.

"We had a lot of plans. We were going to buy my father's landscaping business one day. We were going to fix up this house," said Verlorene Adams, who gave up her customer service job to care for her husband. "He waited a month to tell me he was going, and I was so mad. I knew it was dangerous. But I understand why he had to do it, and I have so much respect for him."

Sgt. Jason Recio, who served with Adams in Iraq, joined the 124th Infantry of the Florida **National Guard** four years ago, fresh out of high school, because he wanted to go to college and also be a soldier. Two weeks before deployment, he got married.

On July 6, Recio and four others were ambushed during a patrol in Ramadi. Injured by a rocket-propelled grenade and an ensuing gun battle, he was severely wounded in both legs and lost his right calf.

Now a scrapbook in Jason and Patricia Recio's home in Kendall, Fla., gives a pictorial account of his recovery, after 16 surgeries. Doctors said he would not walk again, but Recio, 22, manages to get around, often without a cane.

"I always had a dream of fighting in a war. And when it happened, I wanted to go. But I would not want to go again," Recio said. "It wasn't until I got off the plane in Baghdad and saw pictures of Saddam Hussein that I realized this was the real thing."

The military has become increasingly dependent on the National Guardsmen and reservists, who represent about 40 percent of the more than 110,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. Most military hospitals on U.S. bases, built to take care of enlisted soldiers and their families, have been flooded with guardsmen and reservists as well as their own active-duty troops.

Overcrowding and inadequate staffing have led to long delays in providing medical care to returning troops.

Recio was hospitalized for six months at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington. He has lived for two months in a hotel near Ft. Stewart in Hinesville, Ga. He takes a leave to go to Miami when he can, but mostly his wife drives eight hours to Ft. Stewart.

"We've been traveling back and forth from Walter Reed to Miami and from Ft. Stewart to Miami for eight months," Recio said. "My wife and I haven't had a chance to spend that much time together, so we have over \$5,000 in phone calls."

Recio has had muscle replacement surgery and wears braces on both legs. Because of damaged nerves, he cannot move his feet or feel his legs. His left leg has been broken twice, and pieces of both knees were blown away. He lives in constant pain. Doctors have told him that his right leg must be amputated. He knows he will have to do it eventually, but he is resisting for now.

"At Walter Reed, I was so depressed. For a long time, I could not even look at my leg. Every day I woke up, I was in the worst pain I had felt in my life. It was hell for me," Recio said. "I am doing good mentally and physically now because of Patty. If we get through this, I know we can get through anything."

Patricia Recio, 23, a senior majoring in criminal justice at Florida International University in Miami, has been a source of strength for her husband. She keeps things going at home on the \$3,000-a-month Army pay they live on.

What U.S. never sees on TV

"We are just getting to know each other because he has been gone so much," she said. "This is what America never sees on TV. Some guys have lost both legs and are blind, but they manage to keep their spirit up. But being separated from family is hardest."

War wounds have been devastating for active-duty soldiers as well as those in the Guard and reserves. But critics say certain conditions have made it tougher for guardsmen and reservists.

In October, it was revealed that hundreds of sick and injured soldiers in the Guard and reserves were being housed in barracks at Ft. Stewart that had no air conditioning or toilets and were waiting for weeks--behind active-duty soldiers--to receive medical care. Since the revelation, Winn Army Community Hospital at Ft. Stewart has added more than 100 doctors, counselors and other staffers, and has improved living conditions for injured guardsmen and reservists.

Most now live in hotels while awaiting completion of new housing on base.

"If the National Guard and reserve soldiers are taking 100 percent of the risk that active-duty soldiers do, they should be entitled to 100 percent of the support when they return. The message is, 'We love you when we need you, but when the war is over, you are on your own,'" said Steve Robinson, executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Center in Silver Spring, Md.

"The Department of Defense needs to step up to the plate and provide money and resources to get these people back home to their families. There has to be a way to allow them to get health care and appointments through existing veteran facilities where they live."

Meanwhile, the 400 soldiers recovering at Ft. Stewart struggle with transition.

"I am frustrated at times, and on bad days, I have to remind myself that I am lucky to be alive," said Sgt. 1st Class Vanessa Peeden, 48, an Army reservist who suffered a compound fracture of her knee when the Humvee in which she was riding overturned in Iraq. "I am tired of being on crutches. I'm tired of being away from home and separated from my family."

Like many others who are injured, Peeden, a 3rd-grade teacher in Huntsville, Ala., is required to remain at her mobilization base until a military board decides whether she should stay on active duty or be discharged. It is a process, officials said, that can take a year and a half.

Peeden's husband has grown impatient.

"It's like they are being punished after having an accident. And that makes me very bitter," said Raoul Peeden, 50, a computer scientist who drives 450 miles each way to visit his wife. "She did her duty and now they are saying she can't come home. I know that she would recover faster and much better if she were at home."

Military official said they are looking at ways to improve medical holdover periods.

"Those on active duty go back to their home base, get care at the hospital and can be home with their family at night because it is there on the base. But the National Guard and reservists who are injured or ill are held in a captured environment. We are looking at how we can do this in a community-based system," said Kilpatrick of Department of Defense Office of Health Affairs.

"There is tremendous efficiency in having people located where the health-care system is. The question is, 'When can we start to move that care closer to home?' It is a delicate balance, but the pendulum is focused on giving the best care."

Sacramento Bee

March 21, 2004, Sunday METRO FINAL EDITION

Home for Good Tired of Absences, Guard Member Will Leave Military

Pamela Martineau Bee Staff Writer

Bursts of gunfire no longer jolt California National Guard Staff Sgt. Dain Miskimen awake at night.

These days, he's more likely to be roused by a child's soft voice asking for a drink of water.

For a soldier back home just a few weeks following eight months in Iraq, the nighttime rituals of family life are a godsend, something he never again wants to live without.

"I'm through with the military," Miskimen said of his career with the California National Guard. "I couldn't really care less what my job is, as long as I'm home with my family."

Tired, disillusioned with the operation in Iraq and grappling with the stress of re-entry into civilian life, Miskimen, of Auburn, plans to walk away from his 14-year career with the military, including a pension.

As America's military involvement in Iraq passes the year mark, officials fear more soldiers like Miskimen may opt out of the military, unable or unwilling to bear the stress of ongoing deployments. The National Guard and reserve personnel are being asked to go on full-time active duty for long stretches for the first time since the Korean War.

"Is there concern among Guard leaders? Yes. But no one has pushed the panic button," said John Goheen, spokesman for the National Guard Association of the United States.

The military is in the midst of a massive rotation of troops, with roughly 130,000 coming home from Iraq and another 110,000 shipping out. The returning troops are working to rebuild relationships with their families, friends and employers after being gone for as long as a year.

The ease of the transition may determine whether they stay in the reserves.

"We're certainly going to see some people get out," said Goheen. "But we're also going to see some people who say they feel like getting out and then later change their minds."

For Miskimen, who is 32, prolonged absence has taken an emotional toll.

"I've been home for over a month and I'm still getting to know my wife and my kids," he said.

"We've definitely grown apart," added his wife, Kelly, 31.

The couple is in marriage counseling. Before returning home, the military briefs soldiers on coping with the stresses of re-entry. Counseling is paid for - and encouraged - by Tri-Care, the military's insurance carrier.

Miskimen serves with the California National Guard's 270th Military Police Company, a Sacramento-based unit whose members have been on full-time active duty for nearly two of the past three years. Just a few days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the unit was deployed to Fort Lewis in Washington state for what would become a 10-month stint.

Five months after returning from Fort Lewis, the unit was mobilized again, this time for Iraq. They returned to the United States in late January.

Since then, Dain and Kelly Miskimen have been working to rebuild their life.

"I'm coming back trying to treat my wife like one of my soldiers. That didn't go over very well," he said.

"He's having to deal with me having more independence," she said.

While her husband was away, Kelly cared for the couple's two children, Makenzie, 6, and Miah, 3. The girls were more difficult to handle without their father, and often would cry themselves to sleep asking for Daddy.

"(Makenzie) had kids at school ask her, 'We saw dead soldiers on TV. Is your dad dead?' " Kelly said.

She quit working for the last five months of her husband's deployment, to help reduce stress and so she could study for a real estate license. Without her income, the family fell behind paying bills.

When her husband returned home, she said, she wanted to "run away for my 'vacation,' since he had his." But counseling helped her realize running away wouldn't bring them closer.

Dain Miskimen returned from Iraq physically unharmed. Within a week of coming home, though, he tore his Achilles tendon playing soccer. He now faces a month or more of disability before he can return to his job as a service technician at Home Depot.

Kelly is back working, as a loan officer, while he stays home with the girls, hobbling on crutches.

On a recent afternoon, he sat in the living room of the family's Auburn home as his daughters and a friend ran in and out.

He spoke of life in Iraq, where his unit performed convoy escort patrols and other security missions.

"Nine out of our 15 days on night patrol we got hit - by gunfire, (rocket propelled grenades), (improvised explosive devices), you name it," he said. "Those guys were shooting at us and not hitting us."

Miskimen says he supports the mission in Iraq but believes reservists aren't receiving the necessary equipment to carry out its goals. Most reservists are driving around in Humvees that lack armor reinforcements, he said, and it was hard for his unit to get ammunition refills when needed. He said he also felt military leaders failed to discipline troops appropriately.

Still, he looks on his service with pride. Scanning a photo album of his time in Iraq, Miskimen indicates an Iraqi school where he and other members of his unit delivered supplies. Another picture shows soldiers swimming in a pool at one of Saddam Hussein's palaces.

"We were actually a stone's throw away from Saddam after they caught him," Miskimen said.

In another photo, Miskimen stands next to Spc. Michael George Mihalakis, an 18-year-old soldier from Fairfield. Mihalakis died in a Humvee accident, the 270th's only casualty in Iraq. Miskimen served as a pallbearer at his funeral.

"He was good people," Miskimen said before turning the page.

Once a full-time Army soldier, Miskimen plans to go on inactive status with the Guard, then leave the military altogether when his term is up in 2006.

"I've already missed two years of Miah's life. I'm done," he said.

The Army National Guard has not seen a dip in recruitment or retention since the 2001 terrorist attacks, according to association spokesman Goheen. But he said problems may surface as troops return from Iraq.

Col. Terry Knight, spokesman for the California National Guard, said retention and recruitment remain strong in California as well. He said some of the people who say they will get out don't, and instead come to realize their deployment has helped their military careers.

"They're veterans of a foreign war, they're wearing medals and their career has been enhanced," he said.

Medals or no medals, Miskimen says he's leaving.

"I won't make it through another deployment," he said. "I'm just burned out."

The San Francisco Chronicle

MARCH 20, 2004, SATURDAY, FINAL EDITION

Anatomy of a Wounded Soldier; After 2 Wars, Decorated with 6 Purple Hearts and Layers of Scars, He's Still Ready for Battle

Matthew B. Stannard

California National Guardsman Raymond Anthony Jr. has paid his dues as an American soldier. His, and maybe five other guys'.

His first installment was made in Vietnam, where he served four tours. His most recent was paid in Iraq, where the 57-year-old Sacramento man served alongside soldiers one-third his age until an Iraqi rocket-propelled grenade sent him home with shrapnel wounds and burst eardrums.

Now, he is convalescing at home, an icon of war: the wounded soldier, dog tags dangling over bandages, with a body filled with scars and a head full of memories.

Staff Sgt. Anthony has a lot of company in that role -- nearly 3,000 troops have been wounded in action in Iraq, according to the Pentagon. But few of those men and women have the kind of familiarity in their iconic role that Anthony has. When the Purple Heart that Anthony is expecting makes it through the paperwork to his chest, it will not be his first. Nor even his second.

According to the California National Guard, it will be his sixth -- a number of medals that could be notable if held by a company, much less by one soldier.

The tales behind those medals must be pulled from Anthony in incomplete chapters, stalled by twin forces common in the men and women injured in the service. One is modesty. The other is pain.

His first injury in the line of service happened in 1966, in Vietnam. Anthony was a 19-year-old Marine, the job that had drawn him since he saw "cavalry and Indian" movies as a child and decided to be a soldier. He joined as a reservist, following two brothers into the Corps, and volunteered to go to Vietnam after several friends were killed there, leaving widows and children behind.

"I thought that maybe by going over there I could take the place of another who had a family," he said. "I could get hurt in his place."

In that, he succeeded. A battle left him with shrapnel wounds that sent him back to the United States for six months of convalescence. He won't discuss the circumstances of his injury -- it is a memory he does not wish to revisit. He returned to Vietnam in 1967, he said, "for vengeance."

Injured again in 1967, he returned to Vietnam in 1968, a year during which he was wounded several times, and 1969, when he was injured once. A North Vietnamese soldier with a bayonet left him with a scar across the right side of his face and a nearly detached left arm. On another occasion, he and his company were surrounded by enemy soldiers for so long they had to drain the water from their vehicles' radiators and drink it to survive. Anthony was one of two soldiers in the company of 15 to make it out alive. He doesn't recall the pain of receiving his wounds -- more the surprise of looking down from battle to find himself drenched in blood, a limb dangling, a gash revealing bone. He remembers time flashing past, or holding still -- he remembers, once in '68, feeling like he was floating above himself, watching as his chest and face were burned as he helped fellow soldiers from a flaming vehicle.

"I don't ever remember thinking I might be killed," he said, something he ascribed to his Southern Baptist faith and the pressures of the moment, the need to focus on the task at hand.

He explained his willingness to return to the fight each time with words common to soldiers in Iraq, Vietnam and elsewhere through the ages.

"When you're in combat, you build a relationship with your fellow Marines and soldiers that a civilian cannot comprehend," Anthony said. "You're willing, without a second thought, to lay down your life for another individual. I just knew, 'OK, I'm hurt. I'm ready to get back in the fight.' "

In the end, it wasn't Vietnam that drove Anthony out of the Marines, but the turbulent postwar period. Tired of responding as a military police officer to racial fights between Marines, he quit in 1978, moving into civilian law enforcement and, eventually, into a job with the state of California.

In 1995, Anthony joined the California National Guard, figuring that a few years of weekend warrior duty added to his decade-plus of active service would give him a second pension. But like many reservists and Guard members, he was in for a surprise: He was activated two days

after Sept. 11, 2001, and sent to Iraq last May, arriving in Baghdad in late June with the 270th Military Police Company alongside his son, Sgt. Gary Ochoa.

It was a different experience from Vietnam. Anthony's fellow soldiers, especially the reservists and National Guard, seemed less prepared for the pressures of combat, and the urban battlefield bore little resemblance to the jungles of southeast Asia.

But there were similarities, too, he said: a difficulty in distinguishing between friendly civilian and hostile combatant, and political motivations behind the wars that he did not agree with, even as he believed he was helping to protect downtrodden civilians from a dictatorial government.

Enough similarities that from time to time, Anthony says "Danang" when he means "Baghdad."

Less than two weeks after he arrived in Iraq, Anthony was riding west of Baghdad on a night patrol that included his son when the rocket-propelled grenade exploded in front of his face. What the windshield, his helmet, and his weapon didn't absorb went into his arm, gouging out chunks of flesh. But he was alive.

"Thank you, Lord," he thought. And then: "Damn it. Not again."

At first, distracted by the need to get his burning humvee out of the firefight, Anthony didn't realize he had been wounded. It wasn't until he was evacuated -- with the help of his son, who was unhurt -- that he saw the damage to his arm; not until Kuwait City that he discovered that what he thought was a rash was a blanket of shrapnel embedded in his skin; not until he was in the military hospital in Germany that he learned both eardrums were shattered.

Back in the United States, he entered the military medical system, and was frustrated to find it less efficient than the smooth Vietnam-era machine he recalled. But he also saw, in the halls of Army hospitals, soldiers with the kind of horrible wounds he managed to avoid over the years, lost limbs and terrible disfigurements. He helped them as he could, but the recollection of those wounded -- from Vietnam as well as from Iraq -- still moistened his scarred cheeks with tears.

"Oh, I've just seen so many," he whispered. "Even though it's been 30 years, it's just like yesterday."

Anthony knows about lasting injuries -- the physical kind, like his Vietnam war wounds that still ache through the pain of his healing injuries from Iraq, and the mental kind, the post-traumatic stress and depression that he believes faith has helped him avoid but that he has seen kill others.

Ask Anthony how he and his fellow wounded soldiers should be treated, and his answer is quick and firm: Give them what they have coming, in benefits and compensation. And give them thanks.

"Everybody should be thankful that they live in a country that has freedom, and they should be grateful for the individuals that are patriotic and care enough for this country to give their lives for it," he said. "We have so many people in this country that don't give a second thought about what the military people go through."

His own service, after 22 years, is over, Anthony believes. His burst eardrums have seen to that. But given his choice, and despite layers of scars that he always wears a shirt to hide, he would

return to the line of fire in Iraq again, helping some other young soldier avoid scars of his or her own.

"I feel that I didn't do my part. I regret that," he said, softly. "I really feel guilty."

The News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina)

March 22, 2004 Monday

Hundreds Mourn Soldier; Spc. Joce Carrasquillo, the First N.C. Guardsman Killed in Iraq, is Buried

Jonathan B. Cox, Staff Writer

GOLDSBORO -- It's going to be OK, Jocelyn "Joce" Carrasquillo would tell friends.

No matter the situation, the 28-year-old was ever the optimist. He worked to brighten the spirits of those around him, playing practical jokes when a friend needed a laugh, engaging with customers at the Sam's Club where he worked, dancing -- even when he had no one to dance with.

"He had a way of bringing people together in a way that nobody else could," said his roommate, Chad Clark. "His smile is what you will remember always."

Spc. Carrasquillo was laid to rest Sunday in Goldsboro, 10 days shy of his 29th birthday. A soldier deployed with the N.C. National Guard's 30th Heavy Separate Brigade, he died earlier this month when a roadside bomb exploded in Baghdad. He was the first guardsman from North Carolina killed in Iraq.

More than 800 mourners attended a service at the First Pentecostal Holiness Church, filling the sanctuary nearly to capacity. The funeral procession leading to the gravesite stretched at least three miles and shut down intersections along the path.

Friends remembered Carrasquillo, who traced his ancestry to Puerto Rico, as a determined young man. He was studying for a degree in occupational therapy at Cape Fear Community College, and made ends meet as a cashier at Sam's Club in Wilmington.

He worked in the store for three years and left a mark among beachgoers and locals who shopped there. Thirty of his co-workers drove to the funeral Sunday, bringing with them a book signed by about 100 customers who remembered him.

"He was loved by all," said Brenda Williams, a 14-year associate who called herself Carrasquillo's "Sam's Club mama." She last saw him three weeks ago when he came in, walked to each register and said goodbye.

When not at work, Carrasquillo was often helping others. Or on a dance floor. A resident of Wrightsville Beach, he would wash the car of a neighbor just to help. He visited clubs to dance, sometimes alone.

Carrasquillo was the son of a retired Air Force captain and relished his own military service. Even so, news of his death stunned friends and relatives.

He trained for a supply unit and they figured he would stay out of harm's way.

Carrasquillo died March 13 en route to a base in northern Iraq from a staging area in Kuwait. He was assigned to serve as a gunner on the mission.

"He served his country, and I want him known as a hero," said Ronald Carrasquillo, Joce's twin brother, who also was deployed in Iraq as a member of the Army Reserve. As emotion gripped him and his voice choked, he promised to look after their mother, Isabel. She was a primary concern of his brother, Ronald said.

Joce Carrasquillo used to joke that he would buy a BMW when he made it big in the therapy business and take care of his mother, said his pastor, Jimmy Whitfield. A picture of mother and son -- he in military fatigues, she resting her head on his shoulder -- was shown throughout the service.

As two soldiers folded a flag draped over Carrasquillo's coffin, Isabel Salgado Carrasquillo dried her eyes with a handful of tissues. She shook with sadness, and sobbed.

A dozen U.S. flags flapped in a stiff March wind, waving, it seemed, farewell to a fallen soldier.

The Times and Democrat, Orangeburg, South Carolina

March 22, 2004, Monday

Returning U.S. Armed Services Personnel Take Time to Adjust Back to Life

By Gene Zaleski

Lori Croft wears two hats.

One is as a specialist with the Orangeburg Company B 163rd Support Battalion. The other is as a production technician for Orangeburg's Federal-Mogul Friction Products.

Juggling the proverbial hats and the transitional period from citizen to soldier and back to citizen can prove challenging, Croft said. Proper support helps.

It is this support Croft said helped her re-adjust after spending a year on a homeland security mission during the Iraq war.

"The military is totally different from day-to-day plant life," Croft said from her place of employment she rejoined about three months ago. "Federal-Mogul has been real supportive when I was gone. The transition has been smooth."

Croft, who has worked at Federal-Mogul for six years, had her job, salary and benefits waiting for her upon her return -- with one exception.

"I got a new supervisor when I was gone ... but that is going pretty good," she said, noting that adjustments are commonplace when working in an industrial atmosphere. It is just one of those things she said she has learned how to manage.

It is also a flexibility she realizes is part of her daily and future existence.

"There is always a possibility being in the National Guard that you will be called overseas to serve our country," she said. "I will do what I have to do."

And what about returning back to work?

"I don't think anybody is ever real happy to come back," she said laughing.

Croft's situation is becoming commonplace throughout the state and nation as more and more citizen/soldiers are reentering the workplace a year removed from the start of the Iraqi war.

She is one of five employees at Federal-Mogul alone to enter into service, Gayle Carter, company human resources manager.

"It is a hardship when you lose a good technician or engineer," Carter said. "Ours are really good, but we have to survive."

Three of the employees are production technicians, one is a supervisor and one is an electrician.

Two have already returned to their positions, Carter said.

The law directing employer obligations in military call-ups was enacted by Congress in 1994 after the Gulf War.

Under the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act, reservists and National Guard members must be restored to a position comparable, if not exactly the same, in salary, benefits and status.

These are operable under stipulations that the soldier is active for under five years, completes military training satisfactorily, receives a certificate of service and reapplies to the employer within 90 days of returning.

Exceptions to the re-employment and the burden of proof fall on the employer and can entail such things as: a significant change in industry or business structure making re-employment unreasonable or impossible, or that re-employment would pose an undue hardship on the employer.

Returning reservists also have recourse if it is determined their rights were violated.

To offset the employment gaps, Federal-Mogul has hired temporary employees or filled the positions with other employees with the intention of leaving the slot open for the returning soldier.

Under the USERRA, Carter affirmed that returning soldiers' "jobs will be there when they get back."

All the company's active-duty employees, Carter said, are stationed either locally or in the United States and are currently serving as part of the rotating shifts for units overseas. The proximity of the soldiers has allowed some to make frequent visits to the plant.

Though the company's employees have had the luxury of close contact with Federal-Mogul during their absence, Carter explained the company has an employee-assistance program to help ease the possibly rough transition from duty to re-employment.

The program is in place to assist families to cope with any emotional and family issues and provides the returning soldier an opportunity about taking some time off before returning to his or her place of employment.

When employees return, Carter said they can expect to find yellow ribbons displayed throughout the company's campus in honor of the soldiers.

The S.C. Employer Support of Guard and Reserve, a 100-member volunteer committee, is on the front lines of informing Guard and Reserve members and employers of their rights.

Joel Cassidy, chairman of the ESGR, said the committee serves as primarily an information group on the laws in place to ease the transition.

"Based on information so far, employers in South Carolina have been real supportive of the Guard and Reserve," Cassidy said, noting that many more citizen/soldiers will be returning in the next few months. "The law is written in favor of re-employment of the Guard and Reserve.

"When you look at the large number of guardsmen and reservists on active duty, employers are linked to the national defense of this nation," Cassidy said. "They are linked by employees to defend democracy."

Albemarle Corp. Human Resources Manager and Desert Storm veteran Terrence Martin said the company adheres strictly to USERRA regulations including an in-company policy that covers both military leaves in both summer drills and active duty.

The company has had only one employee -- James Harley from S.C. National Guard Company 122nd Engineer Battalion -- report for duty in February 2003.

"As a veteran myself, I am in full support of it," Martin said, when asked about the re-employment law. "We should support our military personnel because it is a very important part of our obligation as a corporate citizen."

Martin said Albemarle employees have sent Harley care packages to show support and will provide him emotional and psychological assistance through the company's employee-assistance program if needed.

The entire process can be trying and frightening.

"First you have to adjust to your family. The more family support you have, the easier it is to come back to work," Harley said. "It takes some time."

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

March 20, 2004, Saturday, BC cycle

Bomb Survivors Recall Experience

FORT LEWIS, Wash.

Spc. Audra Hauer's tour of duty in Iraq came to an end almost as quickly as it started.

At 19, while riding in an Army National Guard truck ferrying supplies through Baghdad, she was showered with shrapnel and broke her back when the truck struck a mine.

It was June 12, less than three months after the war began.

"My heart just about jumped out of my chest," said Sgt. Jeffrey Elliott, 35, of Moses Lake, who was behind the wheel that day. "I thought she was dead."

Hauer and Elliott are now back at Fort Lewis recovering from their injuries. They were among the first Northwest soldiers injured in the first year of war in Iraq.

Since the start of the war on March 20, 2003, some 2,842 soldiers have been wounded in combat. About 430 others have suffered so-called nonhostile injuries, according to Defense Department figures.

After they were injured, Hauer and Elliott were assigned to a holding unit largely made up of soldiers deemed too ill or wounded for deployment. Much of their time is spent on the monotonous routines of base life, as they wait to heal.

At Fort Lewis, trash pickup and graveyard shifts answering phones are common duty for the wounded and sick. Hauer doesn't bemoan the dull duty. She said she feels grateful she got a second chance at life.

"Going to Baghdad, seeing the things I saw, I will never forget," Hauer told The Seattle Times. "Everyone needs to have a story. And I have a story now. That means a lot to me."

Hauer enlisted in the Washington Army National Guard after the Sept. 11 attacks, which happened at the start of her senior year in high school. Elliott had to leave behind his wife, five children and his job as a security officer at McNary Dam in Eastern Washington.

They didn't get along easily at first. Elliott thought Hauer lacked experience driving the 25-ton trucks, and figured he had to be tough on her if she was going to improve. Hauer found Elliott overbearing, but eventually, they developed a scrappy, wise-cracking friendship.

On June 12, despite the oppressive heat, Hauer put on her Kevlar helmet and flak jacket as they cruised along a highway near Baghdad. They were following close behind a Humvee, which suddenly swerved to straddle a suspicious black plastic bag. Elliott had no time to react.

"The whole cab went dark," he recalled. "The next thing you know, there was a glow behind Audra."

Elliott was the first to regain consciousness. He called Hauer's name, but got no response. He got out and yanked at the passenger-side door, but it was jammed, so he reached into the cab and asked Hauer to take his hand. She responded, and they both prayed.

Another soldier arrived, and they pulled Hauer out and moved her to the median. Elliott told Hauer she would be all right, just like he had been trained to do.

"She says, 'Yeah, whatever.' So then I started to get mad. I threw off my sunglasses, and I said, 'Audra, you are going to be OK,' and at this point she finally started to believe."

For Hauer, the next month was a blur of hospitals in Germany; Washington, D.C.; California; and finally a few days at Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis.

Doctors picked out the biggest hunks of shrapnel. But smaller slivers remained in her elbow, knee and other areas of her body. She had trouble with movement on her right side, and even if she overcame the paralysis, doctors thought she would have difficulty walking. Then there was her fractured back.

Hauer channeled the joy she felt from surviving the explosion toward healing. She made the most progress once she returned to her mother's home in Port Orchard. She arrived in a wheelchair, but by September, she was wearing a back brace and walking.

Though still dogged by pain, hearing loss, and nerve damage in her legs, she now walks without a limp and can run for several miles at a time.

Others in the medical hold unit, which now tops 300 soldiers, have made much slower progress. Elliott is one of them.

In the moments after the explosion, the rush of adrenaline kept him from noticing his own injuries. But within a few days, he felt excruciating back pain, and after a five-week attempt to mend in Iraq, he returned to the Fort Lewis hold unit.

Some eight months later, Elliot is still struggling with chronic pain from the rupture of a disc in his lower back and other damage from the blast. During a recent visit with a physical therapist, Elliott was able to pick up only 24.9 pounds, and he learned that the pain likely would be lifelong.

"I thought, jeez, what I want to at least be able do is be able to pick up my youngest daughter, and right now she weighs 27 pounds," he said.

Elliott also suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Sudden noises are unnerving. And base training exercises produce plenty of explosions, machine-gun fire and overhead helicopters that echo the sounds of combat.

"There are quite a few of us in the same boat, though not everyone acknowledges it," Elliott said.

As of early March, soldiers in medical hold units across the country numbered about 4,100, according to the Army Medical Command.

Early on, critics said the Army struggled to provide timely long-term care for all these soldiers.

Last October at Fort Stewart, Ga., the Army was stung by complaints from medical hold unit soldiers that they were lodged in substandard barracks with no running water and sometimes waited for months just to see a doctor. The Army worked to improve those conditions as a Senate inquiry and a U.S. General Accounting Office investigation were launched.

Officials who looked at Fort Lewis say conditions at that medical hold unit were better than at Fort Stewart. After an initial stay in World War II-era barracks, the wounded were moved last fall into more modern quarters as departing soldiers freed up space.

"I think the system is working as well as it can," said Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg, commander of the Washington Army National Guard.

Both Elliott and Hauer likely will stay in the medical hold units for at least several more months. Once they return to civilian life, Hauer hopes to attend college and Elliott has thought about going back to school. They both hope they'll be able to continue their service, one day returning to active duty.

They get together at the base occasionally, talking about latest news from their unit in Iraq. Earlier this month, Yakima native Spc. Joe Davis arrived at Fort Lewis with serious shrapnel wounds to his legs and arms. The rest of the unit is expected to return to Washington this spring.

Hauer said she plans to marry her fiance by summertime. And Elliott said he'll be there.

BENEFITS

DoD Temporarily Extends TRICARE Eligibility Following Active Duty to 180 Days

TRICARE News Release

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 17, 2004

No. 04-07

Under the National Defense Authorization Act and the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2004, TRICARE eligibility for some active duty and Reserve Component members separating from active duty service is temporarily extended under the Department of Defense Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP) from 60 or 120 days to 180 days.

The enhanced TRICARE provision, which began Nov. 6, 2003, and ends Dec. 31, 2004, is the first of three temporary programs the TRICARE program is implementing this spring under its "Temporary Reserve Health Benefit Program," to enhance access to care for active and Reserve Component sponsors separating from active military service and their family members. The only change to TAMP is the temporary extension for the eligibility period.

"We are pleased to implement these new benefits for separating service members and their families in order to assist the transition to civilian life," said Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. "TRICARE and contractor staff are working to make this temporary benefit work as smoothly as possible," he said.

Eligible sponsors and family members must be enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Former active duty sponsors and family members eligible for the transitional program may enroll in TRICARE Prime in locations where TRICARE Prime is available, or they may use the TRICARE Extra or TRICARE Standard benefits. Under TAMP, active duty sponsors and family members are not eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote.

Former active duty and Reserve Component members who are eligible for transitional benefits may receive dental care at military dental treatment facilities on a space-available basis only.

Family members are not eligible for dental care at these facilities. Civilian dental care is not a covered benefit for sponsors or family members under the transitional program. Certain members of the Reserve Component and their family members may, however, receive dental care by enrolling in the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP). To determine eligibility and get additional information, contact the TDP administrator, United Concordia Companies, Inc. at (800) 866-8499 or at <http://www.ucci.com>

All claims submitted to TRICARE for sponsors and family members eligible for transitional benefits are processed by the TRICARE claims processor at the TRICARE Standard or TRICARE Extra active duty family member rate. To apply for TRICARE reimbursement, sponsors or family members must submit a TRICARE claim form, a copy of the itemized bill, and an explanation of benefits and receipts (if available) to their regional managed care support contractor for processing.

The sponsor's Service branch determines whether the sponsor and family members are eligible for transitional benefits. Active duty and Reserve Component sponsors who are separating from active duty and need to verify eligibility for transitional TRICARE benefits for themselves and family members are encouraged to contact their nearest Service personnel office for assistance. DEERS eligibility may be verified by contacting the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office toll free at (800) 538-9552.

On Jan. 1, 2005, TRICARE eligibility under the transitional program for active and Reserve Component sponsors who separate from active duty and have fewer than six years of total active federal service and their family members returns to 60 days upon the sponsor's separation. TRICARE eligibility for active and Reserve Component sponsors who separate from active duty and have six years or more of total active federal service and their family members returns to 120 days upon separation of the sponsor.

Sponsors and family members who need help understanding their TRICARE benefits or processing TRICARE claims, may contact their regional TRICARE beneficiary counseling and assistance coordinator for assistance. A list of BCAC names and telephone numbers for assistance is available at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/bcacdirectory.cfm>. Additional information on TRICARE and the Temporary Reserve Health Benefit Program is available on the TRICARE Web site at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/> and the Reserve Component Web site at <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra>. A list of frequently asked questions is available at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/faqs/> by typing in keywords TAMP or Reserve.

SOURCE: TRICARE web site at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil>

TRICARE AND MAILING LIST INFO:

1. DOD Worldwide TRICARE Information Center (Toll-Free) 1-888-DoD-LIFE (363-5433), 1-877-DoD MEDS (363-6337) or 1-888-DoD-CARE (363-2273). Operating Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (ET) (excluding federal holidays).
2. To get TRICARE answers, assistance via E-mail, send your message to mail to: TRICARE_Help@AMEDD.ARMY.MIL or <mailto:QUESTIONS@tma.osd.mil>
3. To be automatically added to this mailing list, send a message to: Health-ON@PASBA2.AMEDD.ARMY.MIL (subject/body may be left blank).

Miami Herald

March 18, 2004

Troops' Pay Supplement Pushed

By Erika Bolstad

TALLAHASSEE - Two Democratic lawmakers, Sen. Steve Geller of Hallandale Beach and Rep. Jack Seiler of Wilton Manors, are backing legislation to help private employers who supplement the salaries of their employees called to active duty.

"Not only are these brave men and women risking their lives, but they're also risking the financial futures of their families," Geller said.

The legislation creates a state grant program that private employers can use to pay reservists and National Guard troops the difference between their military and civilian pay. The state would pay one-half of the difference if the private employer picked up the other half.

"What we're hearing from the private sector is they not only want the opportunity to do this, but the incentive to do this," Seiler said. "This is an idea whose time has come."

At the peak of the war with Iraq, about 11,000 **Florida National Guard** and Reservists from the Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard were called to active duty. Today there are about 6,600 on duty, about half of whom are Florida Army or Air National Guard, according to Pentagon reports and a Florida National Guard spokesman.

Geller estimated that the financial impact to the state would range from \$4 million to \$16 million, depending on how many employers take advantage. Public employees already are eligible for a similar program.

The Associated Press

March 16, 2004, Tuesday, BC cycle

State Proposal Would Maintain Benefits to Soldiers Overseas

DATELINE: MILWAUKEE

Some **National Guard** members returning from duty in Iraq find their vacation benefits have lapsed and they won't get a break any time soon.

But a bill Gov. Jim Doyle is expected to sign Wednesday would give state employees on active duty both supplemental wages and let them keep unused vacation time.

Doyle spokesman Dan Leistikow said the bill lawmakers approved last month would reduce the financial burden on military reservists who must leave their state jobs behind for months at a time.

"It's a small number, but it is a very important issue for those families," Leistikow said. "These are people who are heroes serving their country. We should make sure they don't incur a financial penalty."

Federal law requires that employers retain the jobs of those serving on active duty, but not much else.

In Wisconsin, about 100 state employees are currently away from their jobs for the Iraq war, while the state overall has about 2,000 reservists on active duty.

A proposal before the Waukesha County Board would allow employees returning from military service to either receive cash payouts for lost vacation time or carry it forward as state employees will soon be able to do.

"It just seems like the right thing to do," said Peter Hans, employee benefits administrator for Waukesha County. "They serve our country for a year, they come back to work, and we say: 'Guess what. You don't have any vacation time.' "

The private sector doesn't appear to be as generous, however.

MRA, a nonprofit employers association in Waukesha, estimates about half of Wisconsin employers let employees accrue vacation time while in the military. Even fewer supplement the military wage of those workers.

"There's a burden for employers," association spokeswoman Jane Berg said. "It is difficult for them to do more."

Pacific Daily News (Hagatna, Guam)

Stateside "Space A" Travel Test Extended

By Tech. Sgt. Mark Diamond

AMC Public Affairs

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILL. (AMCNS) - The one-year test to expand space-available travel privileges to family members of active-duty and retired personnel traveling within the Continental United States was extended, according to a Feb. 24 message released by Air Mobility Command's Air Transportation Division.

In the message, Lt. Col. Darcy Lilley, Chief of the Air Transportation Division's Passenger Policy Branch, said the extension will allow the test to continue while the Office of the Secretary of Defense completes its evaluation of the test.

Under the "Space-A" test phase, the family members of active-duty and retired military people are able to travel "Space-A" aboard military flights when accompanied by their sponsors, according to John Lundeby, AMC Passenger Policy Branch. He said the test does not apply to "gray-area retirees" - Guard and Reserve members who are retired, but are not yet eligible for retired pay and benefits.

Lundeby explained that in December 2000, the commander of U.S. Transportation Command outlined the proposed test as a way to improve quality-of-life privileges for military service people and their families. After reviewing the proposal, Defense officials approved the one-year test period.

"Prior to the test, regulations prohibited family members from flying space available within the CONUS," said Lundebly. "This privilege was available only to active-duty and retired military people. During the test period, dependents can accompany them."

To register for space-available travel, active-duty sponsors must be on leave or a pass and remain in the status while awaiting travel and through the entire travel period.

Additional Space-A travel and signup information is available through the Headquarters AMC Passenger Policy Branch Web site at <http://public.amc.af.mil/SPACEA/spacea.htm>. A list of passenger terminals and phone numbers can be found there.

Following added by 172 APF: Local space A number is (601)405-8761. Personnel are available to assist you each technician work day in the Aerial Port.

GENERAL

The Associated Press

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

March 15, 2004, Monday, BC cycle

Military Recruiters Filling Spots

DATELINE: COLUMBIA, S.C.

Despite ongoing and dangerous operations in Iraq, military recruiters in South Carolina have had little trouble reaching enlistment goals.

Leslie Ann Sully, spokeswoman for the Columbia Recruiting Battalion, says January's goal of 153 recruits was exceeded by 21 and last month's goal of 145 was exceeded by 19, The (Columbia) State reported. The battalion oversees Army recruiting in South Carolina and parts of Georgia and North Carolina.

Sully said Army Reserve recruiting was also up.

The South Carolina Army **National Guard** is only 32 soldiers short of its authorized strength of 9,200, despite having more than 60 percent of its troops called up for active duty, said Maj. Ronnie Taylor, the Guard's chief recruiter.

Taylor thinks if he had more recruiters, all his positions would be filled. "I've lost several recruiters who have either moved or transferred to other jobs in the Guard," Taylor said.

And people aren't leaving either, Taylor said.

The **National Guard** in South Carolina is losing less than 10 percent of its personnel. The national average is about 18 percent. If there's any problem for maintaining the Guard's strength, Taylor says it's competition from the active-duty Army.

"We're having people coming back from deployment who are going on active duty," Taylor said. "They're young, they're out there making decent money, and they have benefits for their wives and family."

Bess Rothenberg is a sociology professor at Clemson University who studies patriotism. She says that economics plays a big part in attracting recruits, especially those from small towns.

Recruiters pitch college benefits and technical training soldiers can use in later civilian life, she said.

"Laying down your life for your country looks particularly appealing when other opportunities are not there," Rothenberg said.

And she says there's a strong military culture in the South that makes the military an appealing choice. That culture has developed over the years because of the large number of military installations in the region, she said.

"There's also a glorification and romantization of the military," Rothenberg said. "Southerners see the military as demonstrating their belief of fighting the good fight."

ANG Woman Wing Commander Doesn't See Herself as Pioneer

By Master Sgt. Bob Haskell
Special to American Forces Press Service

ANDREWS AFB, Md., March 18, 2004 – Air National Guard Col. Linda McTague has gotten pretty good at regarding herself through the eyes of others. She does not see a pioneer for women's achievements when she looks in a mirror. But she realizes that other people consider her to be a role model – a pioneer – for what women can accomplish in this country's military service. And she strives very hard to live up to those expectations, as well as to her own.

McTague is in a good position to take that kind of stock in herself, because she is the first woman to command an Air National Guard wing, and because she is believed to be the first of her gender to have an Air Force fighter squadron under her command, according to records at the Air Force history office.

Specifically, the woman from Battle Creek, Mich., assumed command of the District of Columbia Air National Guard's highly-decorated 113th Wing on Dec. 1. She therefore is eligible to become a brigadier general.

That diverse wing of some 1,050 men and women includes the 121st Fighter Squadron of F-16s that is on alert during the war against terrorism and the 201st Airlift Squadron that flies members of Congress and other dignitaries around the world in a fleet of C-38 and C-40 operational support airplanes.

Here's the catch. McTague is not a fighter pilot. She cut her Air Guard aviation teeth as an operational support airlift pilot beginning in 1988 before climbing the ladder to serve as the 201st's commander for nearly four years beginning in November 1997. She was the first woman to command an Air Guard flying squadron, said Charles Gross, the Air Guard's chief historian.

That, she claimed during a recent interview, is an indication of how much the military culture has changed during the past decade to make it possible for women and members of minorities to reach the level she has attained.

But a pioneer? "I don't personally see myself that way, because I've never felt the pressure to be a pioneer. But if I'm realistic about the comments that I hear from other people, I'd have to say that they do see me that way." McTague said.

"I know this is something unique and something that, perhaps, a lot of people are excited about and interested in, because it may open paths and opportunities for them that they hadn't thought about before, or that they can now do realistically," she added. "It's not just a dream for them now."

McTague said many other women did plenty of pioneering before her, including the civilian Women Air Force Service Pilots, who ferried military airplanes overseas and towed targets and served as instructor pilots during World War II.

She does, however, realize she's in the right place at the right time to benefit from a change in attitudes toward women and toward people who are not fighter pilots that was helped, she said, by the change in the law in 1992 that made it possible for women to fly combat aircraft.

"Ten years ago, the culture was such that if you weren't a fighter pilot, you were not going to be the wing commander," McTague said. "Now, we've had women in traditional male fields for awhile, and our senior leadership has pushed the idea that we need to be a diverse organization, to tap the resources that we have available to us, and to not exclude anybody because of race or gender."

And she does not feel out of place in the commander's office because she is not one of the fighter pilots, even though "we exist as a wing to support the fighter mission," she acknowledged. "I've been given the opportunity to do a lot of jobs in this wing over the years, so I think I was pretty well prepared when I was asked to be the commander.

"I don't think I have to fly the airplane to understand the F-16 mission," said McTague, who has earned her wings as a command pilot while logging more than 5,250 hours in eight kinds of aircraft during her 23 years in uniform. That includes four years as an instructor pilot and Wings of Blue pilot for the Air Force Academy in Colorado.

"I've always relied on the experts, and we have a strong vice commander in Col. Jeff Johnson who does fly the F-16 and knows the missions," McTague added.

Chief Master Sgt. George McCarley predicted that McTague would make an excellent wing commander "because she's level-headed and she listens to her people." McCarley is the 201st squadron's superintendent for aircraft generation, and he worked for McTague from March 1991 until October 1994, when she was the squadron's assistant chief and then chief of maintenance.

"She was an excellent pilot, and she didn't know anything about aircraft maintenance when she came to us," McCarley recalled. "But she listened to us, and she always referred to the book to help her make good decisions."

She also learned to respect and to rely on the enlisted force during her tenure in maintenance, said McTague, who has since served as commander of the 113th Logistics Squadron and Logistics Group. The D.C. Air Guard's enlisted men and women gave her their highest tribute in 2001 by inducting her as an honorary chief master sergeant.

She spent the past two years as the Air Guard advisor to the director of operations at Headquarters Air Education and Training Command at Randolph, Air Force Base, Texas, before returning to the 113th Wing as the commander.

McTague holds a liberal arts degree and a master's degree in adult education from Florida International University, where she received a scholarship to play softball and volleyball. She played volleyball on the Air Force team and at the international level when she was a young officer.

Now she considers herself the Air Guard wing's advocate as well as its coach, whose most important job is preparedness and "to maximize everybody's potential out here" while maintaining its reputation as a team "that will not settle for being less than the best."

Her plan is simple. "I want to be a good listener. I have to be a good student of dealing with people," said McTague. "I want to be polite and respectful. I want to try to find the niche where everybody will fit and contribute."

"I want to give people the opportunity to fulfill their personal goals," said the new wing commander, who has taken advantage of every chance she has been given to fulfill her own.

(Army Master Sgt. Bob Haskell is assigned to the National Guard Bureau.)

Guard Bureau Honors Heroes of Water Taxi Tragedy

By Master Sgt. Bob Haskell, USA

Special to American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., March 16, 2004 – Four Puerto Rico Air National Guard members were saluted as heroes at the National Guard Bureau headquarters here March 15, nine days after helping to save the lives of other water taxi passengers in the Baltimore harbor.

Master Sgt. David Blakeley and Staff Sgts. Alejandro Gonzalez, Antonio Acosta and Luis Nazario had a day off March 6 and were among 25 people aboard a 36-foot pontoon water taxi, the Lady D, which a rogue wind capsized about 100 yards off shore from historic Fort McHenry.

Four passengers drowned in the accident.

The noncommissioned officers kept their wits and pulled the ill-fated craft's first mate, Michael Homan, out of the 44-degree water and gave him cardiopulmonary resuscitation. They said they pulled another man to safety and also rescued a woman.

The Guard NCOs are serving at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., with other members of the Puerto Rico Air Guard's 141st Air Control Squadron, helping to maintain airspace security over the nation's capital.

The four were sightseeing in Baltimore when they got caught up in the dramatic event that grabbed the entire country's attention.

"I applaud you for what you did," Brig. Gen. Charles Ickes II, the Air National Guard's chief operations officer, told them. "It's hard to measure how much of an impact you guys have had. I'm sure that a lot of people will never forget you for the job you did out there.

"I would think that people probably don't have a feel for what you went through," Ickes added.

Schwarzenegger 'Pumps Up' Deploying Guard

By Spc. Jacob A. McDonald

Army News Service

March 15, 2004

FORT IRWIN, Calif. -- California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger visited the National Training Center and Fort Irwin March 12 to speak to Soldiers of the California National Guard deploying to Iraq.

"I'm here not just as the governor," Schwarzenegger said. "First, I wanted to come here to talk to you and pump you up before you ship out."

To pump them up, Schwarzenegger told the Soldiers of his service in the Austrian army as a tank driver. He also expressed his love for the military and his appreciation of American Soldiers.

"I have a great love for the military," Schwarzenegger said. "I have been very much into the military."

"I came over here with empty pockets but big dreams," he said. "I was very fortunate to go way beyond my dreams. Why I was able to accomplish those things is because this is the greatest country in the world; because it is free and you help keep the country free."

The governor also talked about his recent experiences visiting Kuwait, Iraq and Bosnia.

"There has never been a time when any country has been as powerful as the United States. That's because you guys have been protecting it for a long time," he said. "I can only say that I play a machine, but you guys are the true machines. You are the real terminators."

"The sacrifices you make are appreciated by all of us, not just in California, but all over the United States," Schwarzenegger said.

"I appreciate the type of work you are doing and the sacrifices you are making. I am proud of all of you."

The governor spoke to Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 185th Armor, a California National Guard element of Washington state's 81st Armor Brigade (Separate). The Brigade was mobilized in November, trained at Fort Lewis, Wash., and now has undergone 30 days of intensive training at NTC in preparation for deployment.

Following his speech, the governor presented the battalion with a California State Flag and a United States Flag, both of which had been flown over the California State Capitol Building.

The Soldiers then presented Schwarzenegger with a jacket. Schwarzenegger took some time after the presentations to shake hands with the Soldiers and sign autographs.

--End--